

# American Thinker

[Return to the Article](#)

February 05, 2011

## A Guided Tour through the Museum of Communism

By **Drew Belsky**

We hear a lot about "never forget." Hot Air posted a [tribute](#) in October to the crew of the *USS Cole* using these words, and the Armenian genocide during and after World War I continues to spark [memorials](#) and controversy both in print and [online](#). And then there's Hitler's Holocaust, which is so inextricably linked to "never forget" as to barely need mentioning (unless you're in [Iran](#)).

It's clear, then, that people are doing their best not to run afoul of Santayana's tired *bon mot*. But one historical tragedy continues to evade history's condemnation: the global scourge of Communism<sup>1</sup>.

Now, Communism is an ideology cleverly handled by its advocates, who keep it both remembered and forgotten at the same time. Of course, everyone knows about Communism -- ask any American across the country about Stalin or Mao Tse-Tung, and you'll probably hear the word "Communism" at least once. (Then again, I may be giving people too much [credit](#).)

But the proliferation of Communism as a viable ideology even today proves that many people don't spare a second thought for the horrors perpetrated on behalf of Communism's most zealous adherents. Communism (or socialism<sup>2</sup>), people say, is a fine and noble economic system -- it's just been flawed in its execution.

Here's where Slavenka Drakulić and her *Guided Tour Through the Museum of Communism* come in. Drakulić compiles an octet of anecdotes set in a myriad of former Soviet-bloc nations, from Bulgaria to Romania to former Yugoslavia. But unlike many authors who have plumbed these depths before, Drakulić writes each chapter in *A Guided Tour* from an animal's point of view.

Drakulić uses this foundation -- a sort of *Burnt by the Sun* meets *Charlotte's Web* -- to put into motion a compelling thematic trajectory. She sets up an animal mask in her first chapter, with the mouse cheerily showing his foreign relative around the eponymous museum. Next, Koki the parrot embarks on a profanity-sprinkled discourse on Tito. And on and on. But soon enough, the mask begins to slip -- Drakulić gradually dispenses with the little animal markers, and the narrative grows more and more human.

It's a brilliant concept, but Drakulić bungles the execution. She overplays her hand from the get-go: the introductory mouse eschews all of his "mouseness" almost immediately to embark on an all-too-human exordium. Without any grounding context yet established, the reader could be forgiven for wondering why Drakulić chose to channel an animal at all.

In other chapters, on the other hand, Drakulić's merging of the human and the animal is nothing short of masterful. Take for instance Tosho the Dancing Bear, who assaults the heartstrings by recalling his dance "training," or the mole, who rattles off a dissertation on the Berlin Wall (the Berlin *Walls*, actually, as the mole himself is only too happy to clarify) while charmingly keeping his species at the front of the reader's mind.

So Drakulić's thematic trajectory manifests not so much in the narrators' human-animal balance, which tends to seesaw from chapter to chapter, but instead in the book's general tone. The narrators' humor and whimsicality steadily dissipate up to the penultimate chapter, when there's next to nothing left of either. Here, furthermore, the dog out-and-out *jostles* the mask: "You could almost take this whole canine story as a metaphor for humans[.]" And the chilling, no-nonsense last chapter, purportedly by a raven, does away with the animal narrative altogether to hammer home Communism's devastating and all-too-human effects.

The problem, then, is that Drakulić's botched human-animal *narrative* balance gets in the way of her sublime human-animal *thematic* balance. Take the last two chapters: the dog beautifully preps the now-weakened barrier between animal and human, and the raven smashes that barrier. Drakulić effectuates the denouement perfectly. But then there's the preceding Chapter VI, in which the pig is so anthropomorphic (her parents drive a car, she has a degree in political science, and she speaks of when she was twenty-seven years old, a [preposterous age](#) for anyone of a porcine disposition) as to suggest a human being with low self-esteem. Thus does Drakulić corrupt her own momentum at a crucial time.

Even with these hiccups, though, the book is not by any means a waste. Drakulić's characters are entertaining, her writing rich but comprehensible. Indeed, the most precious vein that connects *A Guided Tour's* characters is their nuanced loyalty -- indeed, their Stockholm syndrome -- to their owners. Tosho admits that life with Angel the gypsy "was bearable. Yes, the word is bearable. It means that I got used to such a life, one gets used to anything." It's no stretch to imagine *A Guided*

*Tour's* animals feasting on shoe leather while their owners brandish Stalinesque mustaches.

But as Drakulić makes clear, there is more to the story than good, downtrodden citizen-victims under evil Communist feet. And this, as Gorby the cat starkly summarizes, is why the horrors of Communism elude the "never forget" mantra:

The others ... perhaps believe that all *their* sins would be redeemed once the sentence was passed -- as if the General were Jesus. ... Redemption of [the Polish people's] Communist sins would come in very handy, because it would divest them of their own responsibility. ... Not every Pole was a member of the Solidarity movement. Once the General is sentenced, others can wash their hands.

And there's the problem. "Never forget" cannot apply to Communism because those who survived the system *yearn to forget it*. Communism was that wicked -- both in its sheer barbarism and in the often questionable nature of its victims (who sometimes, regrettably, must be called "victims").

Without firsthand experience, we blissfully ignorant on the western hemisphere (especially among the political left) have the luxury of failing or refusing to grasp the enormity of Communist ideology. Meanwhile, on the eastern hemisphere, Communism is fast becoming the dictionary definition of *infandous* -- a development which will surely impede Western enlightenment on the subject. Fortunately, Slavenka Drakulić, with her Aesopian compendium, has gifted us a sorely needed wake-up call...and a reminder to thank God (Whom we, as strangers to Communism, are still allowed to worship!) for narrowly missing out.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Whether and when to capitalize "Communism" constitute a tricky and oft-disputed subject. For the purposes of this review, I've decided to follow Drakulić's example.

<sup>2</sup> Drakulić clears up the socialism/Communism dichotomy in short order. From Chapter VI:

Hungarians lived under a political system called socialism. Or what in the West was wrongly called Communism (because of Communist parties' leadership in Socialist countries). Why wrongly? Because Communism, in the fulfilled vision of its theoreticians Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is the last stage in the development of human society, a kind of "end of history," as we would say today. Socialism was only a step along the way.

***Drew Belsky is the associate editor of American Thinker. A Guided Tour Through the Museum of Communism will be released on February 22, 2011. Pre-order [here](#).***

**Page Printed from: [http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/guided\\_tour\\_through\\_the\\_museum.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/guided_tour_through_the_museum.html) at April 01, 2011 - 04:37:11 AM CDT**