

Writer or Witness: Problems of Varlam Shalamov's Late Prose and Dramaturgy

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## Abstract

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This dissertation aims to illuminate the late works of Varlam Shalamov, a Russian writer most famous for his six prose cycles of *Kolyma Tales* based on his experiences in the Gulag. While previous scholarship has focused mainly on the earlier cycles, I explore the aesthetic and ethical shift that takes place in his later texts. Drawing on theories of late style in art by Theodor Adorno, Edward Said, and Joseph Straus, I detect the breaking point in Shalamov's trajectory as a writer in his 1965 literary manifesto "On Prose" and argue for a distinct difference in the works he wrote after it. I attribute this difference to his struggle with, and often against, the moral and formal demands of Russian literature and the constraints of Soviet censorship, as well as to his personal circumstances (internal) exile and disability (deafness). My analysis of Shalamov's late style centers on the tension between the imperative for a Gulag survivor to bear witness and the need for a professional writer to claim authenticity and maintain creativity. The dissertation offers new insights into Shalamov's sense of what it meant to be a writer in his contemporary context and explores the problematic encounter staged in his works between Russian literary tradition and the complexities of narrating the Gulag experience.

Chapter I deals with Shalamov's literary manifesto, which articulates his writing as a 'new prose' for Russian literature. I treat "On Prose" as a manifesto and examine Shalamov's motives for writing it. Although rooted in a legitimization project, this manifesto serves not so much as the making of a literary theory as it is the unraveling of a literary practice from within. As one of its consequences, I formulate the notion of a *transitory hero* encompassing both the first person narrator of a text and the historical person 'Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov' and detect within this concept a collision between the writer and the witness.

Chapter II analyzes *The Revival of the Larch*, the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*. I argue that this cycle, which is usually considered an aesthetic masterpiece, already contains a foretaste of the difficult and ultimately unreconciled late style that haunts Shalamov's later prose. Several of the short stories become closer in form to testimony by imitating authenticity – I focus on "The Life of Engineer Kipreev" and "The Golden Medal" – yet the voice that emerges in them is no longer solely that of a witness – but also of a writer.

Chapter III investigates Shalamov's longer autobiographical works *The Fourth Vologda* (about his childhood) and the antinovel *Vishera* (about his first incarceration in the Northern Urals). Both

works appear shaped by literary conventions, as narratives of childhood and youth. However, they are permeated by an omnipresent challenge to traditional notions of form and content. Although set in the past, they are products of a period of literary experimentation in search of a new mode of expression – subjective, intimate, and emotional – the essential task of Shalamov’s late style.

Chapter IV examines *The Glove or KT-2*, the unfinished sixth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*. This last cycle undoes the attempt at closure in *The Revival of the Larch* and is rough in both its incomplete form as well as in its harsh content, coming closer to the harrowing perspective of the “goner” than ever before in its mode of narration. I explore the fraught communication between the writing ‘I’ and the ‘you’ of the reader in “Love Lessons” and “Athenian Nights.” These stories anticipate the impossibility of address as well as of an addressee.

Chapter V focuses on Shalamov’s last longer work: *Evening Discourses*. This incomplete ‘fantastical play’ (his own generic designation) stages confrontations in Butyrka prison between his transitory hero and the four Russian Nobel laureates in literature at the time: Ivan Bunin, Boris Pasternak, Mikhail Sholokhov, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Instead of declaring himself the real winner of Russian twentieth-century literature, Shalamov in this fragmentary text articulates a complicated and conflicted relationship with not only his contemporaries and compatriots, but also with his own identity as a professional writer who never stopped being a witness to some of his century’s worst atrocities.

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## Introduction

The Varlam Shalamov at the center of my dissertation is reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's essay on Ludwig van Beethoven<sup>1</sup> from which the term *late style* (*Spätstil*) originates: an aging, deaf, and increasingly isolated writer.<sup>2</sup> Here I will explore Shalamov's last works in prose and dramaturgy. The two final cycles of *Колымские рассказы* [*Kolyma Tales*] (1954-73) – *Воскрешение лиственницы* [*The Revival of the Larch*] and *Перчатка или КР-2* [*The Glove or KR-2*] – belong to this period, as does *Вишера: Антироман* [*The Antinovel Vishera*] (1961/70-71) and the childhood narrative *Четвертая Вологда* [*The Fourth Vologda*] (1968-71). In these two longer autobiographical texts, the late Shalamov returns to the early Shalamov, to the northern Urals of his first incarceration and to his upbringing in Vologda. Neither autobiographical nor in any sense realistic, his last play *Вечерние беседы* [*Evening Discourses*] (mid-1970s) pits the four Russian Nobel Prize laureates in literature – Ivan Bunin, Mikhail Sholokhov, Boris Pasternak, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – against each other in Butyrka prison. Rather than discard this play as a sudden anomaly in an otherwise consistent oeuvre, I trace Shalamov's literary development toward it through a process of rupture in which continual confrontations with the ethical and aesthetic dimensions in his representation of the atrocities in the Soviet camps come to cause a problematic yet productive tension. As a result of this rupture, his late works are different. I argue that one source for this difference can be found in his literary manifesto “О прозе” [“On Prose”] (1965), an ambitious yet elusive text in which he articulated his own aesthetic program of ‘новая проза’ [‘new prose’] for the future of Russian literature. This manifesto signals not only his break with literary tradition of the past, but also the shift in his subsequent writing and in his conceptualization of himself as a professional writer.

To propose a period of lateness in the works of a writer is not only to concern oneself with aesthetic shifts and the crises they yield in the creativity of this writer. A period of lateness is also connected with the writer's biography and suggests a possible overarching periodization of his life and works. My reading of Shalamov proposes three periods in his literary production. The specific circumstances of his biography, punctured as it was by two camp sentences during which he was unable to write prose, the first in the northern Urals 1929-31 and the second in Kolyma 1937-53, generate voids in any attempt to divide his creative work into chronological time periods. My periodization therefore includes blank spaces; supposedly ‘empty’ years that fall outside of these three proposed periods.

The first period, the beginning, which I call *Youthful Expression*, dates from the 1920s to Shalamov's second incarceration in 1937.<sup>3</sup> Only a handful of short stories, which were published in literary journals in the 1930s, have survived from this early period. The middle period, *Urgent Embodiment*, starts in 1949 when he, although still in Kolyma, was able to write again. It ends in

<sup>1</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. “Late Style in Beethoven” in *Essays on Music*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2002, 564-7. It should be noted that the aging and isolated Shalamov was not only deaf, but also lost his coordination and was later going blind. By the end of his life, this resulted in his inability to write legibly.

<sup>2</sup> “So convincing as cultural symbol to Adorno was the figure of the aging, deaf, and isolated composer that it even turned up as part of Adorno's contribution to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*...” Said, Edward W. *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006, 8.

<sup>3</sup> In Shalamov scholarship, this first period is usually considered a distinct period as the few texts from it which were published in the 1930s and thus preserved are markedly different in both form and content from the works he wrote after his return from Kolyma. See Kline, Laura. “Ovladenie tekhnikoi (o rannei proze V. Shalamova)” in *Shalamovskii sbornik: vyp. 3*. Ed. V. V. Esipov. Vologda: Grifon, 2002, 155-9, and Michael Nicholson's paper “Osobennosti rannei prozy Varlama Shalamova” presented at the conference *Sud'ba i tvorchestvo Varlama Shalamova v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, Moscow-Vologda, 16-19 June 2010.

1965, the year he wrote “On Prose.” The first four cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, his most widely read and well-known texts, were written during this mature period, which could be considered the peak of his literary production. Throughout my dissertation, *Kolyma Tales* refers to the six prose cycles of Shalamov’s *magnum opus* and I observe the order of them that he himself established in the 1970s: 1. *Kolyma Tales*, 2. *Левый берег* [*The Left Bank*], 3. *Артист лопаты* [*An Artist of the Spade*], 4. *Очерки преступного мира* [*Sketches of the Criminal World*], 5. *The Revival of the Larch*, and 6. *The Glove or KT-2*.<sup>4</sup> This order is not chronological (*An Artist of the Spade* contains short stories written later than those in *The Left Bank*); however, the two last cycles were almost entirely written in 1965 or later. During this middle period, he also composed the play *Анна Ивановна* [*Anna Ivanovna*] (early 1960s) and published his first poetry collections: *Огниво* [*Firestone*] in 1961 and *Шелест листьев* [*The Rustle of Leaves*] in 1964.

Shalamov’s late style begins after 1965 and represents the longest creative period in his life, ending with his death in 1982 and thus spanning almost two decades. He wrote not only the two last cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, *The Fourth Vologda*, *The Antinovel Vishera*, and *Evening Discourses*, but also the unfinished biography *Федор Раскольников* [*Fyodor Raskol’nikov*] about the Bolshevik revolutionary and later Soviet diplomat.<sup>5</sup> Although neither his prose nor his dramaturgy passed censorship in the Soviet Union in his lifetime,<sup>6</sup> he was able to publish three poetry collections during this period: *Дорога и судьба* [*Road and Fate*] in 1967, *Московские облака* [*Moscow Clouds*] in 1972, and *Точка кипения* [*The Boiling Point*] in 1977.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The number of cycles as well as the order of *Kolyma Tales* remains debatable; see, for example, the following discussion by Leona Toker who does not consider *Sketches of the Criminal World* to belong to *Kolyma Tales*: “Shalamov’s main work is usually referred to as *Kolyma Tales*. This is, judging by [Irina] Sirotinskaya’s publications, both the title of the first cycle of stories, written in the years 1954-63, <...> and the blanket reference to five story cycles. The most famous are the first three, from 1954-65: the second to be completed was *The Artist of the Spade* and the third *The Left Bank*. <...> In 1992 Sirotinskaya published what is now the definitive two-volume edition of Shalamov’s tales, reversing the order of *The Artist of the Spade* and *The Left Bank*: apparently, in the seventies Shalamov had second thoughts about the sequence of the cycles. Placing *The Artist of the Spade* at the end of the ‘trilogy’ makes sense biographically, because the last story of this cycle, ‘Train,’ tells about the focalizer’s journey from Kolyma to Moscow, in keeping with the ‘journey out’ topos that ends many a Gulag memoir. Yet the last story in *The Left Bank*, ‘Sententia,’ dealing with the focalizer’s spiritual recuperation from total dystrophy when sent to an easier camp, is more effective in terms of reader response. It is one of the most powerful works of the corpus, and can function both as a memorable finale and as the open-ended half-promise of a sequel.” Toker, Leona. *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 160-1.

<sup>5</sup> “Во вступительной заметке к публикации И. П. Сиротинская отмечала: ‘Федор Раскольников – поздняя проза Шаламова, редкая для него по жанру вещь, попытка писать по собранным материалам, сделать что-то для публикации, а не в стол, как всегда. Но пока вещь писалась (а начата она была в 60-х годах), оттепель кончилась, имя Ф. Ф. Раскольникова (1892-1939) снова стало опальным, и рукопись Шаламова так и не увидела свет.’ [In the introductory note to the publication I. P. Sirotinskaya noted: “‘Fedor Raskol’nikov’ – is the late prose of Shalamov, a text in a rare for him genre, an attempt to write based on collected materials, to make something for publication, and not for his own desk as always. But while the text was written (it was begun in the 1960s), the thaw was over, the name of F. F. Raskol’nikov (1892-1939) had again fallen out of favor and Shalamov’s manuscript was never published”]. Shalamov, Varlam. *Sobranie sochinenii v 6 t. + t. 7*. Moskva: Knizhnyi klub knigovok, 2013, Vol. 7, 107. This source will henceforth be referenced parenthetically (vol: page number) in the text. All translations from English to Russian are my own.

<sup>6</sup> One of the few prosaic texts that Shalamov was able to publish in the Soviet press was the sketch “Студент Муса Джалилов” [“The Student Musa Dzhaliilov”] which appeared in the journal *Юность* [*Youth*] in 1974 (no. 2, 78). From 1965-81 Shalamov published around 80 poems in this journal. For more about his poetry publications in it, see Esipov, Valery, “Shalamov v ‘Iunosti,’” *Iunost’*, No. 6, 2012, 10-7.

<sup>7</sup> For a chronological outline of Shalamov’s prose, including the short stories in *Kolyma Tales*, his dramaturgy, and officially published poetry collections, and how they relate to his three periods, see Appendix 1.

Shalamov's late-style period was fruitful yet troubled by challenges in his personal life and by social and cultural changes in the Soviet Union. He had begun *Kolyma Tales* in 1954; when he abandoned the sixth cycle almost twenty years later, much had changed in the Soviet society around him as well as in his private situation. The political relaxation through the so-called Thaw of 1956-64, during which he wrote the first cycles, was over. The physical effects of forced labor, starvation rations, and violence in the camps restricted his access to the world, leaving him deaf and eventually blind. His literary achievement was monumental in scope, yet still prohibited by censorship and read only in *samizdat* (self-publication in the Soviet Union). In the early 1970s, both memoiristic and fictional narratives about the Gulag were no longer novelties or a cause for public indignation. This era had its own concerns as the Soviet dissident movement of the 1970s fought for human rights in the present. The late Shalamov was marginalized as a witness to tragic events in the past and his works demoted to the genre of testimony. Yet what he wanted was to be recognized as a professional writer and for his works to become a part of the Russian literary canon. His final creative period seems a search for both recognition and an answer to the question: Where does the witness end and the writer begin?

After 1965, Shalamov began to understand that, no matter what he wrote, it was only for posterity. The trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yulii Daniel and their literary works the following year appears further to have motivated Shalamov's nascent withdrawal from Soviet society and literature.<sup>8</sup> Although his last period has not been considered a 'late style' previously, other scholars have highlighted the sometimes sudden or strange and often difficult difference that appears in these works. My exploration of them here should be seen as both a continuation and an expansion of previous contributions to the study of his later texts: Elena Volkova's interpretation of the "2" in the title of *The Glove, or KT-2* as indicative of a "new" perspective;<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shalamov reacted to the trial in February 1966 with the anonymous "Письмо старому другу" ["A Letter to an Old Friend"]; it concludes Aleksandr Ginzburg's *Белая книга о деле Синявского и Даниэля* [*The White Book about the Case of Sinyavsky and Daniel*] (1967): "Но наиболее точно и полно отношение интеллигенции к происшедшему выразилось в сугубо частном письме, автор которого неизвестен." [But the attitude of the intelligentsia to the event was most accurately and completely expressed in purely private letter, whose author is unknown.] Ginzburg, A. I. *Belaia Kniga o Dele Siniavskogo i Danielia: Moskva 1966*. Frankfurt am Main: Possev-Verlag, 1967, 405. Toward the end of his letter, Shalamov defends the right to publish as the basic right of a writer and implies that the best Russian writers are dead and unpublished: "Всякий писатель хочет печататься. Неужели суд не может понять, что возможность напечататься нужна писателю как воздух. Сколько умерло тех, кому не дали печататься? Где 'Доктор Живаго' Пастернака? Где Платонов? Где Булгаков? У Булгакова опубликована половина, у Платонова – четверть всего написанного. А ведь это лучшие писатели России. Обычно, достаточно было умереть, чтобы напечатали, но вот Мандельштам лишен и этой судьбы." [Every writer wants to be published. Can the court really not understand that a writer needs the possibility to publish like he needs air. How many have died of those who were prohibited from publication? Where is Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*? Where is Platonov? Where is Bulgakov? Half of Bulgakov has been published, of Platonov – a quarter of everything he's written. But these are the best Russian writers. Usually it is enough to die to be printed, but Mandel'shtam was deprived also of this destiny.] *Ibid.*, 414. As he himself at the time was one of such writers deprived of the possibility to publish his works, his letter implicitly asks those capable of deciphering its anonymous author: 'where is Shalamov?' Ginzburg did not reveal his identity until twenty years later, see Ginzburg, A. I. "Dvadstat' let tomy nazad. O 'Beloi knige' i pis'me V. Shalamova" in *Russkaia mysl'*, no. 3608 (14 February), 10.

<sup>9</sup> "В названии присутствует и некая документальность, протокольность ('КР-2'): не только отсылка к первой серии 'КР,' но и новый, еще не пройденный путь, указанный цифрой '2.'" [In the title there is a certain documentary character, of protocol keeping ('KT-2'): not only a reference to the first series of 'KT' but also a new path not yet traversed, as indicated by the number '2'.] Volkova, Elena V. *Tragicheskii paradoks Varlana Shalamova*. Moskva: Respublika, 1998, 152.

Leona Toker's argument for "belatedness" after the fifth cycle *The Revival of the Larch*;<sup>10</sup> and Valery Esipov's suggestion of a "literary autism" for Shalamov after 1966 when his isolation from contemporary society and culture increased before eventually becoming definite.<sup>11</sup>

My dissertation builds upon these observations in its construction of Shalamov's final period as his late style. I trace its development and eventual culmination in five chapters, each devoted to one text or a cluster of texts. Chapter I, "'On Prose': A Manifesto for the Beginning of the End," analyzes his literary manifesto, which I suggest signifies a breaking point in his trajectory as a professional writer, and the aesthetic consequences such a candid and inherently metatextual reflection upon his own writing caused for his subsequent works. In Chapter II, "*The Revival of the Larch: Return of the Writer*," I focus on the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales* and consider the complex relationship between his claim to create authentic representations based on his personal experience in "On Prose" and his telling of the stories of others in this cycle. Chapter III, "The Late Shalamov Writes the Early Shalamov," discusses the break with the conventions of Russian literary tradition in his longer autobiographical prose narratives about childhood in *The Fourth Vologda* and about youth in *Vishera*. In Chapter IV, "*The Glove or KR-2: Kolyma Tales Redux*," I investigate how this incomplete conclusion to his *magnum opus* engages the perspective of a "доходяга" [goner], the Russian term used in the Soviet camps for a prisoner beyond life but not yet dead, and disrupts both the testimonial and literary dimensions inherent in *Kolyma Tales*. Chapter V, "How Russian Literature Was Won: Confrontations with Catastrophe in *Evening Discourses*," provides a close reading of his last play through a framework provided by Adorno's provocative statement, "In the history of art late works are the catastrophes."<sup>12</sup> *Evening Discourses* is the catastrophe of Shalamov's late style, yet simultaneously its crescendo: it presents the final battle for Russian twentieth-century literature and for himself as a professional writer.

## 1. Late Style

Not all artists have a late style. It is neither a compulsory feature of creativity nor a prerequisite for greatness. A period of lateness in any artist's life and oeuvre only becomes meaningful or problematic when it exhibits a striking difference from the works that precede it. There is something sudden, surprising, and even a little bit unsettling about a 'late work,' as opposed to a 'last work' after which simply nothing else was produced. Such suddenly different, belated works have been subject to many questions posed about late style as an aesthetic category in art. What

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<sup>10</sup> "The cycles *Vishera: An Antinovel* and *The Glove, or KR-2* continue the intellectual processing of the past begun in 'Kolyma Tales.' At times it seems that these later works could not have been written, or given their present shape, had the author not produced the other four cycles first: the late stories are less urgent; they continue, as it were, rather than initiate a conversation. Thus Shalamov's literary biography follows the main pattern of the history of the Gulag memoir corpus: everything written after, roughly, *The Revival of the Larch* bears the marks of belatedness." Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 177.

<sup>11</sup> "В связи с эти можно говорить о двух этапах литературной работы Варлама Шаламова в его послелагерный период: до 1966 года и после, а второй этап можно охарактеризовать как окончательный уход в себя, как своеобразный литературный аутизм, связанный со стремлением к абсолютной независимости, к самосохранению себя как художника в резко изменившейся общественной атмосфере – в условиях натиска как справа (со стороны власти), так и слева (со стороны набравшего радикализма)." [In connection with this we can speak of two phases of Shalamov's literary work in his post-camp period: until 1966 and after, and the second stage can be described as the final withdrawal, as a kind of literary autism associated with a desire for absolute independence and for the self-preservation of himself as an artist in a rapidly changing social atmosphere – under the onslaught from the right (by the authorities) as well as the left (by gaining radicalism).] Esipov, Valerii V. *Varlam Shalamov i Ego Sovremenniki*. Vologda: Knizhnoe nasledie, 2007, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 567.

is late style? In which ways does it manifest itself? Is it possible to detect ‘lateness,’ without knowledge of the life of an artist, in any given work of art? What are the temporal, biographical as well as chronological, dimensions of late style? Does it necessarily have to occur late, i.e. can there be such a thing as an ‘early’ late style? Adorno, who coined the term, would most likely have rejected anything but old age for his model of a late artist epitomized by the aging, alienated, and deaf Beethoven (who was only in his 40s at the time).<sup>13</sup> Since Adorno articulated his parameters of the concept in 1937, it has been applied to other artists working in diverse genres and received additional features as well as more nuanced interpretations.<sup>14</sup> A ‘late’ artist need no longer be equated with an ‘old’ artist. Lateness as a stylistic feature of a work or a set of works can occur when an artist is relatively young, speaking both biographically and chronologically. Shalamov was not yet 60 when my proposed period of his late style began.

However, for Adorno it is not age that informs the late style of an artist but rather the proximity of this artist to death – something more likely to occur later in life. Late style for him is generated by the artist’s confrontation with the terminality of being; a revelation that, albeit possibly terrifying, seems generic as it eventually must loom large over all of us. In the light of his progressing mortality, the works of Adorno’s late artist are overcome with subjectivity as he experiences a pressing need for expression: to speak to the end. “Touched by death, the hand of the master sets free the masses of material that he used to form; its tears and fissures, witnesses to the finite powerlessness of the I confronted with Being, are its final work.”<sup>15</sup> Attempting to say all during the limited time left, searching for an outlet through which to express the abundance of potent content not yet used, the late artist abandons any previous concerns he might have had for form. There is, in other words, something shapeless about late works. The need for a last communication in the face of an inevitable death produces a powerful break, consciously or unconsciously, with the normative aesthetic of more successful earlier works:

The maturity of the late works of significant artists does not resemble the kind one finds in fruit. They are, for the most part, not round, but furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation. They lack all the harmony that the classicist aesthetic is in the habit of demanding from works of art, and they show more traces of history than of growth. <...> In this way, late works are relegated to the outer reaches of art, in the vicinity of the document.<sup>16</sup>

Late style, Adorno argues, is difficult: difficult to appreciate and difficult to comprehend. Late works constitute uncomfortable art. They seem to strive to detach themselves from the privileged realm of art itself, to become something else than mere objects of aesthetic consumption. Adorno calls this something else a ‘catastrophe.’<sup>17</sup> By this, he seems to imply the etymology of the Greek word *καταστροφή*, as an ‘overturning,’ as well as this as the term for the final, devastating

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Straus notes, “Even composers who are thought of as having lived into old age often initiated their distinctive late style when relatively young, at least by modern standards <...> Beethoven was only forty-eight when he wrote the ‘Hammerklavier’ Sonata, Op. 106...” Straus, Joseph N. “Disability and ‘Late Style’ in Music” in *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, McDonald, Russ. *Shakespeare’s Late Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Davis, Andrew C. II *Trittico, Turandot, and Puccini’s Late Style*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010; and Jones, Bethan. *The Last Poems of D. H. Lawrence: Shaping a Late Style*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno. *Essays on Music*, 566.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>17</sup> “He does not bring about their harmonious synthesis. As the power of dissociation, he tears them apart in time, in order, perhaps, to preserve them for the eternal. In the history of art late works are the catastrophes.” *Ibid.*, 567.

denouement of the plot in tragedy. Late works are catastrophic in the sense that they ‘overturn’ previous artistic achievements and thus provide the entire oeuvre with a cataclysmic closure. Such works cause more trouble than pleasure for both listeners and readers as they at once appear enigmatic and incomprehensible, riddled with caesuras, and often consist of fragments as if torn from an inexistent and unimaginable whole. Adorno’s notion of the subjective dimension in a late work shatters any understanding of aesthetics as a representation of beauty:

The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves. It breaks their bonds, not in order to express itself, but in order, expressionless, to cast off the appearance of art. Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself.<sup>18</sup>

As in many critical texts by Adorno, the language is dense and the practical point difficult to determine. The value of his essay appears to reside not in any concise theory but in how he highlights the problematic features often inherent in late works and thus opens up for serious discussions ‘shapeless,’ ‘inartistic,’ and ‘incomplete’ works which might otherwise be discarded as unqualified for or unworthy of critical attention. Many scholars have since found both this kind of unruly texts and late style itself fascinating.

In his book *On Late Style*,<sup>19</sup> Edward Said revisits Adorno’s concept to argue that Adorno himself represents lateness as someone who at the time of writing the essay had become detached from contemporary society. As Adorno’s Beethoven appeared ‘out of time’ in the confrontation with his imminent death, so Said’s Adorno appears ‘out of time’ as a critic who signifies a *back then* in and of his own being: a well-read old-world scholar who belongs to a society already gone.<sup>20</sup> Yet Said’s book also presents a late version of its author; with his casual references to intimate connections within the literary elite, he seems to position himself as a privileged, and thus also dated, academic.<sup>21</sup> As the intellectual climate of Adorno felt passé for Said, so the scholarly world by which Said was shaped and which informs the discourse of *On Late Style* may be viewed as archaic and outmoded for those of us who read it after his death. Is writing about late style a sign of being out of time and out of touch? Must the scholar of late style always suffer the same belatedness or alienation as the focus of their investigation? Despite his own late tendencies, Said offers a potential exit by including another dimension to his discussion of late style: exile.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 566.

<sup>19</sup> Said’s book, which was also his last, might be read as a work of late style itself as it was left unfinished by its author before his death: “The book on late style was unfinished, then, but the materials for it are very rich. We can regret what might have been and do our saddened best to imagine what Said might have written if he had written more, but we have no reason to be ungrateful for what there is. In what follows I have put together several different sets of materials, but although I have cut and spliced, I have not thought it necessary to write summaries or bridging passages. The words are all Said’s own.” Wood, Michael. “Introduction” in Said, *On Late Style*, xviii.

<sup>20</sup> “Lateness is being at the end, fully conscious, full of memory, and also very (even preternaturally) aware of the present. Adorno, like Beethoven, becomes therefore a figure of lateness itself, an untimely, scandalous, even catastrophic commentator on the present.” Said, *On Late Style*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> A different kind of implicit lateness for Said, who suffered from terminal cancer while writing this book, has been suggested: “...when he speaks of the impact that the decay of the body and the onset of ill health may have on creativity, he is surely not just referring to Beethoven’s ears, but also to the illness that accompanied the writing of the book under review here.” Bacht, Nikolaus. “After Said” in *Beethoven Forum*, Fall 2007, Vol. 14, No. 2, 180.

Exile, for Said, is not exclusively reserved for those living (and writing) outside of what they perceive as their native cultural, national, ethnic, or social contexts. His idea of exile includes a spectrum of human experiences, from exile in the political sense to emigration and immigration (involuntary or voluntary), as well as exile as an ‘outside’ location.<sup>22</sup> Late style becomes for him “a kind of self-imposed exile.”<sup>23</sup> It is a way of refusing to adhere to the dominant cultural paradigm in one’s creative work which occurs “...when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. [Beethoven’s] late works constitute a form of exile.”<sup>24</sup> The artist who continues to produce difficult works, refusing to abandon the ‘catastrophes in art’ of which Adorno warned, places himself in exile from the realm of normative culture. To be late and to be exiled is to compose that which cannot be embraced or assimilated by the contemporaneous cultural context.

This type of difficult late artist in self-inflicted exile is one of the two late artists that Said proposes. The other type of late artist achieves an unprecedented level of mastery in his last works that thus have the potential to become the epitome of his entire oeuvre. In the Russian context of such critically acclaimed and generally beloved late works, we may think of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Братья Карамазовы* [*The Brothers Karamazov*] or Anton Chekhov’s *Вишневый сад* [*The Cherry Orchard*]; perhaps even Aleksandr Pushkin’s final prose piece *Капитанская дочка* [*The Captain’s Daughter*] may be considered examples of how an accomplished late style plays a vital part in the making of a concluding masterpiece.<sup>25</sup> This ‘prosperous’ late artist whose last text embodies the peak of his production stands in stark contrast to the ‘problematic’ late artist who refuses to furnish his works with a convenient closure to his career:

Each of us can readily supply evidence of how it is that late works crown a lifetime of aesthetic endeavor. Rembrandt and Matisse, Bach and Wagner. But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction? What if age and ill health don’t produce the serenity of ‘ripeness is all’? This is the case with Ibsen, whose final works, especially *When We Dead Awaken*, tear apart the career and the artists’ craft and reopen the questions of meaning, success, and progress that the artist’s late period is supposed to move beyond. Far from resolution, then, Ibsen’s last plays suggest an angry and disturbed artist for whom the medium of drama provides an occasion to stir up more anxiety, tamper irrevocably with the possibility of closure, and leave the audience more perplexed and unsettled than before.<sup>26</sup>

In the Russian context of such stubborn writers who in their later works refuse “harmony and resolution,” be it aesthetic or philosophical, and instead revisit the contradictions of their past texts or challenge present circumstances of their own life and society, we may think of post-*Anna*

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<sup>22</sup> “Exile is life led outside the habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.” Said, Edward W. “Reflections on Exile” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000, 149.

<sup>23</sup> “Lateness therefore is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it.” Said, *On Late Style*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Said, *On Late Style*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in 1880 and Dostoevsky died in 1881; *The Cherry Orchard* premiered on 17 January 1904 and Chekhov died 15 July the same year; Pushkin finished *The Captain’s Daughter* in 1836 and died in 1837.

<sup>26</sup> Said, *On Late Style*, 7.

*Karenina* Leo Tolstoy (especially his novel *Воскресение* [*Resurrection*]), Ivan Bunin's penultimate short story collection *Темные аллеи* [*Dark Avenues*],<sup>27</sup> the later texts by Vladimir Nabokov,<sup>28</sup> and, as I will argue in this dissertation, Shalamov's post-1965 prose and dramaturgy. Late style has not yet received due critical attention in relation to Russian literature, but the Russian writers mentioned here indicate prospective areas for future research. However, one aspect of Shalamov seems to separate him from his compatriots and contemporaries: his disability.

Almost twenty years of living – and surviving – in the extreme geographic and physical conditions of the camps in Kolyma had not only psychological consequences for Shalamov but also made an irreversible impact on his body: from the second half of the 1950s up until his death in 1982, he suffered the deteriorating symptoms of Ménière's disease.<sup>29</sup> Ménière's is an illness of the inner ear that causes vertigo and progressive deafness. As a result, he grew increasingly deaf over the last thirty years of his life. Esipov, in his biography on Shalamov, hints that at the end Shalamov may also have had Huntington's disease (a genetic condition that causes the progressive breakdown of brain cells). In his last decade, he also lost his coordination and his vision, making writing nearly impossible and his handwriting illegible. His experience of living with disability in his final creative period resounds with the experiences of the composers with disability discussed by Joseph Straus in his 2008 paper "Disability and 'Late Style' in Music." Rather than old age, proximity to death, or self-appointed alienation from the immediate cultural context, Straus argues that the main feature shared by artists who have a pronounced late style is disability: "Composers who write in what is recognized as a late style often have shared experiences of nonnormative bodily or mental function, of disability, or of impairments resulting from disease or other causes."<sup>30</sup> Apart from the illustrious example of Beethoven and his deafness, Straus examines the musical echoes of stroke in Igor Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*; of heart condition in Arnold Schoenberg's String Trio; of leukemia in Béla Bartók's Third Piano Concerto; and of dementia in the final composition of Aaron Copland. His analysis opposes the conventional emphasis on 'late' in discussions of late style:

Either way, I would argue that in the end *there may be nothing late about late style* <...> Rather, late style may in some cases be more richly understood as *disability style*: a perspective composers may adopt at any age, often in response to a personal experience of disability. To the extent that composers find ways of writing their nonnormative bodies or inscribing their disabilities in their music, late style may be less about anticipating death than living with a disability, less about the future hypothetical than the present reality.<sup>31</sup>

In his 'disability style,' Straus recognizes the presence of one or more of the six metaphorical categories often used to describe late style characteristics: 1) Introspective (alienated, detached,

<sup>27</sup> *Resurrection*, the last of Tolstoy's major long works, was published in 1899 and Tolstoy died in 1910; the short stories in *Dark Avenues* were written in 1937–1944 and the collection published in 1946 and Bunin died 1953.

<sup>28</sup> See Wood, Michael. "Nabokov's Late Fiction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*. Ed. Connolly, Julian W. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2007, 200-14; and Zdravkovic, Mina. *Aesthetics at its End: Late Style in the Works of Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, and W. G. Sebald*. Thesis (Ph. D.), Boston University, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Shalamov notes that his first seizure from Ménière's disease happened in 1957: "В ноябре. Вот когда я переписывал эти стихи в Л<енинской> б<иблитеке>, у меня и был первый меньеровский приступ." [In November. While I was transcribing poetry in the Lenin Library, I had my first Ménière's seizure] (5:264).

<sup>30</sup> Straus, "Disability and 'Late Style' in Music," 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.



exiled, intimate, etc.); 2) Austere (expressionless, restrained, simple, spare, etc.); 3) Difficult (catastrophic, contradictory, incomprehensible, unconcerned about pleasing, etc.); 4) Compressed (concise, dense, miniaturized, undecorated, etc.); 5) Fragmentary (episodic, interrupted, torn, unreconciled, etc.); and 6) Retrospective (archaic, nostalgic, sentimental, translucent, etc.).<sup>32</sup> Some of these features appear to be mutually exclusive, as Straus also notes, and therefore it would make little sense to demand that a late work of any artist in any genre should exhibit all of them at once. What these attributes have in common is that they are sometimes employed to describe aspects of mental and physical disability:<sup>33</sup>

Although criticism that engages such a vocabulary might be dismissed as pathologizing a style, treating it as deviant and abnormal with respect to the mature style that precedes it and thus practicing criticism as a form of diagnosis, I would prefer to see a deeper truth in these metaphors: *late-style works are those that represent nonnormative mental and bodily states*. The disabilities of their composers are refracted into a general sense of nonnormative bodily or mental function and inscribed in their music. That inscription then gives rise to the aesthetic category of late style.<sup>34</sup>

Straus contends that it is possible to ‘hear’ disability in the music of composers living with disability. The question for a literary scholar is whether we can ‘read’ the traces of disability in written texts: How is disability inscribed in literature? In other words, does it matter if the author was deaf at the time of writing when we as readers are little concerned with ‘hearing’ his texts?<sup>35</sup> Straus’s ‘disability style,’ rather than being a mode of thinking that excludes the insights of previous scholarship on late style, appears capable of lending it a much-needed complementing, and perhaps also complicating, perspective. The subjectivity of which Adorno speaks in relation to Beethoven and the exile that Said emphasizes for his ‘troubled’ late artists may be similarly entrenched in the experience of living with disability.

Rather than supersede late style with ‘disability style,’ as Straus does, I consider the intersection of disability and late style for Shalamov not only in a literal sense but also as a metaphor. If a professional writer understands the publication of his works as a normal and necessary extension of their existence, this writer may regard a text that was rejected by censorship and remains unpublished as a dysfunctional, or disabled, text in that it cannot attain full functionality through public circulation. I argue that Shalamov was this kind of writer with this kind of perspective on the literary text and its function in society. Therefore, I distinguish a

<sup>32</sup> For more details, see Straus’s table on page 12 of the same paper.

<sup>33</sup> “Many of the characteristics of late style suggest nonnormative physical, mental, or emotional states, and even specific ‘disorders’ such as autism (detached, estranged from reality, isolated, socially resistant), depression (expressionless, laconic, immobilized), schizophrenia (torn, fissured, nonharmonious, fragmentary), senile dementia (backward-looking, simplified), mobility impairments (immobilized), and general physical disintegration (fractured, furrowed, fissured).” *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>35</sup> In his letter to Irina Sirotinskaya from 1971, Shalamov emphasized the ‘audible element’ of his creative process: “Для рассказа мне нужна абсолютная тишина, абсолютное одиночество. <...> Каждый рассказ, каждая фраза его предварительно прокричана в пустой комнате – я всегда говорю сам с собой, когда пишу. Кричу, угрожаю, плачу. И слез мне не остановить. Только после, кончая рассказ или часть рассказа, я утираю слезы” (6:495-6). [For a short story I need absolute silence, absolute solitude. <...> Every short story, every phrase of it is preliminary shouted in an empty room – I always speak with myself when “m writing. I yell, I intimidate, I cry. And I cannot stop the tears. Only after finishing the short story, or a part of the short story, do I wipe away the tears.]

dual disability connected to his late style: one concerned with limitations imposed on his body by loss of hearing (and eventually vision and coordination) and the other with restrictions enforced by censorship on his works. We do not need to know that Shalamov was deaf at the time of writing his late texts;<sup>36</sup> neither do we need to know if the same texts were denied publication during his lifetime. But if we do know, as we indeed do, both these contexts of limits and constraints might illuminate the emergent conflict in his late works between his autobiographical circumstances and his understanding of the place he should have occupied in Russian literature and Soviet society.

Shalamov's perception of himself as a great, albeit unpublished and thus unrecognized, writer of contemporary prose resonates with how recent scholarship insists on a connection between a late style and a retrospectively constructed "greatness": a distinct last period of artists equals "incontrovertible evidence of their genius"<sup>37</sup> and late style is code for "great style."<sup>38</sup> This new tendency in scholarship on late style, lateness, and other belated expressions of artistic creativity, is both true and not in my understanding of Shalamov's late style. It would be futile to describe his late style as synonymous with his "great style" – even a cursory reading of *Kolyma Tales* will confirm the first five cycles to be artistically superior to anything he wrote after them. However, my project is informed by an effort to elevate the status of Shalamov as a professional writer. If his early period belongs to juvenilia and his middle period reflects maturity, then his late period shows the aesthetic contradictions and ethical contractions that have the potential to situate him within the canon of great Russian writers.

## 2. A Late Style for Shalamov

The late Shalamov may have shared the deafness of Adorno's late Beethoven, but he did not share his proximity to death – not until the beginning of the 1970s. His late style began at a time when, instead of a steady decline in physical or intellectual vigor, he experienced an influx of new impressions and refreshed feelings after he became acquainted with Irina Sirotinskaya in March 1966. She was his last love and became, after his death, the heir to his literary production. It is interesting to note that the three periods I propose for his creative work correspond loosely to the chronology of his relationships with three women. During his first period, *Youthful Expression*, he married his first wife, Galina Gudz'; they met in the Vishera camp during his first incarceration.<sup>39</sup> During the second period, *Urgent Embodiment*, he married his second wife, Olga

<sup>36</sup> The connection between Shalamov's deafness and the poetics of his works, prose as well as poetry, has not yet received due attention in scholarship. A rare example is Efim Gofman who argues that Shalamov's lack of attention to the musical aspect of Boris Pasternak's funeral in 1960 could have been due to his difficulties hearing; this seems to later have been reflected in his poems about the funeral. See, Gofman, Efim. "Vidny tsarapiny roayalya... O chetyrekh stikhotvoreniya Varlama Shalamova na smert' Borisa Pasternaka" in *Znamia*, Vol. 3, 2015: 198-207.

<sup>37</sup> "The attribution of a late phase has thus come to serve as a signal of the elect status of the artist or poet or composer in question; it is incontrovertible evidence of their genius." McMullan, Gordon, and Sam Smiles, *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 4.

<sup>38</sup> "[W]here 'late style' is essentially a way of determining *great* style, of conferring elite, quasi-transcendental stature on a chosen canon of artists, lateness questions the very possibility of greatness in a belated age." Hutchinson, Ben. *Lateness and Modern European Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 12. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>39</sup> Sirotinskaya relates this event in her book about Shalamov: "Они познакомились во время первого заключения Варлама Тихоновича: Галина Игнатьевна приехала навестить своего мужа, тоже находившегося на Вишере, и тут, как рассказывал В. Т., – стремительный роман. Она бросает мужа..." [They met during Varlam Tikhonovich's first incarceration: Galina Ignat'evna came to visit her husband, who was also located in the Vishera camp, and then, as V. T. told it – an impetuous affair. She leaves her husband...] Ellipsis in the original. Sirotinskaya, Irina. *Moi Drug Varlam Shalamov*. Moskva: Allana, 2006, 37.

Nekliudova. They divorced the same year that he met Sirotinskaya; as an archivist at the State Archive, she visited his home with the purpose of allocating his unpublished manuscripts for preservation. Although they never officially became a couple (Sirotinskaya was a married woman with small children at the time), his relationship with her was one of mutual intimacy and affection. He dedicated two cycles of *Kolyma Tales* to her and even wanted to claim her as the co-author of *The Revival of the Larch*. It seems that since the beginning of his relationship with her coincided with the beginning of his late style, both infused his works with a rush of revitalized creativity. Despite disability and advancing age, the second half of the 1960s was a period of intensive productivity for Shalamov; he himself called the month of June 1968 that they spent together the best time of his life.<sup>40</sup> Without her visit to Vologda the same year, for example, we might not have been able to read *The Fourth Vologda*.<sup>41</sup> She may also be the reason for the increased focus on Russian and Soviet history in this and his other late texts. This seems not only to echo Adorno's observation that "[late works] show more traces of history than of growth," but also to be indicative of the generational difference between Shalamov and Sirotinskaya as his 'первоочитатель' ['first reader']: born in 1932, she had little exposure to the breadth of historical knowledge which he, twenty-five years her senior, possessed.

If the beginning of his late style necessitated a second wind of literary fervor, the 1970s reflects an increasingly restraining disability. In one of his notebooks from 1972, Shalamov reflects on the limitations imposed upon him and his career as a writer because of his deafness: "[Boris] Polevoi and I are the same age. At 65 years, he directs a large journal, while I'm an invalid. That's what deafness is. For a whole 15 years now nobody prevents me from doing anything I want. But I cannot because of the deafness."<sup>42</sup> He continues his discussion of living

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<sup>40</sup> See his letter to Sirotinskaya from July 12 1968: "Да, и у меня июнь шестьдесят восьмого года – лучший месяц моей жизни. Крепко тебя целую, люблю. Если бы я был футурологом, чьи обязанности совсем недавно выполняли кудесники – 'скажи мне кудесник, любимец богов,' то я желал бы себе будущего в нашем только что прошедшем июне. Я предсказал бы себе этот июнь, пожелал бы себе только этого июня" (6:463). [Yes, and for me, too, June of 1968 was the best month of my life. I kiss you firmly, I love you. If I were a futurist whose duties were recently performed wizards – 'tell me, magician, favorite of the gods,' I would like to wish myself as a future our June that has just passed. I would predict myself this June, I would wish myself only this June.]

<sup>41</sup> Valery Esipov also argues for a direct cause-and-effect relationship between Sirotinskaya's trip to Vologda in the spring of 1968 and Shalamov's work on *The Fourth Vologda*: "Именно впечатления и фотографии, привезенные Сиротинской, послужили Шаламову толчком к созданию книги Четвертая Вологда – ценнейшего источника его жизненной и духовной биографии, целого пласта вологодской жизни первой четверти XX века и позднейших философских заключений." [It was the impressions and photos brought back by Sirotinskaya that served as Shalamov's impetus for the creation of the book *The Fourth Vologda* – a most valuable source for his vital and spiritual biography, for a whole layer of Vologda life of the first quarter of the twentieth century, and for his later philosophical opinions.] In addition, Esipov sees the poor health of Shalamov as the reason why he did not visit his hometown after his mother's funeral there in December 1934: "После лагеря здоровье его было глубоко подорвано, он стал инвалидом (кроме глухоты – болезнь Меньера, связанная с нарушением координации движений), и всякие поездки, в том числе в Вологду, стали для него слишком тяжелы. Именно поэтому он так и не бывал больше в родном городе..." [After the camp, his health was deeply undermined and he became an invalid (in addition to deafness – Ménière's disease is associated with impaired motor coordination), and all sorts of trips, including to Vologda, became too difficult for him. That's why he did not visit his hometown again...] Esipov, *Varlam Shalamov i ego sovremenniki*, 197-8.

<sup>42</sup> "Мы однолетки с Полевым. В 65 лет он руководит большим журналом, а я – инвалид. Вот что такое глухота. Мне никто не мешает целых 15 лет делать все, что я хочу. Но я не могу из-за глухоты" (5:333). Boris Polevoi (1908-1982) was the chief editor of the journal *Юность* [*Youth*] 1961-1981. Polevoy was also the author of "Повесть о настоящем человеке" ["Novella about a Real Man"] (1946) the main character of which is a disabled war hero (both his legs were amputated). The novella received the Stalin Prize for Literature in 1947. For more about disability in this novella, see Dunham, Vera S. "Images of the Disabled, Especially the War Wounded, in Soviet Literature" in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union: Past and Present, Theory and Practice*. Eds. McCagg, William O.

with his disability by detailing the ways it has restricted his access to the cultural life in his contemporary Moscow:

Film, radio, music, lecture activities – all the things that make the capital special – are for me an extra element of irritation, of nervous shock. I cannot go to the theater, to the cinema. <...> I have been deprived of all this because of deafness. The problem is not with secretaries, but that civilization and culture associate too much with the ears, with hearing and not just with vision. Vision is a burden for science, a problem for the last century. The book. Now the book is on its way out, and in this new world without books there is no place for me. I read faster than anyone in the world, but this ability is no longer so important when there is TV, radio. Once the era for silent film was over, I realized that the future is not for the deaf. It is science and technology that daily emphasize that there is no place in life for the deaf.<sup>43</sup>

Shalamov here articulates a deep sense of exclusion from the abled society around him. He does so in the only way left for him to effectively communicate with others: through writing. The texts in which he could speak, as well as hear the words of others, belonged to what he considered outdated forms of communication in the modern world – mainly books, but also newspapers, magazines, and letters. His negative feelings toward his disability can be seen as representing a kind of exile. His progressing deafness presented a physical barrier to participation in intellectual and literary life; although he was present in Moscow, he was in another sense not fully there. Before that he experienced exile as punishment through the enforced geographical dislocation from his family and home twice, first in 1929 to the northern Urals and then again in 1937 to Kolyma. This exile of many years included incarceration in prisons and camps, thus adding an additional layer of restrictions, limitations, and feelings of displacement to his expulsion from society and physical suffering. His experiences of geographical and political exile as well as his return almost two decades later inform much of *Kolyma Tales*.

However, his return, first to European Russia in 1953 (he initially lived in the small town of Turkmen north of Moscow since he was not allowed to reside in the capital until his legal rehabilitation) and later to Moscow in 1956, became problematic as it brought a different exile in its wake. This exile took the shape of exclusion from the contemporary literary context due to official censorship, when his efforts to publish his prose were frustrated repeatedly. In the second half of the 1950s, especially after his legal rehabilitation and in the context of the Thaw, Shalamov nurtured hopes of publishing *Kolyma Tales*. Instead of prose, he was successful in publishing for the first time some of the poems from his poetry cycles *Колымские тетради* [*Kolyma*

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and Lewis H. Siegelbaum. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989, 151-64. See also Kaganovsky, Lilya. "Introduction: Bodies That Matter" in *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008, 1-18.

<sup>43</sup> "Кино, радио, музыка, лекционная деятельность – все, чем дорога столица, для меня только лишней элемент раздражения, нервного потрясения. Я не могу ходить в театр, в кино. <...> Всего этого я лишен из-за глухоты. Тут дело вовсе не в секретарях, а в том, что цивилизация и культура слишком многое связывают именно с ушами, со слухом, а не только со зрением. Зрение это нагрузка науки, задача для прошлого века. Книга. Сейчас книга уходит, и в этом новом мире без книги мне нет места. Я читаю быстрее всех в мире, но эта способность сейчас человеку не так важна, когда есть телевизор, радио. Еще когда кончилось немое кино, я понял, что будущее – не для глухих. Именно наука и техника подчеркивают ежедневно, что глухим нет места в жизни" (5:333).

*Notebooks*]<sup>44</sup> in the journal *Znamya* in 1957. After the publication of Solzhenitsyn's novella *Один день Ивана Денисовича* [*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*] in the journal *Novy Mir* in November 1962, Shalamov asked him to remind the editor Aleksandr Tvardovsky to have a look at the poems and short stories that Shalamov submitted to the same journal in 1961.<sup>45</sup> However, nothing came of this endeavor.<sup>46</sup> While his five officially published poetry collections established him as a Russian poet of some renown, his prose was only available in *samizdat*. Although manuscript copies of *Kolyma Tales* eventually made their way illegally, and without his consent as author, to the West where they were published and translated into various European languages, it seems that for Shalamov this was not a clandestine overcoming of Soviet censorship but rather yet another circumstance depriving him of being read and becoming known as a professional prose writer in his home country. He was adamant about who his writing was intended for – the Russian people.<sup>47</sup>

Shalamov's sense of exclusion and imposed distance from the official literary context of his time intensified toward the second half of the 1960s. He composed his literary manifesto in 1965 as a response to the comments and suggestions made by readers who encountered *Kolyma Tales* in *samizdat*. In it, he situates also his innovative aesthetic program of 'new prose' in a kind of exile from literature itself. 'New prose' is separate in content as well as in form from both the Russian literary tradition of the nineteenth century and the aesthetic doctrine of socialist realism in the twentieth-century Soviet Union. What Shalamov writes, he proclaims in the manifesto, is something else, something entirely new. His commitment to further develop the features of this 'something else' in his 'new prose' appears to become stronger after his elucidation of it in "On Prose." His late works drift further apart from both traditional and contemporary literature. In this way, we can trace exile in the late style of Shalamov in three dimensions: in the geographical displacement present in the topoi of several of his texts (Kolyma, Vishera, even Vologda); in the conscious attempt to be different from, and ultimately overthrow, conventional literary forms and

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<sup>44</sup> The titles of Shalamov's six poetry cycles of *Kolyma Notebooks* are: 1. *Синяя тетрадь* [*The Blue Notebook*], 2. *Сумка почтальона* [*The Postbag*], 3. *Лично и доверительно* [*Personally and Confidentially*], 4. *Златые горы* [*Golden Mountains*], 5. *Кирпей* [*Fireweed*], and 6. *Высокие широты* [*High Latitudes*].

<sup>45</sup> See Shalamov's letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 1962: "Скажите как-нибудь Твардовскому, что в его журнале лежат мои стихи более года, и я не могу добиться, чтобы их показали Твардовскому. Лежат там и рассказы, в которых я пытался показать лагерь так, как я его видел и понял" (6:288). [Find a way to tell Tvardovsky that my poems have been lying in his journal for more than a year, and I cannot get them shown to Tvardovsky. There are also short stories there, in which I tried to show the camp as I saw and understood it.]

<sup>46</sup> For more details about the interaction between Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn, and Tvardovsky in the 1960s, see Esipov, "Neliubovnyi treugol'nik: Shalamov – Tvardovskii – Solzhenitsyn," *Varlam Shalamov i Ego Sovremenniki*, 67-104.

<sup>47</sup> During their meeting on August 30 1964, according to Solzhenitsyn's essay "С Варламом Шаламовым" ["With Varlam Shalamov"] written 1986-98, Solzhenitsyn asked Shalamov if he would like to co-author *The Gulag Archipelago*: "Я изложил с энтузиазмом весь проект и моё предложение соавторства. Если нужно – поправить мой план, а затем разделить, кто какие главы будет писать. И получил неожиданный для меня – быстрый и категорический отказ. Даже: знал я за В. Т. умение тонко намекнуть вместо того, чтобы сказать прямо (у меня уже слагалось такое ощущение, что я с ним открыт, а он полужакрыт), – а тут он ответил прямо: 'Я хочу иметь гарантию, для кого пишу.'" [I explained with enthusiasm the entire project and my offer of co-authorship. If necessary – to improve my plan, and then divide the chapters to be written between us. And I unexpectedly received a quick and categorical refusal. Even more: I knew V. T. for his ability to subtly hint instead of saying something explicitly (I already had the feeling that I was open with him while he was semi-closed with me) and then he replied bluntly: 'I want to have a guarantee for whom I write.']] In this reply, we might detect Shalamov's unwillingness to write specifically for publication abroad. Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. "S Varlamom Shalamovym" in *Novy mir*, 1999, Vol. 4: [http://magazines.russ.ru/novy\\_mi/1999/4/solgen.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/novy_mi/1999/4/solgen.html). Emphasis in the original.

traditional contents; and in the physical limitations imposed upon him by his disability which manifests itself in the incomplete or fragmentary quality of many of his late works.

As a matter of fact, Shalamov only composed one complete work during his late style: *The Revival of the Larch*, the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*. The rest of his prose and dramaturgy that I will analyze in the following chapters was ultimately left unfinished: *The Antinovel Vishera*, *The Fourth Vologda*, *The Glove or KT-2*, and *Evening Discourses*. Remnants of unimaginable or impossible wholes, the incomplete form of these late texts reflects the fragmentation of the writing subject that occurs in them. These unfinished works often center around an ‘I’ that appears equally unfinished yet evokes intimacy and individuality. The late Shalamov is arguably more subjective than the mature Shalamov of his middle period, *Urgent Embodiment*.<sup>48</sup> In the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, he had striven to combine a literary framework with historical objectivity in his creative testimony to the atrocities he had witnessed in the camps. He survived, but many others did not. Telling his short stories from the perspective of a ‘we,’ instead of an ‘I,’ furnished his mature literary efforts with a perspective of objectivity. In many ways, the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales* are not about Shalamov, although they are undoubtedly based on his personal experiences and furthermore indebted to his survival. These are short stories about the untold tales of unknown individuals: “*Kolyma Tales* is the fate of martyrs who never were, who never became and could never become heroes.”<sup>49</sup> His avatars, or rather focalizers, with different names all resembling him in many ways – in physical appearance, social background, and personal opinions – are not actually Shalamov. They could all be, but the objective lens and laconic style through which their fates are narrated show them to be collective and general rather than individual and specific. The individualization becomes more pronounced in his late works, as Shalamov’s individual life and his specific circumstances come to the forefront to exhibit an increasingly pronounced subjectivity. His late style is, in other words, personal.

The subjective tone of Shalamov’s late style is not solely autobiographical; the features in it that we recognize from his biography seem to be refracted, reconstituted, and eventually reimagined through a *transitory hero* without much internal or external consistency. The transitory hero is a careful construction made to be against and essentially contradictory to a literary character or conventional hero. This transitory hero, as an alternative term for speaking about the author’s double or autobiographical representations of himself, is the addition I wish to make to discussions of late style with my project. It seems to me that late style is about more than proximity to death, exile, disability, or notions of greatness; late style also contributes to a new understanding and different representation of the self for the late artist. Shalamov and his works can serve as an example this: his late style is often retrospective but never nostalgic, often personal but never private, and often faithful to historical facts but never as faithful when it comes to the fictions of literary traditions. Case in point, his late works sometimes contain what appear to be consciously incorrect intertextual allusions.

Shalamov’s transitory hero might seem to be an easily interpreted allusion to the author himself: this ‘I’ is sometimes even called “Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov.” However, we must be

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<sup>48</sup> In this way, we may consider how the first four cycles of *Kolyma Tales* are more indebted to as well as entrenched in the traditional ways of writing about imprisonment in Russian literature: “The interconnection of the communal and the individual concerns is also reflected in the components of the material [of Gulag memoirs as a genre]. Since Dostoevsky’s *The House of the Dead*, narratives of imprisonment have tended to combine stories of individual experiences with accounts of the ‘shared suffering and common shame’ ([Evgenia] Ginzburg [*Into the Whirlwind*]), that is, of the representative experience of the prisoners. Conditions in the Gulag are, indeed, seldom treated as grounds for personal grievance.” Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> “*Колымские рассказы* – это судьба мучеников, не бывших, не умевших и не ставших героями” (5:148).

careful not to conflate him with the real-life individual Shalamov; this is not a transparent embodiment of the author in the text but rather an experimental mode of communicating his own personal experience. Although the transitory hero might also be an appropriate term for the function of the focalizer in the first four cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, his late works introduces an unprecedented feature to the voice of ‘I’: this ‘I’ breaks apart from ‘we’ and reaches out to a ‘you.’ Impersonal constructions with the second person singular pronoun are common in Russian but rare in Shalamov’s oeuvre. In his late style, the search for an addressee in ‘you’ substitutes the missing contemporary reader and the impossible interlocutor who would fully understand these experiences. The transitory hero of his late works rarely shares his author’s disability, yet deafness is echoed in the elusive pursuit of a communication that is ultimately unattainable. The historical and literary context of the transitory hero as a term and how it can be applied to the problems of representation in Shalamov’s late works will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter I.

In sum, my construction of Shalamov’s late style draws upon previous scholarship as well as upon the information about his life that he conveyed in personal documents: notebooks, letters, and several unfinished fragments written in the autobiographical mode. This way of reading Shalamov’s late works against himself – a writer who on the one hand was reluctant to narrate himself in a memoir or autobiography and on the other preoccupied with this endeavor in other texts throughout his career – shows how his literary representation of personal experience is shaped by his interpretation of both Russian/Soviet literature and Russian/Soviet history. Shalamov was a witness, a survivor, and a chronicler of the Gulag – an important role that he recognized and understood – yet what he wanted to become was a chronicler of his own soul<sup>50</sup> and to be considered a professional writer above everything else. This subjective perspective on his creative process contradicts much of what he wrote during his last period, yet such contradictions are what make up the fascinating and difficult basis of his late style. It is my hope that this dissertation will be of interest not only to Shalamov scholars, scholars of Russian literature, Soviet history, and concentration camp narratives, but also to those interested in questions of late style, exile, disability studies, subjectivity, and, more broadly, problems of representation in literature.

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<sup>50</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Aleksandr Kremenskoï from 1972: “Я летописец собственной души, не более. Можно ли писать, чтобы чего-то не было злого и для того, чтобы не повторилось. Я в это не верю, и такой пользы мои рассказы не принесут” (6:580). [I am a chronicler of my own soul, nothing more. Is it possible to prevent evil and so that it not happen again. I do not believe in this and my short stories will not yield such use.]

## Chapter I. “On Prose”: A Literary Manifesto for the Beginning of the End

### 1. Introduction: A Nexus of Theory and Practice

The literary manifesto “On Prose” (1965) might be Shalamov’s most cited text. This longer essay presents his ideas about the urgent concerns of contemporary literature and explains how his aesthetic program of ‘new prose’ addresses these concerns. ‘New prose’ declares the death of the novel, and with it all forms of fictional narratives, and makes way for the birth of a new literary form centered on a visceral representation of personal experience. He uses *Kolyma Tales*, often abbreviated as “K.P.” [“K.T.”], as one example of this throughout “On Prose.” The manifesto is a defense of his creative method and appears to have been written to defend one short story from the critique of contemporary readers: “Шерри-бренди” [“Sherry Brandy”] (1954) from the first cycle. He read this short story, which narrates the death of Osip Mandel’shtam in a Vladivostok transit camp, at the first Mandel’shtam Memorial Evening at Moscow State University on May 14 1965.<sup>51</sup> There is a lengthy digression in the middle of “On Prose” devoted to the problematic aspect of “Sherry Brandy,” specifically, that Shalamov neither witnessed Mandel’shtam die nor died himself in the camps. Consequently, it cannot be based on his personal experience and seems already to break the rules of his own ‘new prose.’ However, Shalamov uses this text to stress the emotional dimension of his narrative strategies as well as the proximity of his experiences to that of Mandel’shtam:

Regarding one of the *Kolyma Tales* I had a conversation in the editorial office of a Moscow journal.

– Did you read “Sherry Brandy” at the university?

– Yes, I did.

– And Nadezhda Yakovlevna [Mandel’shtam] was there?

– Yes, Nadezhda Yakovlevna was there too.

– That means your legend about the death of Mandel’shtam is canonized now? <...>

Do not I have a moral right to write about Mandel’shtam’s death? This is my duty. Who and with what can call into question such a short story like “Sherry Brandy”? Who dares call this short story a legend?

– When was the short story written?

– The short story was written immediately upon my return from Kolyma in 1954 in the town of Reshetnikov in Kalinin region, where I wrote day and night, trying to fixate something of the most important, to leave a testimony, to put a cross on the grave, to prevent the name, which had been dear to me my whole life, from becoming hidden, to commemorate this death, which cannot be forgiven and forgotten.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Ahern, Kathleen. “Events on the Road to Immortality: An Evening of Mandelstam at Moscow State University, 1965” in *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 62:4 (2009): 219-34.

<sup>52</sup> “По поводу одного из “Колымских рассказов” у меня был разговор в редакции московского журнала. – Вы читали ‘Шерри-бренди’ в университете? – Да, читал. – И Надежда Яковлевна была? – Да, и Надежда Яковлевна была. – Канонизируется, значит, ваша легенда о смерти Мандельштама? <...> Разве у меня нет нравственного права написать о смерти Мандельштама? Это – долг мой. Кто и чем может опровергнуть такой рассказ, как ‘Шерри-бренди’? Кто осмелится назвать этот рассказ легендой? – Когда написан этот рассказ? – Рассказ написан сразу по возвращении с Колымы в 1954 году в Решетникове Калининской области, где я писал день и ночь, стараясь закрепить что-то самое важное, оставить свидетельство, крест поставить на могиле, не допустить, чтобы было скрыто имя, которое мне дорого всю жизнь, чтобы отметить ту смерть, которая не может быть прощена и забыта” (5:149-50).



The Mandel'shtam Evening was a rare occasion for Shalamov to read one of his short stories in public and receive a hitherto unprecedented direct contact with readers. This prompted him to refute the interpretation of “Sherry Brandy” as his “legend” about Mandel'shtam with a detailed explanation of his aesthetic principles. Yet neither the mourning in “Sherry Brandy” nor its topic, the death of a famous Russian poet in a camp, appear to be representative of *Kolyma Tales* or of the type of writing he proclaims to be the future of Russian literature in “On Prose.” Rather, the way in which his digression protects “Sherry Brandy” from being misunderstood suggests both the overarching aim of his literary manifesto and the new self-conscious turn in his subsequent works: to protect and defend his own writing as a different mode of literature that is difficult to understand properly without the author stating his intentions. With “Sherry Brandy” at its core, a text contradictory to his own proposed program, “On Prose” illuminates the difficult yet productive divergence between practice and theory, between personal experience and literary representation, and between the ethical imperative of the witness and the aesthetic instinct of the writer that will inform what he wrote after it.

“On Prose” has previously been read as the theory behind Shalamov’s practice and as such it has often been interpreted as a text that can clarify his poetics in general and *Kolyma Tales* in particular.<sup>53</sup> Yet the ambitions of “On Prose” are more complex than a mere cause and effect relationship between his declaration of his intentions as a writer in the mid-1960s and the texts he wrote later. The most intriguing significance of “On Prose” is not the program it proclaims but the provocation it contains: through a self-made rupture in the Russian literary tradition, this manifesto simultaneously provokes a crisis in his own development as a writer. It is in the context of this crisis, I will argue, that his late style begins to form.

The source of this crisis should be sought neither in Shalamov’s incarceration in the camps of Kolyma nor in his writing of the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales*. Instead, the seed for his late style as a self-reflective and self-conscious creative period informed by exile and disability was planted already in the early 1930s when he attended a so-called ‘встреча работников науки и искусства’ [‘meeting of workers’ from the fields of science and art’] in Moscow. In decades to come, he would return to memories of this meeting in different texts: his personal correspondence, an essay, and the autobiographical fragment<sup>54</sup> “Глухие” [“Deaf People”] written in the 1960s. Revisiting this event, he noted how he then realized that the writers’ general level of knowledge as well as their knowledge of their own craft, literature, was inferior to that of the scientists. This discrepancy informed his trajectory as a writer and it seems that he recalled the defeat of the writers in the 1930s again when he articulated his own understanding of literature in the 1960s – not only what literature should be, but also how literature should be written and by whom.

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<sup>53</sup> For example, Volkova, *Tragicheskii paradoks*; Kline, Laura. “Novaya Proza”: Varlam Shalamov’s Kolymskie rasskazy. Thesis (Ph. D.), University of Michigan, 1998; Toker, “Varlam Shalamov” in *Return from the Archipelago*, 141-87; Mikhailik, Elena. “Dostoevsky and Shalamov: Orpheus and Pluto” in *The Dostoevsky Journal* 1, 2000: 147-57; Nekrasova, Irina. *Sud’ba i tvorchestvo Varlama Shalamova: monografiia*. Samara: SGPU, 2003; Davoliute, Violeta. “Shalamov’s Memory” in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 47 1, 2005: 1-21; Esipov, Valerii. *Varlam Shalamov i Ego Sovremenniki*; Boym, Svetlana. “The Banality of Evil: Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt” in *Slavic Review* 67 2, 2008: 342-63; Mikheev, Mikhail. “O ‘novoi proze’ Varlama Shalamova” in *Voprosy literatury* 4 (2011): 183-214; Sukhikh, Igor’. “‘Novaia proza’ Shalamova. Teoriia i praktika” in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, Moskva: 2013, 222-7; and Young, Sarah. “Mapping Spaces as Factography: Human Traces and Negated Genres in Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolymskie rasskazy*” in *Slavonica* 19 1, 2013: 1-17.

<sup>54</sup> The genre ‘autobiographical fragment’ suggests both the personal dimension of “Deaf People,” as concerned with his own deafness, and the incomplete structure of this small text. Many of Shalamov’s texts are generically ambivalent, and although the question of generic hybrids is valid in relation to his works, genre is not my focus here.

The need to conquer this discrepancy is not the only echo of the debate between scientists and writers in the early 1930s in Shalamov's manifesto. Among those representing 'the workers of art' was the writer and critic Vikenty Veresaev, author of the influential literary study *Живая жизнь* [*Living Life*] (1910) about the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.<sup>55</sup> By the early 1930s, Veresaev had become deaf and used a hearing horn. Shalamov's memory of the disabled Veresaev turning his hearing aid to each speaker resurfaced again in the 1960s, when he himself suffered from progressive deafness, while writing "Deaf People":

At this meeting, the different levels of the general culture of writers and of the general culture of scientists were determined immediately. The scientists were even more educated in literary questions, in issues of the psychology of creativity, than any of the writers. <...> The other presentations by the writers were no better – Veresaev, the expert on Horace and translator of Virgil, reproachfully directed his hearing horn toward another speaker and was the first to shrug his shoulders after each speech. Veresaev directed his hearing horn also toward the mouths of the scientists and smiled with satisfaction after the speech of [Boris] Zavadovsky or [Pyotr] Lisitsyn. And Veresaev's hearing horn remained in my memory after this strange meeting.<sup>56</sup>

Veresaev's prosthesis suggests a certain type of writer and a certain type of disability; during this debate, Shalamov did not know that he would one day also suffer deafness. Writing the autobiographical fragment in the 1960s, he already knew what it meant not to hear others in public settings or private conversations;<sup>57</sup> for example, in his recollections of the Mandel'shtam Evening he stresses that his deafness limited his perception of the other readings.<sup>58</sup> He begins "Deaf People" by declaring that such a hearing horn would not work for him.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Veresaev,

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<sup>55</sup> Veresaev's work consists of two parts: *Живая жизнь: О Достоевском и Толстом* [*Living Life: On Dostoevsky and Tolstoy*] (1910) and *Аполлон и Дионис: О Ницше* [*Apollo and Dionysus: On Nietzsche*] (1914). In 1929, a revised version was published in volume seven of Veresaev's complete works; thus, Shalamov may have become aware of this work again through its new publication in the early 1930s. See, Veresaev, Vikentii. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 7: Zhivaja zhizn'*. Moskva: Nedra, 1929.

<sup>56</sup> "На этой встрече сразу определились разные уровни общей культуры писателей и общей культуры ученых. Ученые были даже в писательских вопросах, в вопросах психологии творчества пограмотнее любых писателей. <...> Другие писательские выступления были не лучше – и знаток Горация, переводчик Вергилия Вересаев укоризненно наводил свой слуховой рожок на очередного оратора и первый пожимал плечами после каждой речи. Этот слуховой рожок Вересаев наводил и на рты ученых и удовлетворительно улыбался после речи Завадовского или Лисицына. Вересаевский слуховой рожок и остался в моей памяти от этого странного собрания" (7:76-7).

<sup>57</sup> "Я еще слышу мир, еще могу беседовать с людьми, если вижу мир, движущиеся губы. И каким-то особым напряжением мозга, ранее мне неизвестным, угадываю слова и успеваю подобрать ответ и чувствую себя еще человеком. И никто не знает, сколько душевных и нервных сил стоит мне каждый разговор" (7:76). [I can still hear the world, I can still talk to people, if I see the world, the moving lips. And with some special strain of the brain that was previously unknown to me, I guess the words and manage to select an answer and I feel more human. And no one knows how much mental and nervous strength each conversation costs me.]

<sup>58</sup> "Эренбург читает несколько стихотворений Манделъштама. О веке-волкодаве. Проклинаю глухоту, прислушиваюсь." [Ehrenburg reads a few poems by Mandel'shtam. About the century-wolfhound. Cursing my deafness, I'm listening.] Shalamov, "Pervyi vecher Osipa Mandel'shtama": <http://shalamov.ru/library/21/69.html>

<sup>59</sup> "Слуховой рожок, очки? Нет, при моей болезни рожок и очки не помогают. Больше того – сам отказ мой услышать с помощью очков – служит для различения моей болезни, или, как говорят медики, служит средством дифференциальной диагностики" (7:76). [Hearing horn, glasses? No, with my illness horn and glasses do not help. More than that – my own refusal to hear with the help of glasses serves to distinguish my illness, or, as the doctors say, it provides a tool for a differential diagnosis.]

he opted to maintain the external invisibility of his deafness. Similarly, his disability is rarely addressed or directly represented in his late works – this autobiographical fragment, which was never included in any of his short story cycles, is a rare text in that it explicitly problematizes his deafness. Rather than becoming the main focus of his late style, as it overwhelmed his private life at the same time, his disability is an unspoken dimension of these later texts that nevertheless shapes their emphasis on the intimate interconnectivity of experience and representation.

In the 1960s, when Shalamov composed “Deaf People” in close proximity to “On Prose,” he seems to have recalled not only the deafness of Veresaev, but also his investigation of ‘живая жизнь’ [‘living life’] in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. ‘Living life’ is a central concept in Shalamov’s manifesto and imperative for his understanding of the connection between primary personal experience and its secondary literary representation. Whereas previous scholarship has focused on ‘new prose’ in his aesthetic program, I will suggest that ‘living life,’ a phrase which occurs only one time less frequently than ‘new prose’ in “On Prose,” is as significant for the manifesto’s deconstruction of Russian literature and its construction of a literature for the future.

Shalamov’s manifesto is not so much the making of a literary theory as it is the unraveling of a literary practice from within. Within it, we can trace his anxieties concerning his position as a marginal author in contemporary Soviet society and a tension not only between fact and fiction,<sup>60</sup> but also between his ideas of what a Russian writer must be, what Russian literature may become, and his personal situation of disability and exile. This intersection of anxieties and tensions highlights not only the symbiotic relationship between the manifesto and its author, but also the symbiotic relationship between Shalamov’s text and its scholars. “On Prose” has been a point of departure for much of Shalamov scholarship that, like Shalamov in this text, strives to move from the periphery toward the center. Much of what is common knowledge about his works positions them as marginal. His genre of choice, a hybrid short story form, is far from the novel at the top of the Russian literary hierarchy; until recently *Kolyma Tales* were not included in the canon of Russian literature; the camp theme, albeit emblematic of the twentieth-century, is a minor topic in mainstream literature; and the geographies of his works (Kolyma, Vishera, Vologda) are on the periphery of the Russian map. However, when these peripheries converge in Shalamov’s multifaceted exile, which takes place in the center of Soviet/Russian culture (Moscow) after his return from the camps, an alternative space of centrality is invented and this space takes center stage in his manifesto. In a similar way, Shalamov scholarship has used extensive references to the manifesto, itself a form marred by marginality, to claim legitimacy for both a “marginal” author and his scholars.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Toker, Leona. “Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose” in *Poetics Today* 18.2 (Summer 1997): 187-188; Davoliute, “Shalamov’s Memory,” 4-6; Gavrilova, Anna. “Perepiska i ‘Kolymskie rassказы’ Varlana Shalamov: k probleme sootnosheniia fakta i vymysla” in *Filologicheskie nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki*. Vyp. № 10 (28) / 2013, 50-4.

<sup>61</sup> Galia Yanoshevsky notes that studies of the manifesto fulfilled a similar function for French Canadian scholars: “The advance of manifesto scholarship from periphery to center represents the possibility of repositioning in this field: marginal academic domains and groups change their status by advocating a new research program. <...> [P]eripheral research ‘centers’ choose marginal themes, ‘marginal’ in two senses. First, manifestos are written and acted out by marginal groups. Second, manifestos were originally of minor interest to scholars in the literary field and gained interest by degrees, primarily thanks to their ‘promotion’ by French Canadian scholars. Paradoxically, the choice of marginal subject matters by peripheral research centers helps the latter improve their position in the global literary critical field.” Yanoshevsky, Galia. “Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto: The Making of a Genre” in *Poetics Today* 30:2 (Summer 2009), 282.

The circulation of “On Prose” during Shalamov’s lifetime was limited and the suggestion that he wrote it as the foreword to the publication of *Kolyma Tales* abroad seems unlikely.<sup>62</sup> However, his manifesto has since reached a broad audience and achieved the central position in relation to his works that might have been his intention from the beginning. Thus, a critical text on Shalamov that does not refer, ever so subtly, to “On Prose” seems suspicious – although the manifesto itself remains a dense, equivocal, and peculiar essay.

## 2. Literary and Historical Context

“On Prose” appears less peculiar as a text when read within the genre of the manifesto as well as within the longstanding tradition of writing aesthetic manifestoes in the history of both Russian and European art. The central claim of “On Prose” is a generic one: the novel must die so as to make way for the birth of new genre. Beyond this antagonistic relationship between the old and the new, Shalamov defined his ‘new prose’ in rather ambiguous terms. The purpose of providing both his manifesto and its statements with a literary and historical context is here first and foremost to neutralize his more radical claims and to relativize their consequences within the broader artistic and cultural continuum of the twentieth century.

When Shalamov articulated the defense of his literary method that is “On Prose” in 1965, the text itself and its rhetorical strategies were slightly anachronistic yet paradoxically timely for Soviet literature.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, this type of intellectual endeavor experienced a revival at the same time in Europe and elsewhere in the West through a second wave of both political and artistic manifestoes.<sup>64</sup> Although “On Prose” has mainly been read in the context of Russian literature and history, it references more non-Russian texts and authors (16) than it does Russian (10). Shalamov not only inscribes himself into the Russian literary tradition through a self-made rupture, but also positions himself in an international context with his manifesto. Many scholars have traced the roots of his ‘new prose’ back to Russian formalism and ‘литература факта’ [‘literature of fact’] of the 1920s.<sup>65</sup> However, few have reflected on the genre of “On Prose,” a

<sup>62</sup> See Nich, Dmitrii. *Konspekt poslelagernoi biografii Varlana Shalamov*. Lichnoe izdanie: 2015, 12.

<sup>63</sup> “Впервые с 1920-х годов возрождается жанр литературного манифеста, который был вызван к жизни самой литературой, новым направлением к ней. Такова ставшая событием книги Владимира Турбина ‘Товарищ время и товарищ искусство,’ которая переводила ‘спор физиков и лириков’ с языка поэзии (Вознесенский, Евтушенко, Борис Слуцкий) на язык эстетики и истории литературы.” [For the first time since the 1920s, the genre of the literary manifesto is being revived, which was caused by literature itself, by a new direction in it. The book that became such an event was *Comrade Time and Comrade Art* by Vladimir Turbin, which translated “the argument between physicists and poets” from the language of poetry (Voznesensky, Yevtushenko, Boris Slutsky) to the language of aesthetics and literary history.] Dobrenko, Evgenii and Il’ia Kalinin. “Literaturnaia kritika i ideologicheskoe razmezhenavanie epokhi ottepelii: 1953-1970” in *Istoriia russkoi literaturnoi kritiki*. Moskva: NLO, 2011, 420.

<sup>64</sup> In the introduction to the first of three volumes of manifestoes, both political and artistic, Martin Puchner notes: “A second wave of both political and artistic manifestoes swelled in the 1950s and gained momentum as the 1960s wore on.” Puchner, Martin. “Introduction” in *The Manifesto in Literature: Vol. 1*. Ed. Riggs, Thomas. Detroit: St. James Press, 2013, xvi. This “second wave” is represented in the third volume of this series, *Activism, Unrest, and the Neo-Avant-Garde*. See also Puchner, Martin. “The Manifesto in the Sixties” in *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 211-9.

<sup>65</sup> “Кстати, сам термин ‘новая проза’ (то есть противостоящая традиционной реалистическо-психологической прозе XIX века) впервые вошел в оборот в 1920-е годы – он часто употреблялся и Брикком, и одним из создателей ОПОЯЗа, левовцем В. Шкловским, и Ю. Тыняновым, и другими представителями так называемой ‘формальной школы,’ разгромленной в конце 1920-х годов. Для многих из них была характерна и апология А. Белого в качестве родоначальника ‘новой прозы’ (впервые заявленной его романом ‘Петербург,’ вышедшим в 1922 году). <...> Все это лишний раз доказывает, что слова Шаламова о

manifesto, and how it is embedded in the intellectual practice of declaring a future artistic program while denouncing a past aesthetic common in European modernism.

Shalamov had a rich tradition of manifesto writing to draw upon when he produced his own: not only from the European political and artistic manifestoes of the past, but also from the Russian avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> Symbolism, Acmeism, and Futurism, to mention but the most prominent aesthetic schools of that time in Russia, produced programmatic texts in which their poetics were explained, conceptualized, and defended against what were perceived as alien aesthetic practices. The two generations of Russian symbolists had such texts akin to literary manifestoes.<sup>67</sup> The manifestoes of Acmeism as well as of Futurism claimed a place of significance for their movements through an antagonist relationship with Russian symbolism.<sup>68</sup> Although the literary manifestoes of Symbolism and Acmeism were known and read in their time, the manifesto from Russian literature's avant-garde era to achieve the most fame and the widest circulation was perhaps that of the Ego-Futurists: “Пощечина общественному вкусу” [“A Slap in the Face of Public Taste”] (1912). Half a century later, Shalamov's ‘new prose’ echoes this slap with “пощечина по сталинизму” [“a slap in the face of Stalinism”] as a fundamental aspect of his poetics in his 1971 letter to Sirotinskaya.<sup>69</sup>

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том, что он в молодости ‘знал сборники ОПОЯЗа почти наизусть,’ что А. Белый – один из его учителей в ‘новой прозе,’ имели конкретные основания. На этот счет сразу напрашивается и обобщение: автор ‘Колымских рассказов’ – художественное дитя 1920-х годов; он был законсервирован почти на четверть века (с небольшим перерывом) в лагерной неволе и с новой силой восстал в другое время, где оказался не ко двору...” [By the way, the term “new prose” (i.e., the opposite of the traditional realistic psychological prose of the nineteenth century) first came into circulation in the 1920s – it was often used by Brik, one of the founders ОПОЯЗ, the LEFist V. Shklovsky, and Yu. Tynyanov, and other representatives of the so-called “formal school” which was crushed in the late 1920s. For many of them, [the term] was characterized by A. Bely's apology as the founder of “new prose” (first declared his novel *Petersburg*, released in 1922). <...> All this proves once again the words of Shalamov, that he in his youth “knew the collections of ОПОЯЗ almost by heart,” that A. Bely is one of his teachers in “new prose,” had specific foundations. On this account a generalization immediately arises: the author of *Kolyma Tales* is an artistic child of the 1920s; he was preserved for almost a quarter century (with a short break) in the camp captivity and arose with new force at a different time, when he turned out to be untimely.] Esipov, Valerii. *Shalamov*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2012, 95.

<sup>66</sup> “By the middle of the twentieth century, writing political manifestos was no longer an original act. On the contrary, it now meant joining a long tradition: it meant pledging allegiance to the institution of leftist thought even as the origin of the tradition, the *Communist Manifesto*, receded into history. The artistic manifesto was going through a similar experience. Originally conceived as a means of declaring a new point of departure, a complete rupture with all preceding art, avant-garde manifestos now had to admit that they were part of a tradition – a tradition of manifesto writing.” Puchner, “Introduction” in *The Manifesto in Literature*, xvi.

<sup>67</sup> Dmitri Merezhkovsky's “О причинах упадка и о новых течениях современной русской литературы” [“On the Causes of the Decline and the New Currents of Contemporary Russian Literature”] (1894) functioned as a literary manifesto for the first generation of Russian symbolists. The second generation produced their own manifestoes: Andrei Bely's “Символизм как миропонимание” [“Symbolism as a World View”] (1904) and Vyacheslav Ivanov's “Мысли о символизме” [“Thoughts about Symbolism”] (1912). See Caws, Mary. *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, 56-86. For more about Merezhkovsky's symbolist manifesto, see Levitzky, Sergei. “An Unnoticed Anniversary – On Merezhkovsky's Role in Russian Culture” in *Russian Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Jul., 1968), 321-326. In this paper, Levitzky notes that the centenary of Merezhkovsky's took place in 1965 yet “passed almost unnoticed”; Shalamov wrote his manifesto the same year.

<sup>68</sup> See Nikolai Gumilev's article “Наследие символизма и акмеизм” [“The legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism”] (1913) and Osip Mandel'shtam's programmatic poem “Notre Dame” (1912). Steiner, Peter. “Poem as Manifesto: Mandel'shtam's ‘Notre Dame.’” *Russian Literature* 5.3 (1977): 239-56.

<sup>69</sup> “Каждый мой рассказ – пощечина по сталинизму, и, как всякая пощечина, имеет законы чисто мускульного характера. Вы высказали желание, чтобы были написаны пять хороших отделанных рассказов вместо ста неотделанных, шероховатых” (6:484). [Each of my short stories is a slap in the face of Stalinism and, as every slap, it has laws of a purely muscular character. You have expressed a desire for me to have written five

The public slap by Russian futurism was informed as well as inspired by the radical reinvention of the relationship between art and society announced by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in his “Il Manifesto de futurismo” [“The Manifesto of Futurism”] (1909).<sup>70</sup> As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* [*Communist Manifesto*] (1848) half a century earlier had appropriated a form reserved for authoritative discourse and utilized it to voice the demands of a marginalized group, so Marinetti transformed a form associated with political programs to express literary concepts. In the early twentieth century, political and artistic concerns in their respective manifestoes overlapped in the sense that both attempted to usher in radical change. Although the alteration of society demanded in artistic manifestoes was mainly concerned with this society’s response to the art program being proclaimed, many studies emphasize the shared rhetorical strategies of political and literary manifestoes. In response to this tradition of manifesto writing from the past two centuries, attempts have been made to construct a genre of the manifesto from the discursive conventions displayed in the majority of them.

Despite great variations between individual manifestoes, most scholars of the genre agree that a literary manifesto usually contains: 1) a conception of a history which culminates, or ruptures, in the moment of the writing of the manifesto; 2) a denunciation of a past aesthetic practice from which the movement of the manifesto distances itself (partially or completely); 3) a creation of a new movement, program, or entity to usurp the place of the old art and its outdated artifacts in culture and society; 4) a legitimization of the author(s) of the manifesto as the most suiting artist(s) to instigate as well as to supervise the new movement and its future mission; and 5) a list of current demands, future actions, and/or examples of particular features deemed suitable to the proposed new aesthetic.<sup>71</sup>

“On Prose” contains these five characteristics. Shalamov constructs an “after Kolyma”<sup>72</sup> for a historical time in which a new type of reader has emerged: “People who have gone through revolutions, wars, and concentration camps do not care about the novel.”<sup>73</sup> On behalf of this new reader, he rejects not only the novel as outdated and antagonistic, but also all forms of belletristic or fictional literature. Instead, he presents ‘new prose’ as a mediator between art and life in its

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well-done short stories instead of one hundred unfinished, rough ones.] I owe this analogy between futurism and ‘new prose’ to Maya Larson: “Shalamov’s genre-resisting *Kolyma Tales* answer Russian futurism’s ‘slap in the face of public taste’ (Пощечина общественному вкусу) with a ‘slap in the face of Stalinism’ (пощечина по сталинизму). Shalamov gazes at other writers and literary genres, not, like the Russian Futurist Manifesto’s signatories, ‘from the heights of skyscrapers’ (С высоты небоскребов мызираем на их ничтожество!..) but from the depths of Kolyma.” Larson, Maya. “*To rasshcheplennoe iadro*”: *From Lucretian Swerve to Sundered Core in Shalamov’s Atomnaia Poema*. Thesis (M.A.), University of Oregon: 2015, 7.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Puchner, “Russian Futurism and the Soviet State” in *Poetry of the Revolution*, 94-106.

<sup>71</sup> I am indebted in the creation of this list to the following studies on the manifesto as a genre (in chronological order): Perloff, Marjorie. “Violence and Precision: The Manifesto as Art Form” in *Chicago Review* 34 (21984.): 65-101; Peer, Larry. *The Romantic Manifesto: An Anthology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988; Lyon, Janet. *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999; Somigli, Luca. *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885–1915*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003; and Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*.

<sup>72</sup> “Лагерная тема в широком ее толковании, в ее принципиальном понимании – это основной, главный вопрос наших дней. Разве уничтожение человека с помощью государства – не главный вопрос нашего времени, нашей морали, вошедший в психологию каждой семьи?” (5:156-7). [The camp theme in its broadest interpretation, in its fundamental understanding is the primary, the main issue of our days. Is the destruction of human beings by the state really not the main issue of our time, of our morality, which has entered the psychology of each family?]

<sup>73</sup> “Людам, прошедшим революции, войны и концентрационные лагеря, нет дела до романа” (5:144).

dual capacity of being both literature and “document.”<sup>74</sup> Shalamov, who refers to himself “author” throughout the manifesto, suggests that he is proficient to write ‘new prose’ with the camp as its subject because of his personal experience. Yet the potential scope of ‘new prose’ is not limited to himself and his works: anyone with specific experience can write about it in the manner of ‘new prose’ if they see it as a “moral imperative.”<sup>75</sup> Finally, he mentions which literary features of the past will be excluded from ‘new prose’: conventional characters, character development, description of characters’ exterior or landscape, superfluous details, any excess of language, etc.<sup>76</sup> Instead, he provides a rudimentary description of what that will take their place: personal experience (“personal fate, personal blood”); a serious subject (“death... murder, Calvary”); simplicity and brevity of style; and a resurrection of “feeling” and ultimately of “life.”<sup>77</sup> These are his immediate demands from the literature of the future.

In addition to the five characteristics of the genre outlined above, the artistic manifesto often exhibits several conventions of style. One of these conventions has been traced back to the manifesto of Italian futurism. Scholars have commented upon how the rhetorical strategies in the futurist manifesto reproduce the aesthetic program it proclaims and how it can also be read as an example of a futurist artwork.<sup>78</sup> Rather than separate theory from practice, artistic manifestoes conflate the two within one text; the art that is proclaimed is thus the art of the proclamation itself. As a result, the literary manifesto has been called “the deictic genre par excellence.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “Вопрос: должна ли быть новая проза документом? Или она может быть больше чем документ. Собственная кровь, собственная судьба – вот требование сегодняшней литературы” (5:146). [Question: Must new prose be a document? Or it can be more than a document. One’s own blood, one’s own destiny – that is the requirement of today’s literature.]

<sup>75</sup> “Современная новая проза может быть создана только людьми, знающими свой материал в совершенстве, для которых овладение материалом, его художественное преобразование не являются чисто литературной задачей, а долгом, нравственным императивом” (5:150-1). [Contemporary new prose can only be created by people who know their material to perfection, for which the mastery of this material, its artistic transformation, are not strictly a literary task but a duty, a moral imperative.]

<sup>76</sup> “Пухлая многословная описательность становится пороком, зачеркивающим произведение. Описание внешности человека становится тормозом понимания авторской мысли. Пейзаж не принимается вовсе. Читателю некогда думать о психологическом значении пейзажных отступлений. Если пейзаж и применяется, то крайне экономно. Любая пейзажная деталь становится символом, знаком и только при этом условии сохраняет свое значение, жизненность, необходимость” (5:145). [Plump verbose descriptiveness becomes a vice that erases the work. A description of a person’s appearance becomes a hindrance to understanding the author’s thoughts. Landscape is not accepted at all. The reader has no time to think about the psychological significance of digressions about the landscape. If landscape is described, then very sparingly. Every detail of the landscape becomes a symbol, a sign, and only under this condition does it retain its value, viability, necessity.]

<sup>77</sup> “Прежде всего серьезностью жизненно важной темы. Такой темой может быть смерть, гибель, убийство, Голгофа... Об этом должно быть рассказано ровно, без декламации. Краткостью, простотой, отсечением всего, что может быть названо ‘литературой.’ <...> Важно воскресить чувство. <...> Только при этом условии возможно воскресить жизнь” (5:152). [First of all, by the seriousness of topics of vital importance to life. Such a theme can be death, death, murder, Calvary... This should be told about calmly, without declamation. With brevity, simplicity, and by cutting out anything that might be called “literature.” <...> It is important to resurrect emotion. <...> Only under this condition is it possible to resurrect life.]

<sup>78</sup> “To talk about art becomes equivalent to making it, and indeed most historians of Italian Futurism agree that the series of fifty-odd manifestos published between 1909 and Italy’s entrance into the war in 1915 were the movement’s literary former excellence.” Perloff, “Violence and Precision,” 74.

<sup>79</sup> “The manifest proclamation itself marks a moment, whose trace it leaves as a post-event commemoration. Often the event is exactly its own announcement and nothing more, in this Modernist/Postmodernist genre. What it announces is itself. At its height, it is the deictic genre par excellence. LOOK! its says. NOW! HERE!” Caws, “The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness” in *Manifesto*, xx.

It is possible to read “On Prose” as a declaration of a literary program that is also a literary representation of this program. This reading may explain some of the more paradoxical claims made by Shalamov in his construction of ‘new prose.’ Through its form and function, a manifesto can be considered a historical document that clarifies the intention of its authors while also generating ideas about them and their art.<sup>80</sup> Shalamov’s manifesto ends with the perplexing metaphor: “Not the prose of a document, but a prose that has been suffered out as a document.”<sup>81</sup> Previous scholars have commented upon this metaphor and the association between “the prose of the document,” documentary prose, and the “suffering out” of prose as a document.<sup>82</sup> It seems that Shalamov’s manifesto is itself a document that originates in suffering – the suffering of an unpublished writer denied participation in contemporary literature through the publication of his works. Perhaps this text is in fact the most coherent and persuasive embodiment of the personal document that he situates at the center of his aesthetic program: “That which has been suffered out with one’s own blood comes out on paper as a document of the soul, transfigured and illuminated by the fire of talent.”<sup>83</sup> It is through metaphors of suffering and “blood” that he maintains the superiority of his ‘new prose.’

In a similar way, several of the elusive metaphors and enigmatic statements from “On Prose” gain greater clarity when examples of them are sought not beyond his literary manifesto but rather within it. One of Shalamov’s grander allegations against fictional writing is that the contemporary reader has lost trust in writers who produce fictionalized lives; instead, the reader wishes to read about “active participants in the great drama of life.”<sup>84</sup> Through his manifesto, Shalamov fulfills his own demand as a writer who actively participates in the drama of literary evolution although censorship precludes him from doing so publicly in Soviet literature.

Like many artistic manifestoes that proclaim a new and experimental aesthetics through rejections of the old and conventional, “On Prose” abounds in literary references that reinforce its case for renewal. In his manifesto, Shalamov settles his scores with literature – foreign as well as Russian, of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The intertextuality of “On Prose” shows its author to be an avid and omnivorous reader. However, not all of the old literary tradition is discarded and therefore useless “after Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and Kolyma”<sup>85</sup> for the modern reader whom he envisions as the principal recipient of his works. His literary allusions can be divided into two groups: the first group constitutes ‘old literature’ from which ‘new prose’ separates itself, whereas the second group includes authors whose works will be tolerated in the prose of the future according to Shalamov.

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<sup>80</sup> “...the literary manifesto reflects and generates assumptions not only about the movement or school behind it, but also about when and how public declarations of artistic intent are made in the terms the manifesto itself has established.” Peer, “The Manifesto as a Genre” in *The Romantic Manifesto*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> “Не проза документа, а проза, выстраданная как документ” (5:157).

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Toker, “Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose,” 188-189.

<sup>83</sup> “Выстраданное собственной кровью входит на бумагу как документ души, преображенное и освещенное огнем таланта” (5:151).

<sup>84</sup> “И здесь же: автор, которому верят, должен быть ‘не только свидетелем, но и участником великой драмы жизни,’ пользуясь выражением Нильса Бора. Нильс Бор сказал эту фразу в отношении ученых, но она принята справедливо в отношении художников” (5:144). [And here too: The author who is believed must be “not only a witness but also a participant in the great drama of life,” to use an expression by Niels Bohr. Niels Bohr said this phrase in relation to scientists, but it accepted as true for artists as well.]

<sup>85</sup> See “О ‘новой прозе’”: “В новой прозе – кроме Хиросимы, после самообслуживания в Освенциме и Серпантинной на Колыме, после войн и революций все дидактическое отвергается. Искусство лишено права на проповедь. Никто не может, не имеет права учить” (5:157). [In the new prose – besides Hiroshima, after the self-service in Auschwitz and Serpatinnaya (prison) in Kolyma, after wars and revolutions, everything didactic is rejected. Art is deprived of the right to preach. Nobody can, nobody has the right to teach.]



In the first group of ‘old literature,’ we find the science fiction writers Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov whose genre is considered a “poor surrogate of literature.”<sup>86</sup> Displaced from the future are the protagonists of three major nineteenth-century novels, Julien Sorel from Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* [*The Red and the Black*] (1830), Eugène de Rastignac from Honoré de Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine* [*The Human Comedy*] (1799-1850), and Andrei Bolkonsky from Tolstoy’s *Война и мир* [*War and Peace*] (1869). The modern reader, according to Shalamov, is no longer interested in “checking himself” against these fictitious characters but longs to read about active participants in “living life.”<sup>87</sup> He declares the novel dead and Pasternak’s *Доктор Живаго* [*Doctor Zhivago*] (1957) “the last Russian novel;”<sup>88</sup> subsequently Chekhov is discarded for having even entertained the idea of producing such a longer fictional narrative himself.<sup>89</sup> In the context of such a rigid exclusion of Russian literature’s hallmark genre, Shalamov rejects the literary legacy of Tolstoy not once, but four times throughout “On Prose.” Although Tolstoy is considered a “great writer,” Solzhenitsyn by association with him comes across in unfavorable light: “The so-called camp theme is a very large theme, which will fit one hundred writers such as Solzhenitsyn and five such writers as Leo Tolstoy.”<sup>90</sup> Ernest Hemingway is rejected as a “tourist writer” who despite his experiences in foreign and exotic places never became an “active participant” in them through his writing.<sup>91</sup> Shalamov also rejects H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) as “only amusement compared with the terrible face of living life.”<sup>92</sup> This group of literary rejects from the past share a tradition of producing longer narratives centered on human biography and society – usually referred to as ‘novels,’ the genre that Shalamov began his manifesto by declaring

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<sup>86</sup> “На самом же деле научная фантастика – всего лишь жалкий суррогат литературы, эрзац литературы, не приносящая пользы ни читателям, ни писателям” (5:144). [In fact, science fiction is just a pathetic substitute for literature, an ersatz literature, unprofitable for both readers and writers.]

<sup>87</sup> “Сегодняшний человек проверяет себя, свои поступки не по поступкам Жюльена Сореля, или Растиньяка, или Андрея Болконского, но по событиям и людям живой жизни – той, свидетелем и участником которой читатель был сам” (ibid.). [Today’s human being does not check himself, his actions against the actions of Julien Sorel or Rastignac or Andrei Bolkonsky, but against the events and the people of living life – the same one in which the reader himself has been a witness and a participant.]

<sup>88</sup> “‘Доктор Живаго’ – последний русский роман. ‘Доктор Живаго’ – это крушение классического романа, крушение писательских заповедей Толстого. ‘Д. Ж.’ писался по писательским рецептам Толстого, а вышел роман-монолог, без ‘характеров’ и прочих атрибутов романа XIX века. В ‘Д. Ж.’ нравственная философия Толстого одерживает победу и терпит поражение художественный метод Толстого” (5:145). [*Doctor Zhivago* is the last Russian novel. *Doctor Zhivago* is the collapse of the classic novel, the collapse of Tolstoy’s literary commandments. *D. Zh.* was written per the writerly recipes of Tolstoy, but turned out to be a novel-monologue, without “characters” and the other attributes of the nineteenth-century novel. In *D. Zh.*, Tolstoy’s moral philosophy wins and Tolstoy’s artistic method is defeated.]

<sup>89</sup> “Бесплодны были попытки Чехова написать роман. ‘Скучная история,’ ‘Рассказ неизвестного человека,’ ‘Моя жизнь,’ ‘Черный монах’ – все это настойчивые, неудачные попытки написать роман” (5:147). [Fruitless were Chekhov’s attempts to write a novel. “A Boring Story,” “An Anonymous Story,” “My Life,” “The Black Monk” are all persistent, unsuccessful attempts to write a novel.]

<sup>90</sup> “Так называемая лагерная тема – это очень большая тема, где разместится сто таких писателей, как Солженицын, пять таких писателей, как Лев Толстой” (5:153).

<sup>91</sup> “Образец такого писателя-туриста – Хемингуэй, сколько бы он ни воевал в Мадриде. Можно воевать и жить активной жизнью и в то же время быть ‘вовне,’ все равно – ‘над’ или ‘в стороне.’ Новая проза отрицает этот принцип туризма” (5:151). [An example of the writer-tourist is Hemingway, no matter how much he fought in Madrid. It is possible to fight and to live an active life and at the same time be “outside,” it doesn’t matter, “above” or “on the sidelines.” New prose denies this principle of tourism.]

<sup>92</sup> “Сказка Веркора или Уэллса ‘Остров доктора Моро,’ с его гениальным ‘чтецом закона,’ – только прозрение, только забава по сравнению со страшным лицом живой жизни” (5:153). [The tale of Vercor or Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, with its brilliant “reader of the law,” is just an epiphany, just fun compared with the terrible face of living life.]

dead. More importantly, these authors were all professional writers, or at least considered writing one of their main vocations.

The second group of authors which ‘new prose’ shows tolerance for, albeit not always an outright appreciation, contains few professional writers and not one noted novelist (except for Pushkin, depending on one’s interpretation of the genealogy of the Russian novel). What unites these authors is that they also had other vocations that informed their writing. This group could be further divided into two: professionals and poets. Shalamov shows respect for the cultural significance of Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandel’shtam, Pushkin, and Mikhail Lermontov; yet their creative legacy appears marginal to his ‘new prose.’ His project of innovation draws upon not the work of poets but of professionals: the literary biographies by André Maurois and Irving Stone,<sup>93</sup> Charlie Chaplin’s mediocre yet bestselling autobiography,<sup>94</sup> the pedagogue Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s monumental memoirs,<sup>95</sup> and the painter Paul Gauguin’s travelogue *Noa Noa*.<sup>96</sup> Shalamov refers to a statement about science by the physicist Niels Bohr<sup>97</sup> and an insight about air from the aviator and author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry<sup>98</sup> to support one of the founding principles of ‘new prose:’ instead of imagined lives, its content must first be experienced by an individual before it can be fixated in written form by this individual who only then becomes a professional writer.

The primacy of experience over imagination, of art as a secondary reflection upon the life already lived rather than a life imagined, seems to inform also his generic preferences. Both Shalamov the writer and Shalamov the reader rejected novels in favor of short stories in general and short story cycles in particular. Eight of the authors mentioned in his manifesto gathered smaller prose texts in collections referred to by some as “composite novels”<sup>99</sup> and by others as

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<sup>93</sup> “Успех литературных биографий, начиная от Моруа и кончая автором ‘Жажды жизни,’ – тоже свидетельство потребности читателя в чем-то более серьезном, чем роман” (5:144). [The success of literary biographies, ranging from Maurois and ending with the author of *A Thirst for Life* is also evidence that the reader needs something more serious than a novel.]

<sup>94</sup> “Лучший пример: ‘Моя жизнь’ Ч. Чаплина – вещь в литературном отношении посредственная – бестселлер № 1, обогнавшая все и всяческие романы” (5:146). [The best example is Charlie Chaplin’s *My Life*, which in literary terms is a mediocre text, a number 1 bestseller, ahead of any and all novels].

<sup>95</sup> “Я глубоко уверен, что мемуарная проза Н. Я. Мандельштам станет заметным явлением русской литературы не только потому, что это памятник века, что это страстное осуждение века-волкодава” (5:146-7). [I am deeply convinced that the memoiristic prose of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam will become a noticeable phenomenon in Russian literature not only because it is a monument to the century, because it is a passionate condemnation of the century-wolfhound.]

<sup>96</sup> “Важная сторона дела в ‘Колымских рассказах’ подсказана художниками. Гоген в ‘Ноа-Ноа’ пишет: если дерево кажется вам зеленым – берите самую лучшую зеленую краску и рисуйте. Вы не ошибетесь. Вы нашли. Вы решили. Речь здесь идет о чистоте тонов” (5:152). [An important side of the issue in *Kolyma Tales* was suggested by painters. Gauguin in *Noa Noa* wrote: if it seems to you that the tree is green – take the best green color and paint. You cannot go wrong. You have found it. You decided. It is about the purity of tones.]

<sup>97</sup> “И здесь же: автор, которому верят, должен быть ‘не только свидетелем, но и участником великой драмы жизни,’ пользуясь выражением Нильса Бора. Нильс Бор сказал эту фразу в отношении ученых, но она принята справедливо в отношении художников” (5:144). [And here too: The author who is believed must be “not only a witness but also a participant in the great drama of life,” to use an expression by Niels Bohr. Niels Bohr said this phrase in relation to scientists, but would be fair to apply it to artists, too.]

<sup>98</sup> “Подобно тому, как Экзюпери открыл для людей воздух, – из любого края жизни придут люди, которые сумеют рассказать о знакомом, о пережитом, а не только о виденном и слышанном” (5:151). [Just as Exupéry opened up the air for people – from every corner of life people will come who are able to tell about what they know, what they have experienced, not just about what they’ve seen and heard.]

<sup>99</sup> “The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that – though individually complete and autonomous – are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles.” Dunn, Maggie

short story cycles. *Kolyma Tales* shows an almost hyperbolic devotion to this kind of cyclization: first through the inclusion of a selection of short stories in a cycle and, second, through the inclusion of such a cycle in a constellation of other cycles.<sup>100</sup> Shalamov seems to have familiarized himself with the form and content of other similar ‘composite novels,’ or short story cycles, by Faulkner, Bradbury, Asimov, Hemingway,<sup>101</sup> Solzhenitsyn, and Saint-Exupéry before arriving at a either a rejection or acceptance of them for ‘new prose.’<sup>102</sup>

Shalamov, who “practically never thought about how to write a novel,”<sup>103</sup> devoted a large part of his creative process to perfecting the genre of the short story as well as to thinking about how this smaller textual unit can become a part of a larger whole. Short stories can be published in ‘thick’ journals and the like, but the most profitable way for literature to be sold and bought is in the form of a book. Cyclization is in a sense a compromise: the short story can exist, as its author intended, but the cycle is alluring to a reader used to more pages under one title as well as within one cover. The genre “composite novel” reflects this type of economic negotiation between the making and consumption of texts. Shalamov’s commitment to cycles – of both prose and poetry – might not only have been an expression of his aesthetics but also an attempt at making his works more marketable. For example, he compiled an improvised cycle of various short stories, *Рассказы ранние и поздние* [*Stories Early and Late*], for publication in the mid-1960s. Consisting of some of his short stories already published in the 1930s together with the less camp-focused short stories from *Kolyma Tales*, this cycle remained unpublished and was thus never able to compete for the reader’s attention in the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup>

Against this context of continuous rejection and censorship, “On Prose” becomes more than an essay that outlines an aesthetic program – Shalamov’s manifesto is an attempt to inscribe

and Ann Morris. *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995, xiii. For a more detailed discussion, see Introduction, *ibid.*, 1-19.

<sup>100</sup> Shalamov produced two ‘hyper-cycles,’ one with prose (*Kolyma Tales*) and one with poetry (*Kolyma Notebooks*).

<sup>101</sup> Shalamov’s reading and understanding of Hemingway’s short stories are related in the critical essay “Мастерство Хемингуэя как новеллиста” [“Hemingway’s Mastery as a Novelist”] which he wrote in 1956 for Irina Emelianova. See Shalamov’s essay together with Emelianova’s description of the event: “Neizvestnye stranitsy Varlama Shalamova ili Istoriia odnogo ‘postupleniia’” in *Tarusskie stranitsy*. Revue “GRANI,” Avec le soutien de l’Association ‘One for all Artists.’ Paris: 2011, 130-5.

<sup>102</sup> Here I follow “An Annotated List of Selected Composite Novels” by Dunn and Morris in *The Composite Novel* (they include also Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales*) which contains Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Knight’s Gambit* (1949), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Pawns* (1939); Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* (1950); Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950); Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1925); Solzhenitsyn’s *The Cancer Ward* (1968); and Saint-Exupéry’s *Wind, Sand and Stars* (1939). See Dunn and Morris, *The Composite Novel*, 159-182. It seems to me that Shalamov would not have considered Solzhenitsyn’s *The Cancer Ward* anything else but a novel.

<sup>103</sup> See “(О моей прозе)”: “Если о том, как написать роман, я никогда практически не думал, то как написать рассказ, я думал десятки лет еще в юные годы” (6:484). [While I have practically never thought about how write a novel, I have been thinking for decades about how to write a short story ever since my youth.]

<sup>104</sup> Nekrasova cites the evaluation of some short stories from Shalamov’s impromptu cycle by the internal reviewer: “В. Солнцева признает их некоторую художественную значимость, т. к. ‘написаны они рукой опытного писателя – профессионала.’ Но те рассказы, которые ‘говорят о зверствах в лагерях, об извращении человеческого существа в условиях концлагерей,’ не могут быть включены в сборник. Возражений не вызвали несколько рассказов: ‘Огонь и вода,’ ‘Тропа,’ ‘Стланик,’ ‘Алмазная карта,’ ‘Три смерти,’ ‘Возвращение,’ ‘Водопад,’ ‘Пава и древо,’ ‘По снегу.’” [V. Solntseva recognizes their certain artistic significance, that is, that they “are written by the hand of an experienced writer, a professional.” But those short stories that “speak about the atrocities in the camps, about the perversion of the human being in a concentration camp,” cannot be included in the book. A few short stories caused no objections: “Fire and Water,” “The Path,” “The Dwarf Pine,” “The Diamond Map,” “Three Deaths,” “The Return,” “The Peahen and the Tree,” “On the Snow.”] Nekrasova, *Sud’ba i tvorchestvo*, 15.

and conceptualize his position outside Soviet/Russian literature, and as such it is also his way of legitimizing himself as a writer on his own terms. Unable to find a place for himself or his works in any of the literary outlets of the late 1960s and early 1970s, he wrote a manifesto that articulates a space beyond the ideological limits and aesthetic conventions of both official and unofficial literature.<sup>105</sup> Thus, “On Prose” constructs ‘new prose’ not as a literary theory, but rather as an alternative literary institution. The construction of his literary institution is developed through a dynamic of exclusions, by defining what ‘new prose’ is not. This rejection begins in his manifesto, and can be traced through his thinking about his own works in his programmatic letters of 1971, to Sirotinskaya, and of 1972, to Aleksandr Kremenskoi. Writing about his own writing, he moves from a denunciation of the Soviet interpretation, or mythologization, of nineteenth-century Russian literature, through references to the avant-garde legacy of Russian modernism and the politicization of both official Soviet literature and unofficial Russian literature, until he arrives at a forceful polemic with the most hegemonic of literary institutions: the Nobel Prize in literature.

Shalamov wrote his manifesto when more Russian writers than ever became laureates of the Nobel Prize in literature. Pasternak received, and was forced to reject, the award in 1958; at that time, Pasternak and Shalamov were estranged.<sup>106</sup> Since 1946, the Soviet Union recommended Sholokhov as the more appropriate candidate for the prize; until then the official representatives of Soviet literature had largely ignored the Nobel Prize.<sup>107</sup> This reluctance on behalf of the Soviet Union to nominate candidates could have been partly because the first Russian writer to become a Nobel laureate was Bunin who, as an émigré writer, was considered hostile to Soviet literature. Shalamov held a different opinion of Bunin and considered him a “Russian classic”; for having expressed this opinion in Kolyma, he was sentenced a third time in 1943 to another ten years in the camps.<sup>108</sup> Although the Soviet Union was not interested in the Nobel Prize during the 1930s and early 1940s, Shalamov was attentive to which writer received the award and for what kind of literary work. In the 1960s, after Pasternak’s prize and the ensuing scandal, he seems to have followed the motivations of the writers awarded the prize even more closely, perhaps in eager anticipation of yet another Russian writer to become a laureate. In 1965, the same year Shalamov wrote “On Prose,” Sholokhov received the Nobel Prize in literature for his epic novels.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Toker explores Shalamov’s negative attitude to samizdat in the 1970s: Toker, Leona. “Samizdat and the Problem of Authorial Control: The Case of Varlam Shalamov” in *Poetics Today* 29 2008, no. 4: 735-758.

<sup>106</sup> See Shalamov’s essay “Пастернак” [“Pasternak”] (1960s): “После 1956 года я видел Бориса Леонидовича лишь однажды – зимой пятьдесят седьмого года, на улице в Переделкине. Говорить с ним не пришлось... Случилось так, что о всех событиях до и после Нобелевской премии пришлось мне узнавать из газет” (4:613). [After 1956, I saw Boris Leonidovich only once – in the winter of 1957, on the street in Peredelkino. To speak with him was not necessary... It so happened that I had to find out about all the events before and after the Nobel Prize from the newspapers.]

<sup>107</sup> See Ljunggren, Magnus and Lazar Fleishman. “Na puti k nobelevskoi nagrade (S. M. Baura, N. O. Nilsson, Pasternak)” in Fleishman, Lazar. *Boris Pasternak i Nobelevskaia premiia*. Moskva: Izdatel’skii tsentr “Azbukovnik,” 2013, 503-560.

<sup>108</sup> See Shalamov’s short story “Экзамен” [“The Exam”] (1966): “У меня была как раз пятьдесят восемь, пункт десять – я был осужден в войну за заявление, что Бунин – русский классик” (2:190-1). [I had exactly 58, paragraph 10 - I was convicted during the war for the statement that Bunin is a Russian classic.]

<sup>109</sup> “The Nobel Prize in Literature 1965 was awarded to Mikhail Sholokhov *for the artistic power and integrity with which, in his epic of the Don, he has given expression to a historic phase in the life of the Russian people.*” See: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1965/index.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1965/index.html). Emphasis in the original.

Sholokhov is not mentioned in Shalamov's manifesto and there is no evidence that he objected to Sholokhov as a laureate or that he was concerned with accusations of plagiarism.<sup>110</sup> However, the Nobel Prize and the prestige it bestowed upon Russian/Soviet literature through both Pasternak and Sholokhov in the late 1950s and the 1960s appear as an implicit theme in "On Prose" and anticipates Shalamov's polemic with this institution, that became more pronounced as he continued writing about his own writing in the 1970s. His manifesto mentions five Nobel Prize laureates – four in literature and one in physics, four past and one future: Bohr (physics, 1922), Faulkner (literature, 1949), Hemingway (literature, 1954), Pasternak (literature 1958), and Solzhenitsyn (literature, 1970). Shalamov's critique of this institution intensified after Solzhenitsyn was awarded the prize. In his programmatic letters of the early 1970s, he considers the Nobel Committee's approach to literature antagonistic to his own and he dismisses the choices of the Committee as regressive. This "retrograde" bias, he argues in his letter to Kremenskoï, is particularly evident in relation to the four Russian laureates:

The Nobel Committee conducts rearguard battles by protecting the Russian prose of Bunin, Pasternak, Sholokhov, Solzhenitsyn. These four authors have a unity, and that unity does not do honor to the Nobel Committee. Of the four laureates, only Pasternak appears to be in place, but he's given the mantle for *Doctor Zhivago* and not for his poetry. *Doctor Zhivago* is an attempt by a modernist to create a realist novel – not to return to the precepts of Pushkin, not to the tradition of Andrei Bely and Blok, but to the stylistic and moral tradition of Tolstoy. It is striking that none of the four is even close to Dostoevsky – the only Russian writer that stepped into the twentieth century and foretold its problems. In the committee, they obviously do not believe in Dostoevsky. The awards during 50 years were anti-Dostoevsky in principle. Pasternak too was not associated with Dostoevsky, but more with Tolstoy, even in *My Sister Life*.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See Shalamov's autobiographical essay "Двадцатые годы" ["1920s"] (undated): "За границей была поднята большая шумиха по поводу первой книги 'Тихого Дона.' Жена какого-то белогвардейского офицера, убитого во время Гражданской войны, выступила с письмом, обвиняя Шолохова в плагиате. Рукопись романа будто бы принадлежит ее мужу. Была проверка этих обвинений. Зерно правды было ничтожным. Шолохов сообщил, что действительно, в архивах Донецкого совпрофа он нашел дневник убитого офицера, рукопись, которую он использовал в своем романе. Использование такого рода материалов – право всякого писателя. <...> Выход последующих книг 'Тихого Дона' показал всю беспочвенность этой клеветы" (4:359). [There was a big hype abroad about the first book, *Quiet Flows the Don*. The wife of some White Guard officer killed during the Civil War, issued a letter accusing Sholokhov of plagiarism. The manuscript of the novel supposedly belongs to her husband. These allegations were checked. The grain of truth was miniscule, Sholokhov said, that, indeed, in the archives of the Donetsk professional union he had found the killed officer's diary, which he had used in his novel. The use of such materials is the right of every writer. <...> The publication of the following books after *Quiet Flows the Don* revealed the hollowness of this defamation.]

<sup>111</sup> "Нобелевский комитет ведет арьергардные бои, защищая русскую прозу Бунина, Пастернака, Шолохова, Солженицына. У этих четырех авторов есть единство, и это единство не делает чести Нобелевскому комитету. Из этих четырех лауреатов только Пастернак кажется тут на месте, но и ему мантия дана за *Доктора Живаго*, а не за его стихи. *Доктор Живаго* – это попытка модерниста создать реалистический роман – вернуться не к пушкинским заветам, не к традиции Андрея Белого и Блока, а к традиции Толстого, и стилистической, и нравственной. Поразительно, что никто из четырех даже близко не стоит к Достоевскому – единственному русскому писателю, шагнувшему в 20-й век, предсказавшему его проблемы. В самом комитете, очевидно, не верят Достоевскому. Премии в течение 50 лет – антидостоевского начала. Пастернак тоже был не связан с Достоевским, скорее с Толстым, даже в *Сестре моей жизни*" (6:580).

The problem with the Nobel Prize in literature, Shalamov maintains, is that it circumscribed the influence of Dostoevsky in favor of Tolstoy in the twentieth century: “Tolstoy is an ordinary writer who sucked problems of personal conduct from his finger. Dostoevsky was a genius. No doping, no Nobel Prize can return realism.”<sup>112</sup> However, Tolstoy was not awarded the first prize in 1901; this event that caused quite a scandal at the time seems either unknown or irrelevant to Shalamov.<sup>113</sup> His appeal for the committee to come to terms with modernism, rather than to stimulate an obsolete ‘idealistic’ realism, seems to be about more than literature. For an unpublished author, the Nobel Prize was about more than official and international recognition – it was also about money and symbolic power. Yet being unpublished, and thus relatively unknown, granted Shalamov the freedom to criticize the Nobel Prize in literature as forcefully as he wished. He had nothing to lose – quite literally.

In the light of this exclusion from one of literature’s most powerful and influential institutions, we must read Shalamov’s manifesto as the creation of an alternative space that is a new movement and the expression of its aesthetics simultaneously. Instead of resigning himself to a marginal space of cultural neglect and literary insignificance, he supersedes with his own literary institution the institutions into which he was not allowed. In this subversive move, Shalamov becomes the leading writer, if not the only writer.

This idea of self-made recognition appears straightforward and simple enough within the texts that restate and reproduce its central claims, i.e. “On Prose” and the related programmatic letters of the early 1970s. Beyond these texts, this idea becomes problematic at best. As many artistic programs before it, ‘new prose’ attempted to establish a perfect mode of communication between art and society, between life and text; however, as soon as its premises were to be applied, ‘new prose’ encountered an obstacle it could not overcome: ‘living life.’ ‘New prose’ and ‘living life’ are perhaps but innocent phrases turned powerful terms in Shalamov’s manifesto; yet in his late works, they seem antagonistic forces and mutually exclusive.

### 3. ‘New Prose’ vs. ‘Living Life’

The phrase ‘living life’ is used ten times in “On Prose,” only one time less than ‘new prose.’ Previous Shalamov scholarship has focused on defining ‘new prose,’ while his recurrent usage of ‘living life’ has been largely overlooked. However, both its prevalence in the manifesto and the fact that Shalamov did not use the phrase in the earlier short stories included in *Kolyma Tales* indicates its importance for his thinking about literature at the beginning of his late style.<sup>114</sup> If

<sup>112</sup> “Толстой – рядовой писатель, высосавший из пальца проблемы личного поведения. Достоевский был гением. Никакой допинг, никакая Нобелевская премия не вернет реализма” (ibid.).

<sup>113</sup> “The prize [in 1901] did not go to the person many saw as the obvious recipient, Leo Tolstoy, but to French poet Sully Prudhomme, nominated by a large number of members of the French Academy. The choice unleashed a storm of protest, with 42 Swedish writers and artists sending a letter to Tolstoy, more or less apologizing for the omission. <...> Tolstoy did not, however, receive the prize any of the following years either, the reason being that the Academy did not perceive his work to be characterized sufficiently by ‘lofty and sound idealism.’” Svensén, Bo. *The Swedish Academy and the Nobel Prize in Literature*. Stockholm: Swedish Academy, 2000, 62.

<sup>114</sup> The phrase ‘живая жизнь,’ ‘living life,’ is first used in the cycle *The Left Bank*, which Shalamov made the second cycle of *Kolyma Tales* even though its short stories were written after *An Artist of the Spade*, the third cycle. The dedication of the cycle to Sirotinskaya, whom Shalamov did not meet until March 1966, suggests that he finalized *The Left Bank* no earlier than that year. ‘Living life’ appears in the cycle’s first short story, “Прокуратор Иудей” [“Procurator of Judea”] written in 1965 (“У них там все инструкции, схемы, приказы, а вот вам живая жизнь, Колыма!” (1:224) [They’ve got all the instructions, the diagrams, the orders, but here’s living life, Kolyma, for you!]), and in “Лучшая похвала” [“The Best Praise”] written in 1964 (“Нужно быть слишком теоретиком,

‘new prose’ signifies the innovative form of the aesthetics proclaimed by Shalamov, ‘living life’ appears to be its challenging content: “...instead of a memoir, *Kolyma Tales* offers a new prose, the prose of living life, which at the same time is a transfigured reality, a transfigured document.”<sup>115</sup> He suggests that ‘new prose’ and ‘living life’ – as well as the amalgamation “the prose of living life” – share a claim to reality and to the document as well as to the transformation of both. Together, ‘new prose’ and ‘living life’ transform the form and content of literary representation. Yet the two terms seldom figure in the same context or even near each other in “On Prose,” except for in this sentence and in one other paragraph. In this paragraph, Shalamov connects the two in a discussion of how the writer he envisions for the literature of the future can become a judge of his time:

The writer becomes a judge of the time, and not someone’s supplicant, and it is the profound knowledge, the victory in the depths of *living life* that gives the right and the power to write. Even the method dictates this. As the authors of memoirs, the writers of *new prose* must not place themselves higher, see themselves as smarter than everyone else, to claim the role of a judge.<sup>116</sup>

This section is rare in its close coupling of ‘living life’ and ‘new prose,’ but indicative of the paradoxical dimension of Shalamov’s manifesto: the first sentence states that ‘living life’ grants the writer the right to write as a judge whereas the third sentence revokes this right by insisting that writers of ‘new prose’ should not seek the role of judge. This paradox is emblematic of the relationship between ‘new prose’ as a form and ‘living life’ as its content. Both terms are abstract and enigmatic as far as their practical meaning for his works is concerned and perhaps ‘living life’ more so than ‘new prose.’ In the manifesto, ‘living life’ is sometimes a euphemism for the camp experience (i.e. “the terrifying face of living life”) and sometimes a term for complex extratextual events to be inscribed. The way he uses ‘living life’ suggests that its meaning goes beyond the act of writing and extends into a multifaceted individually lived life located outside the text, in which ‘living life’ is to be produced as well as reproduced. Whereas the stakes of ‘new prose’ are limited to the concerns of literature, the stakes of ‘living life’ seem much higher. As a synecdoche for immediate experience and the literary representation of the same, ‘living life’ has dual implications for Shalamov’s aesthetic program.

The seemingly simple sentence in the middle of Shalamov’s manifesto, “The author wanted to achieve only living life,”<sup>117</sup> suggests a model situation in which literary representation and extratextual experience both coincide and collide. Yet such model situations appear few and far between in his late works. Whereas ‘new prose’ answers the questions of ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ one should write, ‘living life’ alludes to not only ‘what?’ but also ‘for whom?’ to write. His answers to the second set of questions shifted during his late style. The imperative to represent life in its fullness through active participation in it, the ‘life of life’ as it were, runs as a red thread

слишком догматиком, чтобы отвлекаться от живой жизни” (1:279) [One needs to be too much of a theorist, too much of a dogmatic, to become distracted from living life].

<sup>115</sup> “...вместо мемуара ‘Колымские рассказы’ предлагают новую прозу, прозу живой жизни, которая в то же время – преобразенная действительность, преобразенный документ” (5:153).

<sup>116</sup> “Писатель становится судьей времени, а не подручным чьим-то, и именно глубочайшее знание, победа в самых глубинах *живой жизни* дает право и силу писать. Даже метод подсказывает. Как и мемуаристы, писатели *новой прозы* не должны ставить себя выше всех, умнее всех, претендовать на роль судьи” (5:151; emphasis added).

<sup>117</sup> “Автор хотел получить только живую жизнь” (5:149).

throughout his manifesto and ties his paradoxical arguments together. However, this imperative begins to unravel as Shalamov becomes confronted with anxieties concerning the significance of his own life. In 1965, he made the following observation in his notebook:

And I saw that the life of the second person is infinitely more significant than mine. The first person [Solzhenitsyn] left me only with contempt, while the second [Nadezhda Mandelstam] with infinite admiration and devotion. With fear and jealousy, I saw that this person's [Nadezhda Mandelstam] life is much more significant than mine.<sup>118</sup>

Shalamov confronts a dual set of emotions toward Nadezhda Mandel'shtam (and only contempt toward Solzhenitsyn): on the one hand, he feels devoted to her, on the other, the realization that her life is “more significant” than his fills him with fear and jealousy. His admiration for Nadezhda Mandel'shtam carries over into his manifesto where he heralds her memoir as “a new memoiristic form” in Russian literature.<sup>119</sup> The fear and jealousy he sensed when comparing his life to hers are absent from “On Prose” but inform his anxiety concerning his representing the ‘living lives’ of others against the ‘living life’ of himself in his later works. Shalamov did not enjoy the literary fame or cultural status of Osip Mandel'shtam, and nor was his life lived in such intimacy with a person of his stature and significance. The ‘living life’ which Shalamov was striving for, through his personal experiences and in his literary representation, was entirely his own and this appears to have made him anxious as to the importance of what he wrote.

Its many literary allusions notwithstanding, the program put forth in “On Prose” is a self-contained and self-sufficient aesthetic. The literary independence Shalamov proclaims in it suggests his anxiety as a marginal author and his loneliness as an exiled person who also suffered from disability. Yet his practice of his own theory was not concerned only with his life and memory, but also with the recuperation of the lives and memories of others, many of whom perished in the camps and who could therefore not tell their own stories. The concept of ‘living life’ adds another dimension to the often-noted tension between the fictional and the factual in his ‘new prose’: an equally problematic tension between his own story and the stories of others. This tension came to the forefront in his manifesto and subsequently informed his late style.

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<sup>118</sup> “И я увидел, что у второго человека жизнь бесконечно значительнее, чем моя. Первый человек [Солженицын] – оставил по себе мое презрение, тогда как второй [Надежда Мандельштам] – восхищение и бесконечную преданность. Я со страхом и ревностью увидел, что у этого человека [Надежда Мандельштам] жизнь гораздо значительнее, чем моя” (5:290).

<sup>119</sup> “Я глубоко уверен, что мемуарная проза Н. Я. Мандельштам станет заметным явлением русской литературы не только потому, что это памятник века, что это страстное осуждение века-волкодава. Не только потому, что в этой рукописи читатель найдет ответ на целый ряд волнующих русское общество вопросов, не только потому, что мемуары – это судьбы русской интеллигенции. Не только потому, что здесь в блестящей форме преподаны вопросы психологии творчества. Не только потому, что здесь изложены заветы О. Э. Мандельштама и рассказано о его судьбе. Ясно, что любая сторона мемуара вызовет огромный интерес всего мира, всей читающей России. Но рукопись Н. Я. Мандельштам имеет еще одно, очень важное качество. Это новая форма мемуара, очень емкая, очень удобная” (5:146-7). [I'm deeply convinced that N. Ya. Mandel'shtam's memoiristic prose will become a notable phenomenon in Russian literature not only because it is a monument to the century, because it is a passionate condemnation of a wolfhound of a century. Not only because in this manuscript the reader will find an answer to a number of questions that concern Russian society, not only because memoirs are the fate of the Russian intelligentsia. Not only because it deals with questions of the psychology of creativity in a brilliant form. Not only because it presents the covenants O. E. Mandel'shtam and tells about his fate. It is clear that any aspect of the memoir will generate a huge interest all over the world, for all of reading Russia. But N. Ya. Mandel'shtam's manuscript has one more very important quality. This is a new form of a memoir: very comprehensive, very convenient.]



As a concept, ‘living life’ has its own history of usage in Russian culture.<sup>120</sup> Although Shalamov may have remembered the phrase from Dostoevsky’s works *Записки из подполья* [*Notes from the Underground*] (1864) and *Подполье* [*A Raw Youth*] (1875),<sup>121</sup> it seems more likely that he recalled the study of ‘living life’ in the book with the same title by Veresaev, whom he had seen at the meeting between writers and scientists in the early 1930s. Shalamov’s usage of ‘living life’ challenges Veresaev’s interpretation of ‘living life’ in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Veresaev notes that ‘living life’ in Dostoevsky is connected with death and that both the fact of death and the absence of immortality in his works annul the meaning of ‘living life.’<sup>122</sup> Perhaps Shalamov found it difficult to accept this interpretation of ‘living life’ in Dostoevsky because he did not share the religious worldview of Dostoevsky, although as the son of an Orthodox priest he was raised in a Christian home. His disagreement with Veresaev’s understanding of ‘living life’ in Tolstoy is even easier to assume in the light of his manifesto’s emphasis on personal experience. In Tolstoy, Veresaev suggests, ‘living life’ is connected with the opposite end of human life, birth, and he finds its overwhelming power in the scenes of childbirth.<sup>123</sup> Shalamov, it appears, would argue that this type of ‘living life’ is false and fictional, as Tolstoy, a male author, never gave birth and thus Tolstoy’s attempt at representing this dimension of ‘living life’ is distant from and even hostile to Shalamov’s concept of ‘living life.’

In the context of Shalamov’s literary manifesto, it is difficult to give this term a conclusive connotation that would capture its multifaceted usage or even its implications for his works. Instead, I argue that ‘living life’ relates to *Kolyma Tales* and his late style as a wound to a scar. The real, personal, and essentially unrepresentable experience that is, or rather was, the wound dissolves with the inescapable passage of time and is eventually replaced by healed yet disfiguring skin. The scar cannot represent the pain, the depth, or more importantly, the circumstance of the wound; yet it implies the presence of the wound and simultaneously highlights its absence. In a similar way, *Kolyma Tales* cannot represent the ‘living life’ of the Gulag with its conglomerate of diverse faces and their tragic fates. The Gulag experience is a wound that cannot be known; or, as Shalamov put it, the camps are a segment of society that *should* not be known.<sup>124</sup> The explicit

<sup>120</sup> ‘Living life’ was used in relation to art and philosophy in early twentieth-century Russia and was mainly interpreted in two ways: religiously (in the Christian journal *Живая жизнь* [*Living Life*] published November 1907 – February 1908; Shalamov may have encountered it through his father who was an Orthodox priest) and critically (in the work *Живая жизнь* [*Living Life*] by Veresaev; Shalamov never refers to this work).

<sup>121</sup> For a perspective ‘living life’ in Dostoevsky, see Kunil’skii, A. E. “О возникновении контрпекта ‘zhivaia zhisn’ u Dostoevskogo” in *Vestnik Novgorodskogo gos. universiteta im. Yaroslava Mudrogo*, 44 (2007): 72-5.

<sup>122</sup> “Для Достоевского живая жизнь сама по себе совершенно чужда и непонятна, факт смерти уничтожает ее всю целиком. Если нет бессмертия, то жизнь – величайшая бессмыслица; это для него аксиома, против нее нечего даже и спорить.” [For Dostoevsky, living life is itself completely alien and incomprehensible, the fact of death destroys it in its entirety. If there is no immortality, then life is the greatest absurdity; for him this is an axiom, and there is no point to even argue.] Veresaev, Vikentii. *Sobranie sochinenii v 5-i tt.* Moskva: Pravda, 1961. Vol. 3, 428.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Veresaev’s reaction to Kitty giving birth in *Anna Karenina*: “Вот что такое истинная ‘живая жизнь’ и что такое счастье, даваемое ею. Оно не в ‘легкой приятности,’ не в отсутствии страданий. Чудесная, могучая сила жизни не боится никаких страданий, она с радостью и решимостью идет навстречу им, торжествует этими страданиями, и радуется ими, и любит их, и само страдание преобразует в светлую, ликующую радость.” [That is what the true “living life” is and kind of happiness it gives. It is not in an “easy pleasantness,” not in the absence of suffering. The miraculous and powerful force of life is not afraid of any suffering, it goes with joy and determination to meet suffering, triumphs in it, and enjoys it, and loves it, and suffering itself transforms into a bright, exultant joy.] Ibid., 396.

<sup>124</sup> “Человек не должен знать, не должен даже слышать о нем. Ни один человек не становится ни лучше, ни сильнее после лагеря. Лагерь – отрицательный опыт, отрицательная школа, растление для всех – для начальников и заключенных, конвоиров и зрителей, прохожих и читателей беллетристики” (5:148). [A person must not know, must not even hear about it. A person becomes neither better nor stronger after the camp.

physicality and implicit violence of my metaphor of the wound and the scar is intentional. It is through a physical sensation, which includes an arousal of personal memory and creative inspiration, that Shalamov depicts his production of ‘living life’ in literary texts:

There comes a time when a person is seized by an overwhelming emotion to elevate this conclusion, to give it *living life*. This haunting desire acquires the character of a volitional endeavor. And you do not think about anything else. And when (you sense), that you feel again with the same force as when you encountered in *living life* with these events, people, and ideas (maybe, that’s another type of force, of a different scale, but now it does not matter), when in your veins hot blood flows again...<sup>125</sup>

The writing of literature seems here to be a physical process for Shalamov: it entails a rush of blood through his body, rather than to his mind. ‘Living life’ affects the author twice: first, in the real-life moment which later becomes the backdrop for representation, and, secondly, in the act of literary representation itself. ‘Living life’ does not differentiate between the experience in the life of a person and its literary reinterpretation. For Shalamov, ‘living life’ is what happens both in life and in literature. If immediate access to the primary event as well as intimate participation in its secondary representation is crucial to the creation of his text, we may conclude that Shalamov, in one way or another, was always trying to write about himself – around himself, from himself, to himself, perhaps even *for* himself.<sup>126</sup>

With this conclusion in mind, it is peculiar that Shalamov was so reluctant to use the autobiographical mode to describe *Kolyma Tales* – a text impossible without his biography and difficult to read without at least cursory knowledge of his life. Despite his appreciation for the memoir, especially the form of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoir, his attempts at creating a similar longer narrative about his own personal ‘living life’ failed. His reminiscences from *Kolyma*, *О Колыме* [*About Kolyma*] (early 1970s), start with promising musings on memory and language. Soon, however, the fabric of his ‘memoirs’ begins to dissolve as the events described are concluded “This I have written about in short story X,” thus directing the reader back to *Kolyma Tales*. He did not finish *About Kolyma*; neither did he finish the antinovel *Vishera* about his first camp sentence in the northern Urals 1929-31. Moreover, his childhood narrative *The Fourth Vologda* seems to be more about his father than himself.

Against this background of unfinished late texts and late texts not about his own ‘living life’ but about the lives of others in which his participation was approximate at best, one of the less cited statements in “On Prose” may illuminate a problem with our reading of Shalamov re-reading himself: “The author hopes that no one will doubt that in the 33 short stories of the

The camp is a negative experience, a negative school, defilement for all – for bosses and prisoners, guards and visitors, passers-by and readers of fiction.]

<sup>125</sup> “Наступает момент, когда человеком овладевает непреодолимое чувство поднять этот вывод наверх, дать ему *живую жизнь*. Это неотвязное желание приобретает характер волевого устремления. И не думаешь больше ни о чем. И когда (ощущаешь), что чувствуешь снова с той же силой, как и тогда, когда встречался в *живой жизни* с событиями, людьми, идеями (может быть, сила и другая, другого масштаба, но сейчас это не важно), когда по жилам снова течет горячая кровь...” (5:148-9; emphasis added).

<sup>126</sup> There is an echo of this in his literary manifesto: “Вопрос встречи человека и мира, борьба человека с государственной машиной, правда этой борьбы, борьба за себя, внутри себя – и вне себя” (5:153). [The question of the meeting between a person and the world, of a person’s struggle with the state machine, the truth of this struggle, the struggle for oneself, within oneself – and beyond oneself.]

collection is the truth of *living life*.<sup>127</sup> Whereas ‘new prose’ concerns a broader body of texts, of which Shalamov as its founding father does not necessarily need to be the only author, “the truth of living life” is here reserved for the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*. Scholars have commented that the theme of this cycle is death (Mikhail Geller gave it the title *Первая смерть* [*The First Death*] after one of its short stories when it was published abroad) and to some extent this observation holds true for the first three cycles.<sup>128</sup> The final two cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, and thus also Shalamov’s late style, are preoccupied with its opposite – life. After his manifesto, he struggled not with the representation of death and dying, which should now be beyond his capacities as a living author of an aesthetic program restricted to ‘new prose’ as its form and ‘living life’ as its content, but with that which happens when death does not come and one does not die. Although Shalamov, in the citation above, confined “the truth of living life” to the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, ‘living life’ troubled his late style in which a movement opposite to human mortality can be traced: from death via resurrection to life. Still alive, but exiled from a full life as a professional writer by censorship and with an increasingly limited access to a full life as an individual due to disability, the texts he wrote after “On Prose” reveal the life of the living as a subject for literary representation far more complex than the death of the dead.

#### 4. The Witness and The Writer in Shalamov’s Late Style: The Transitory Hero

Shalamov’s understanding of ‘living life,’ which insists on participation in both the experience and its representation, suggests his conscious dual presence in the works written after “On Prose,” as witness (participant in the experience) and writer (participant in the representation). The most notable shift between his middle period and his late style is the inclusion of himself in the text as ‘I’ or as ‘Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov.’ I have chosen the term *transitory hero* [*переходящий герой*] to differentiate the biographically inspired protagonist from his author.

Shalamov suggests this term himself in “On Prose”: “The transition from first-person to third-person, the entry of the document. The use of both authentic and false names, a *transitory hero* – all these are means serving one purpose.”<sup>129</sup> The transitory hero is a complex literary construction, which is dependent upon the status of witness for his function and the role of the writer for his identity in the text. The purpose Shalamov had in mind when he insisted on this

<sup>127</sup> “Автор надеется, что в 33 рассказах сборника никто не усомнится, что это – правда *живой жизни*” (5:155; emphasis added).

<sup>128</sup> As one of the first, Lev Timofeev suggested this in his 1991 article: “Говорить о прозе Варлама Шаламова – значит говорить о художественном и философском смысле небытия. О смерти как о композиционной основе произведения. Об эстетике распада, разложения, разъятия... <...> Здесь смерть, небытие и есть тот художественный мир, в котором привычно разворачивается сюжет. Факт же смерти *предшествует* началу сюжета. Грань между жизнью и смертью навсегда пройдена персонажами ещё до того момента, когда мы раскрыли книгу и, раскрыв, тем самым запустили часы, отсчитывающие художественное время. Самое художественное время здесь – время небытия, и эта особенность едва ли не главная в писательской манере Шаламова...” [To speak about the prose of Shalamov is to speak about the artistic and philosophical meaning of nonexistence. About death of as the compositional basis of the work. About the aesthetics of decay, decomposition, dismemberment... <...> Here, death, inexistence is that artistic world in which the plot usually unfolds. The fact of death precedes the beginning of the plot. The line between life and death has been passed for all characters before the moment when we open the book and, having opened it, we start the clock counting down the artistic time artistic. The artistic time itself here is the time of nonexistence, and this feature is probably the main one in Shalamov’s manner of writing...] Timofeev, Lev. “Поэтика лагерной прозы. Первое чтение ‘Колымских рассказов’ В. Шаламова” in *Октябрь* 3, 1991: 182-195. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>129</sup> “Переход от первого лица к третьему, ввод документа. Употребление то подлинных, то вымышленных имен, *переходящий герой* – все это средства, служащие одной цели” (5:149; emphasis added).

fleeting and fluctuating perspective seems to be the impression of authenticity and immediacy. However, as many of his theoretical arguments in “On Prose,” the idea of the transitory hero seems to be fully realized only in his manifesto. Yet a reading of the transitory hero in this text as a representation of his writer (often called “author”), its witness, and its implied narrator does not limit its capacity or value as a term. Rather, this blend that takes place through the transitory hero in “On Prose” suggests that it can be applied to other texts that show a similar blurring of writer/witness and narrator/hero. Apart from essays and autobiographical fragments, this blurring of differences between these four distinct roles occurs frequently in Shalamov’s late works: the last two cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, *The Fourth Vologda*, *Vishera*, and *Evening Discourses*.

The transitory hero is both a response and a challenge to the conventional understanding and function of characters in Russian literature of the past and in Soviet literature of the present. Shalamov’s rejection of the literary character is symptomatic of his hostility toward fictional characters with fictionalized lives in, for example, the Russian nineteenth-century novel.<sup>130</sup> Having declared his preference for the lived over the imagined, he continues with an annulment of the significance of biography which is central to the novelistic narrative: “In *K.T.* people are taken without biography, without past and without future. Does their present look like that of an animal, or is it the present of a human being?”<sup>131</sup> His representation of the human subject occurs beyond sequential temporality and with a potential question mark hovering above the *human* in the word ‘human being.’ The prisoners in *Kolyma Tales* are deprived of both a heroic legacy and the status of a literary hero, as ‘hero’ in Russian can indicate both (and ‘character’): “*K.T.* is the fate of martyrs who never were, could never be, and never became heroes.”<sup>132</sup> Instead of characters, Shalamov strives to construct martyrs whose fates appear incapable of participating in the meaningful construction of human life expected in traditional literary narratives. Indeed, his martyrs often evoke the meaning of the Greek word *μάρτυρας* [martyr] – witness.

Within this collective of non-heroes in the camps, the coherent vantage point of someone still guides the reader through the human fates contained within in them. In the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, he resembles Shalamov but does not yet share his name. This is the beginning of the transitory hero before he converges with the identity of his writer, subsumes his status as witness, and merges with the voice of the narrator in his late style. When the writer becomes witness, because the witness strives to become writer, and the narrator appears as the hero, the joint figure they create is capable of functioning as a mediator between the living and the dead as well as between life and art. An inhabitant not of novels but rather of short stories and prose cycles,

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<sup>130</sup> “Ставить вопрос о ‘характере в развитии’ и т. д. не просто старомодно, это не нужно, а стало быть, вредно. Современный читатель с двух слов понимает, о чем идет речь, и не нуждается в подробном внешнем портрете, не нуждается в классическом развитии сюжета и т. д. <...> Если писатель добивается литературного успеха, настоящего успеха, успеха по существу, а не газетной поддержки – то кому какое дело, есть в этом произведении ‘характеры’ или их нет, есть ‘индивидуализация речи героев’ или ее нет. В искусстве единственный вид индивидуализации – это своеобразие авторского лица, своеобразие его художественного почерка” (5:145). [To pose the question of “character development” and so on is not just old-fashioned, it is not necessary and, therefore, harmful. The modern reader understands after two words what is at stake and needs no detailed external portrait, he does not need a classic plot development, and so on. <...> If the writer achieves literary success, a real success, a success in its essence, and not the support of a newspaper, then who cares if this work has “characters” or not, if there is any “individualization of the speech of the heroes” or not. In art, the only kind of individualization is the uniqueness of the author’s person, the uniqueness of his artistic penmanship.]

<sup>131</sup> “В ‘К. Р.’ взяты люди без биографии, без прошлого и без будущего. Похоже ли их настоящее на звериное или это человеческое настоящее?” (5:148).

<sup>132</sup> “‘К. Р.’ – это судьба мучеников, не бывших, не умевших и не ставших героями” (ibid.).

genres traditionally little concerned with a protagonist,<sup>133</sup> Shalamov's transitory hero seems in many ways to be closer in function to the lyric hero of a poem or poetry cycle.<sup>134</sup>

The transitory hero is constructed upon premises of the readers' perception of similarities between the author's life and his literary works like those of the 'лирический герой' ['lyric hero'] in Yuri Tynyanov's article on Aleksandr Blok from 1921. The original meaning of the lyric hero was linked with the image of the poet as a person in contemporary society – a background which subsequent Soviet scholarship on poetry largely ignored when the term became a standard way of referring to human subjects in poems without necessarily conflating them with their author.<sup>135</sup> Written as a reflection upon Blok's death, Tynyanov's article comments upon the legacies of his poetry in contemporary society and how these influenced the way the public mourned the poet. Tynyanov used the lyric hero to emphasize the conflation in popular memory of Blok with both his lyric persona and his poetry: "Blok is the biggest lyric theme of Blok. This theme attracts like the theme of a novel that is still of a new, unborn (or unconscious) formation. It is about this *lyric hero* that they speak right now."<sup>136</sup> For readers of Blok, the lyric hero personifies his poetry and the question of what came first – Blok as a lyric hero or the poetry of Blok – appears as difficult as that of the chicken or the egg.<sup>137</sup> This personification of the poems with their author, Tynyanov argues, has led to a reading of his text through his image. Blok the human being, he concludes, has made a bigger impression on the reading public than the art of Blok: "In this image they personify all the art of Blok; when they speak about his poetry, they almost always inadvertently substituted the poetry with a *human face* – and they've come to love the *face*, not the art."<sup>138</sup> Thus, the term lyric hero allows Tynyanov to speak about the representation of experience in Blok's poetry without appealing to popular perception of his identity.

This situation is not unique to Blok, but fits many occasions when the work of a writer seems inseparable from his life. The case of Shalamov and the perception of him by his readers in *samizdat* provide another example of this. Although he was nowhere near as omnipresent a

<sup>133</sup> "Unlike the novel, where a protagonist generally assumes the center of the stage through most of the book, there is no protagonist in a cycle or, if there is one, his or her importance is usually restricted to a limited number of stories..." Garland and Mann, *The Short Story Cycle*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> The similarities between the transitory hero of Shalamov's prose and the lyric hero has been noted previously: "В 'Колымских рассказах' Шаламова действует так называемый 'лирический герой', знаменующий собой тождество автора-повествователя/рассказчика-героя. Это образ самого автора в произведении, объективация и способ раскрытия реального авторского 'я', своего рода художественный двойник автора." [In Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*, a so-called "lyric hero" functions to signify the identity of the author-narrator/storyteller-hero. This is a depiction of the author himself in the work, an objection and a method of disclosure of the real author's "I," a kind of artistic double for the author.] Travova, Natalia. "Avtor, povestvovatel' i geroi v 'Kolymskikh rasskazakh' Varlama Shalamova" in *Integratsionnye protsessy v kommunikativnom prostranstve regionov*. Vologograd: izd. Volgogradskogo universiteta, 2010, 788.

<sup>135</sup> Following Yuri Tynyanov's usage of the lyric hero in relation to Aleksandr Blok, Lidiia Ginzburg argues that it engages the dual reception of the author by readers. Ginzburg, Lidiia. *O Lirike*. Moskva: Intrada, 1997, 151.

<sup>136</sup> "Блок – самая большая лирическая тема Блока. Это тема притягивает как тема романа еще новой, нерожденной (или неосознанной) формации. Об этом *лирическом герое* и говорят сейчас." Tynjanov, Jurij. *Arhaisty i Novatory*. Ann Arbor, Mich: Ardis, 1985, 513. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>137</sup> "Он был необходим, его уже окружает легенда, и не только теперь – она окружала его с самого начала, казалось даже, что она предшествовала самой поэзии Блока, что его поэзия только развила и дополнила постулированный образ." [He was essential, he is already surrounded by legend, and not only now – it surrounded him from the beginning, it even seemed that it preceded the very poetry of Blok, that his poetry is only developed and supplemented the postulated image.] Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> "В образ этот персонифицируют все искусство Блока; когда говорят о его поэзии, почти всегда за поэзией невольно подставляют *человеческое лицо* – и все полюбили *лицо*, а не *искусство*." Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

persona in the culture and society of his time as Blok – perhaps he was even the opposite as an unpublished author – what is important in the analogy of Blok’s lyric hero and Shalamov’s transitory hero is that Shalamov felt entitled to this kind of cultural reception. Writing his manifesto, he knew that his readership was limited; however, the fact of the manifesto suggests that his marginal position was not as important as the centrality he could claim through the act of writing it. Thus, I argue that the transitory hero is necessary as a concept in that it enables interpretations of Shalamov’s late works to approach their autobiographical content yet circumvents excessive emphasis on his biography. Instead of speaking about Shalamov, or even “Shalamov,” and attempting to constantly draw parallels between the lived and the written, the transitory hero can facilitate more nuanced considerations of his autobiographical late works. Besides, almost all of what we know about Shalamov is what he wrote.

Although his actual position in contemporary culture was slight, Shalamov was aware of the significance of his ‘face’ to the segment of Soviet society that was familiar with both his works and his background. He was highly conscious of the connotations surrounding his image as a witness and a writer already in 1961, as he describes in one of his notebooks a dialogue about his portrait at a photography exhibition in May the year before<sup>139</sup>: “Margarita N.: And your portrait was at the exhibit. Everyone asked: Who is this? Who is this? What a familiar face. I: Tell them that I am the face of time and therefore familiar to all.”<sup>140</sup> His answer lacks humility but also conveys a self-conscious approach to both himself as a survivor of the camps – which was indeed representative of its epoch – and as a writer of this experience. Shalamov wanted to be “the face of time” as well as “familiar to all.”

We can speculate that *Kolyma Tales* were read autobiographically not only because Shalamov as a survivor of the camps and a writer of camp narratives could be easily identified as a participant in the events he described, but also because readers of Russian literature were accustomed to finding parallels between literary types and real-life individuals. The characters of nineteenth-century Russian literature were to be replications of types found in society rather than only fictional creations. For example, the superfluous man of the nineteenth-century novel was considered symptomatic of the cultural climate at the time. In his construction of his dual presence as writer and witness, Shalamov could also draw upon, and reject, the veiled representation of personal experience due to censorship in Dostoevsky’s pseudo-memoir *Занушки из Мертвого Дома* [*Notes from a Dead House*] (1860-1). Shalamov seems at times to gesture toward this traditional reading of literary characters by giving his ‘characters’ in *Kolyma Tales* the names of Russian twentieth-century writers: Fadeev, Zamyatin, Platonov, etc.<sup>141</sup>

However, in the context of twentieth-century Russian and Soviet literature, Shalamov’s ‘characters’ as well as his transitory hero are informed neither by the biography nor the identity of these famous writers. Instead, their common point of departure appears to be the positive hero of socialist realism. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Shalamov’s representation of human behavior and human experience in the camps challenges the ideology behind this official literary doctrine that presented the human being as malleable material. The socialist realist hero is not so

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<sup>139</sup> In her comments to Shalamov’s notebooks, Sirovinskaya notes: “Фотовыставка происходила в мае 1960 г.” [Photo exhibition took place in May 1960.] I have been unable to obtain more information about this photo exhibition; we do not know at the moment which photograph of Shalamov was displayed, where, or why.

<sup>140</sup> “Маргарита Н.: А ваш портрет был на выставке. Все спрашивали: Кто это? Кто это? Какое знакомое лицо. Я: Скажите им, что я – лицо времени – потому и знаком всем” (5:275).

<sup>141</sup> Scholars differ in their interpretation of the names of Russian writers in Shalamov’s works. For three different perspectives, see Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 157; Chandler, Robert. “Varlam Shalamov and Andrei Fedorovich Platonov” in *Essays in Poetics* 27 (2002): 184-92; and Young, “Mapping Spaces as Factography,” 7-8.

much a subject of the Soviet novel as he is a function of its teleological text. The transitory hero and the piecemeal trajectory of his life together with his fragmentary interiority defy incorporation into any kind of grand narrative preferred by socialist realism. This difference might not be merely one of genre, in that the positive hero lives in novels whereas the transitory hero inhabits short stories and cycles, but rather one of difference in the literary representation of human experience. In socialist realism, human complexities were sacrificed in favor of a simplified construction of a de-personalized positive hero who is both a symbol and the embodiment of the myth of the historical progress toward a Communist utopia.<sup>142</sup>

The transitory hero desires neither to serve the aims of teleology, ideology, utopia, etc., nor to be complicit in a traditional literature fraught with ‘character types’ and the like. Instead, he insists on being a fluctuating presence in the text unable to disassociate himself completely from Shalamov the writer and the witness as well as from “Shalamov” the narrator. He often dissolves what incomplete and coincidental individual integrity he has to become one among the many other prisoners in the camps. In these instances, which are more frequent in the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales* and decrease in his late works, he speaks from the perspective of a ‘we’ who witnesses and comes across as closer to the other ‘characters’ than to either author or narrator. In the two last cycles, ‘I’ begins to break free from this ‘we’ and directs his narrative toward a ‘you’ – an elusive and unresponsive yet indispensable interlocutor for his late style.

Before both ‘I’ and ‘you’ is Shalamov’s ‘we:’ a conglomerate of prisoners in Kolyma, stripped of past and future as well as of a psychological portrait, not individual characters but rather a collective. The way this multifaceted group of inmates in the camp functions echoes Frank O’Connor’s observation about heroes in short stories:

...the short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged population group – a bad phrase which I have had to use for want of a better. That submerged population changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. It may be Gogol’s officials, Turgenev’s serfs, Maupassant’s prostitutes, Chekhov’s doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson’s provincials, always dreaming of escape <...>. Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo – Christ, Socrates, Moses.<sup>143</sup>

‘Shalamov’s prisoners’ could be added to O’Connor’s list of “submerged populations” (“Gogol’s officials, Turgenev’s serfs, Chekhov’s doctors and teachers...”). Exiled to the northeastern most corner on the Soviet map and incarcerated in an institution on the margins of its society, these prisoners “wander about the fringes” of this society and create echoes and caricatures of the tropes and traditions in the Russian literature of Gogol, Turgenev, Chekhov, and others as well as of the canonization and mythologization of the same in Soviet culture. It has been suggested that Such collective characters are “unsuitable” and perhaps even “insufficient” for the novel; their function in short stories “focuses on the individual’s moral and emotional experience.”<sup>144</sup>

<sup>142</sup> See Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History As Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

<sup>143</sup> O’Connor, Frank. “The Lonely Voice” in *Short Story Theories*. Ed. May, Charles E. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976, 86-87.

<sup>144</sup> “The short story deals not just with events and characters that are unsuitable – insufficient? – for the novel, but also tends to privilege these events and characters precisely because its sociocultural function differs from that of the novel. The novel enters into a direct relationship with the dominant ideology: it can be supportive of it, hostile to it, or take it for granted; the short story, by contrast, focuses on the individual’s moral and emotional experience.”

The protagonist of the short story is necessarily fragmented by the limited space offered by the brief narrative itself; it has neither the ability to convey the illusion of a complete biography nor the desire to do so. The short story hero is not represented in an act of becoming but seen as if caught in a moment, or a succession of moments, whose effects are sudden and illuminating rather than cumulative and monumental. Like the “submerged group” of characters which surround it in the short story, this type of protagonist is either distanced or distancing himself from society and often “an individuated conscience on a moral and emotional quest.”<sup>145</sup> For Shalamov’s transitory hero, this “moral and emotional quest” concerns the recuperation of memory of the camps as an ethical imperative and the representation of the camp experience through the immediate emotional involvement in the events affecting those within them. In every short story, and in each short story cycle, the quest begins again. The construction of one coherent biography through the disparate threads of these quests, that of Shalamov as current writer and former prisoner, appears to be not a product of the text itself but rather of its readers.

### 5. Beyond the Manifesto: The Problem of Resurrection

In his manifesto, Shalamov’s biography is as much an advantage as it is a challenge: when he claims a right to literary representation based on personal experience, he attempts to overcome the difference and distance between art and life. Similarly, the existence of “On Prose” is both an advantage and a challenge for us when we must inevitably read beyond the manifesto and into his late style. What is the relationship between what he *wanted to write* and what he *wrote*: Is his reading of himself a reliable map to his works? Are there any gaps or omissions in the unwritten space that arises in the translation of experience into text? One way to trace the limits of the transitory hero in his late style is to return to the autobiographical fragment “Deaf People” and explore its representation of his own disability in juxtaposition with a short story in which disability is represented but depicted as not his own.

In 1965, Shalamov also wrote the short story “Протезы” [“Prostheses”], which he included as the third to last text in the cycle *An Artist of the Spade*. The structure of this short story is curious: whereas the reader might expect it to end, like an anecdote, with a punch line (as many of the short stories in the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales*), its culmination is incomplete and suggests that something has been removed from it. Its grotesque imagery reflects this process of removal since it depicts a scene in which six disabled inmates are made to surrender the aids that replace their impaired body parts. They undress and each in turn dislocate the aid from their bodies: the first, who is on crutches, hands over a steel corset and is carried by the guards back to his punishment cell. The second surrenders a hand made of iron and can no longer sign the document stating that he has submitted his hand. The third, a deaf old doctor, yields his hearing horn. He is followed by the fourth who dislocates a prosthetic leg before jumping away on the one functional leg he has left. The fifth, to the surprise of the transitory hero who did not notice his disability, removes a porcelain eye from his right socket. The transitory hero, being sixth and last in the group, is left naked and alone. The guard turns to him: “– So that one gave his hand, that one his foot, that one his spine, and this one his eye. We’ll gather all the parts of the body. And how about you? He carefully looked at me naked. – And what will you give? Will you give

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Parts, Lyudmila. “Introduction: The Short Story as a Genre of Cultural Transition” in *The Russian Twentieth-Century Short Story: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Parts, Lyudmila. Brighton, Mass: Academic Studies Press, 2010, xvii.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.



you soul? – No, I said, my soul I won't give."<sup>146</sup> The transitory hero is in possession of the final part that would complete this body of prostheses: a soul. His answer implies an unwillingness to submit to authority and highlights a different interpretation of his soul – it is not a prosthesis and cannot be detached from his body. Yet the request by the guard indicates that his soul has potentially been damaged by the camps and could thus be removed as easily to reveal a disability in its place. By retaining his soul, the status of which is ambiguous in the short story, he shows his preference for saving an authentic yet perhaps defunct part of his body. The integrity of his person is preserved but the question lingers as to why he was asked for it and what the implications of maintaining it might be.

The potential disability of an interior, rather than exterior, body part in this short story can be further illuminated in the context of the cyclicity of the narrative that is observed in *An Artist of the Spade* (and in other cycles of *Kolyma Tales*) as well as in the context of Shalamov's explicit representation of his own disability in "Deaf People." As the third to last short story in its cycle, "Prostheses" ends before the two final texts "За паровозным дымом" ["Chasing Locomotive Smoke"] (1964) and "Поезд" ["The Train"] (1964) in which the return journey through Siberia is narrated. The last sentence of *An Artist of the Spade*, "Я возвращался из ада" (1:655), suggests that this return is similar to a resurrection. From hell, a metaphor for the camp experience as well as an otherworldly realm for the dead, Shalamov's transitory hero has come back to both Moscow and the space of the living. Except for the final short story in the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*<sup>147</sup> and in the fourth cycle *Sketches of the Criminal World*, the last texts in these cycles indicate the prospect of a bodily as well as spiritual resurrection for the transitory hero: "Сентенция" ["Sententia"]<sup>148</sup> (1965) in *The Left Bank*, "Воскрешение лиственницы" ["The Resurrection of the Larch"] (1965) in *The Resurrection of the Larch*, and "Рива-Роччи" ["Riva-Rocci"]<sup>149</sup> (1972) in *The Glove or KT-2*. At the end of these cycles, the resurrection of the former camp inmate's individual personality as well as of his functional body and soul is emphasized. By rejecting the order from the guards to submit his soul right before the cycle comes full circle in

<sup>146</sup> "– Тот, значит, руку, тот ногу, тот ухо, тот спину, а этот – глаз. Все части тела соберем. А ты чего? – Он внимательно оглядел меня голого. – Ты что сдашь? Душу сдашь? – Нет, – сказал я. – Душу я не сдам" (1:639).

<sup>147</sup> In "On Prose," Shalamov comments on this: "Автору кажется, что 'Колымские рассказы' – все рассказы стоят на своем месте. 'Тифозный карантин' – кончающий описание кругов ада, и машина, выбрасывающая людей на новые страдания, на новый этап (этап!), – рассказ, который не может начинать книги" (5:153). [It seems to the author that all the short stories in *Kolyma Tales* are in their place. "Typhoid quarantine," which ends the description of the circles of hell, and the machine that throws people into new suffering, onto a new stage (a stage!), is a short story that could not begin the book.]

<sup>148</sup> "Прошло много дней, пока я научился вызывать из глубины мозга все новые и новые слова, одно за другим. Каждое приходило с трудом, каждое возникало внезапно и отдельно. Мысли и слова не возвращались потоком. Каждое возвращалось поодиночке, без конвоя других знакомых слов, и возникало раньше на языке, а потом – в мозгу" (1:405). [It took many days before I learned to summon more and more new words, one after the other, from the depths of my brain. Each word came with difficulty, each appeared suddenly and separately. Thoughts and words did not come back in one flow. Each returned alone, without an escort of other familiar words, and appeared first on the tongue and later in the brain.]

<sup>149</sup> "Перед отъездом мы повидались. – Желая вам уехать отсюда, освободиться по-настоящему, – сказал мне человек, который сам себя освободил. – Дело идет к этому, уверяю вас. Дорого бы я дал, чтобы встретиться с вами где-нибудь в Минске или в Москве. – Все это пустяки, Михаил Иванович. – Нет, нет, не пустяки. Я – пророк. Я предчувствую, я предчувствую ваше освобождение! Через три месяца я был в Москве" (2:460). [We saw each other before he left. – I wish you to leave this place, to be free for real, said the man who had freed himself to me. – Everything is moving in that direction, I assure you. I would give a lot to meet up with you somewhere in Minsk or Moscow. – All this is nonsense, Mikhail Ivanovich. – No, no, it's not. I am a prophet. I foresee, I foresee your release! Three months later I was in Moscow.]

the two last short stories of *An Artist of the Spade*, the transitory hero of “Prostheses” opts to retain a potentially impaired part of his self that can tell the story of its own disintegration rather than to displace with it its narrative. The incomplete structure of this short story – its missing ending – suggests that the narrative itself has been stripped of what could have been a conventional conclusion, but perhaps also that this would have been nothing but a prosthesis. By keeping his soul and rejecting a kind of literary aid for this narrative, the transitory hero can both compose and conclude the cycle.

In the context of what we know about Shalamov’s disability while writing “Prostheses,” it appears peculiar that it is not the transitory hero who is deaf, but someone else and that it is this person who must submit his hearing horn. Not only does the transitory hero here not suffer the same disability as his author, but also the emphasis on an internal rather than external damaged body part without a visible prosthesis further removes him from the disabled inmates. Shalamov’s disability is a hidden presence in this short story, much like an impaired soul that cannot be seen from the outside and a deafness that is concealed without the aid of a hearing horn and in self-chosen isolation from communication in person. “Deaf People,” unincorporated into any of his cycles, represents disability more directly than any of his other texts, both earlier and later, in which disabled bodies appear. Although represented, disability remains problematic: here it is as an aspect of a person’s body that can have disastrous consequences for the disabled individual. He mentions three other people who suffered from deafness, not only the critic Veresaev, but also the main surgeon of the Soviet Army Nikolai Burdenko and the leader of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions Mikhail Tomsky. The transitory hero notes that Burdenko’s insistence on written answers to his questions aroused suspicions that he was an informer,<sup>150</sup> and that the silence of Tomsky due to his hearing problems compromised his political position.<sup>151</sup> “Deaf People” ends with the deaf Tomsky’s suicide in 1936. Suffering from progressive deafness himself, the late Shalamov depicts three different ways in which a deaf person can interact with his surroundings – through a hearing horn (Veresaev), written notes (Burdenko), and silence (Tomsky) – but retains his initial rejection of external aids to his impairment. Instead, he opts for sight when there is light and for his hands in darkness: “Sight replaces for me hearing. The eyes have the power of the ears, they help the ears, rush to their rescue. And when it’s dark, the hands help the ears.”<sup>152</sup>

When this autobiographical fragment is read against Shalamov’s personal circumstances as well as against other disabled bodies in “Prostheses,” a powerful image of defiance against the limitations of his own body and its gradual physical disintegration emerges. This resistance to the

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<sup>150</sup> “Годы были тревожные, тридцать седьмой, и за спиной Бурденко говорили, что он аггравант, преувеличивает степень своего заболевания и, заставляя писать ответы, хочет оставить ‘следы’, ‘обезопасить себя’, и так далее. Но Бурденко был глух” (7:77). [The years were troubling, 1937, and behind the back of Burdenko they said that he is an aggravator, that he exaggerates the extent of his illness and, by forcing them to write the answers, he wants to leave “traces,” “to protect himself,” and so on. But Burdenko was deaf.]

<sup>151</sup> “Томский терял слух медленно. В тридцать втором году на партийных собраниях в Москве громили ‘правых’, а Томский был ведь лидером. Промолчать – значило струсить, а Томский глух, не слушал, что говорил оратор от ‘ортодоксов’. Poleмик Томский был блестящий, но какая уж полемика для глухого! Томский понимал яснее и раньше других, куда все идет” (7:77). [Tomsky lost his hearing slowly. In 1932 at party meetings in Moscow they were attacking “the right” and Tomsky was after all their leader. To remain silent – meant to be a coward, but Tomsky was deaf and did not hear what the “orthodox” orator said. As a polemic, Tomsky was brilliant, but what sort of polemics is there for the deaf! Tomsky understood more clearly and earlier than others, what was happening.]

<sup>152</sup> “Зрение заменяет мне слух. Глаза обладают силой ушей, помогают ушам, кидаются на помощь. А когда темно – руки помогают ушам” (7:75).

visibility of his disability has much in common with the artistic provocation of his manifesto. In writing “On Prose,” he insisted on a rejection of past Russian literature and on a reconstruction of his marginal position in contemporary Soviet literature, and, in rejecting a hearing aid, he seems to have objected to a physical disability as an aspect of the “face of time” which he wanted both himself as writer and his transitory hero to become in Russian literature. The insistence on the invisibility, and to some extent unnarratability, of his disability suggests one important ‘gap’ between personal experience and literary representation in Shalamov’s late style.

What such omissions in the translation of life into art, between theory and practice, suggest is that the arguments of Shalamov’s manifesto articulate not a program to be followed but an alternative space for both himself as writer and for his works. This alternative space is not centered on the literary representation of personal experience as memory, for Shalamov repeatedly refuses to write “воспоминания” which can mean both memoirs and memories in Russian,<sup>153</sup> but is focused on the resurrection of both “feeling” and “life” in the act of writing:

A great semantic, and most importantly, a great emotional burden does not allow for patter, trifle, rattle to develop. It is important to resurrect emotion. Emotion should return and defeat the control of the time, the change in the evaluations. Only under this condition is it possible to resurrect life.<sup>154</sup>

The craft of the writer, Shalamov argues in his manifesto, is not only personal and professional, but also entails an emotional process. It is in the emphasis on emotion and the resurrection of emotion, and through it of “life,” that the pertinence of “On Prose” to his subsequent works should be sought. The resurrection of emotion, he indicates above, will “defeat the control of time” and therefore have a profound effect on the temporal dimension in representations of personal experience. The manifesto itself appears to be an emotional, although simultaneously highly professional, response to his marginalization as a writer that is in a sense timeless: it can be read both as a clarification of his previous works and as a foreshadowing of his future texts not yet written. However, it seems that this combination of emotion and professionalism is especially relevant in relation to his late texts: on the level of form and content, as well as on the level of organization of narratives into larger cycles.

Shalamov’s cyclical structures bring not only the transitory hero but also the reader through a circular movement based on a constant resurrection that brings incessant returns in its wake. Each of the *Kolyma Tales* cycles can be seen as enacting the process of *воскрешение*, a recurrent revival or return to life that implies a cycle in and of itself. A repeated revival rather than one definite resurrection (i.e. *воскресение* from the perfective verb *воскресить* [to resurrect] and epitomized by the one-time feat of Christ in the New Testament), *воскрешение* is derived from the imperfective verb *воскрешать* [to revive] and reminds of cyclical resuscitation in nature. The first work of his late style, the fifth cycle *The Revival of the Larch*, bears the device of his structural principle in its title which signals its heightened significance for his late period. One of the first

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<sup>153</sup> “Когда меня спрашивают, что я пишу, я отвечаю: я не пишу воспоминаний. Никаких воспоминаний в ‘Колымских рассказах’ нет. Я не пишу и рассказов – вернее, стараюсь написать не рассказ, а то, что было бы не литературой” (5:157). [When they ask me what I write, I answer: I do not write reminiscences. There are no reminiscences in *Kolyma Tales*. Neither do I write short stories – rather, I try to write not a short story but something that would not be literature.]

<sup>154</sup> “Огромная смысловая, а главное, огромная нагрузка чувства не дает развиваться скороговорке, пустяку, погрешке. Важно воскресить чувство. Чувство должно вернуться, побеждая контроль времени, изменение оценок. Только при этом условии возможно воскресить жизнь” (5:152).

known usages of cycle is the Easter cycle, according to which calendar time was to be calculated in Christianity, and it was based on a similar concept, the resurrection of Christ.<sup>155</sup> What the Christian concept of resurrection in the Easter cycle and Shalamov's superstructure of resurrection in his cycles share are consequences for how the world and the unfolding of human life within it are perceived. In Christian theology, the first resurrection of one becomes the foundation for the subsequent resurrection of all; in other words, the teleology of the life – and death – of Christ promises a similar teleological purpose for each human being.

The worldview offered by Shalamov through the cyclical revival of his transitory hero could be seen as both different and more complex. In his works, cyclicity seems to explicitly pose the problem of death both *in* a totalitarian regime and *by* a totalitarian regime<sup>156</sup> while implicitly gesturing to what literature can do for life but life cannot do for literature. Death, as well as life, in the camps was de-personalized and constructed to be devoid of emotion, but there as elsewhere death was final; in literature, there can be no death. The difference between life and death in the literary text is a difference as to which way we read: forward or backward, or even circulating. Cycles construct and aid a type of reading which appears to go against human mortality while the standard understanding of biography limits the life of each of us to one, cyclicity of both literary texts and their heroes violate this part of the human condition.

In the context of 'living life' as a complex but not yet problematic concept in Shalamov's middle period, the overcoming of death in the literary work casts the focalizer in an optimistic light as he appears and reappears under different names in the earlier cycles of *Kolyma Tales*. However, the transitory hero and his inability to die become troubling aspects of the cyclical text for Shalamov as both writer and witness in his late style. In his late works, a doubt as to life as an uncontested good begins to emerge: "I repeat that I do not know whether life is a good thing or not,"<sup>157</sup> the transitory hero states in one of the short stories from the last cycle *The Glove or KT-2*. In this negative evaluation of the life bestowed upon a survivor of the camps by accident rather than by intention, as Shalamov himself stated, we can detect echoes of disability, exile, and emotion. When this last cycle was written in the early 1970s, Shalamov had neither the same access to life nor the same perception of it as he had during his middle period. 'Living life' was no longer simply a metaphor for the relationship between art and life, but presented a challenge to his ability to write as well as to function as an individual. It is against this reevaluation of life, and simultaneously of 'living life,' that the transitory hero of his late style begins to speak from within a body twice violated: first by the violence and forced labor together with the starvation and the cold in the camps of Kolyma, and secondly by the lingering, returning, and eventually lasting physical consequences of his survival in the dehumanizing circumstances of the camps. It seems

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<sup>155</sup> "Cyclus made a slow entrance into the Latin language. Before the fifth century, it occurred only twice. <...> By the end of the fifth century, *cyklus* was appearing in all discussions of the Easter controversy. <...> Because of the influence of the papal statements on the Easter controversy, however, commentaries on the liturgical year and the celebration of Paschal time tended to employ *cyklus*, not *circulus*, to designate the calendar of solar and lunar years that established the proper annual date of Easter." Staines, David. "The Medieval Cycle: Mapping a Trope" in *Transtextualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicity in Medieval French Literature*. Eds. Sturm-Maddox, Sara, and Donald Maddox. Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996, 18-19. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>156</sup> "Почему лагерная тема. Лагерная тема в широком ее толковании, в ее принципиальном понимании – это основной, главный вопрос наших дней. Разве уничтожение человека с помощью государства – не главный вопрос нашего времени, нашей морали, вошедший в психологию каждой семьи?" (5:156-7). [Why the camp theme. The camp theme in its broadest interpretation, in its fundamental understanding is the primary, the main issue of our days. Is the destruction of human beings by the state really not the main issue of our time, of our morality, which has entered the psychology of each family?]

<sup>157</sup> "Повторяю, что я не знаю, жизнь – благо или нет" (2:332).

that the initial loss of hearing and the later loss of vision made both life as the reward for survival and 'living life' as an aesthetic imperative problematic and finally unbearable for Shalamov.

Perhaps it was the experience of living with a disability, progressing and eventually unstoppable, that caused him to become cynical as a resurrection in his life became increasingly unattainable. Instead, the late Shalamov returned to different versions of the early Shalamov to rewrite himself in Vologda, Vishera, and Kolyma as well as to inscribe the fates of others in these places. If the transitory hero in these late works function to emphasize as well as to conceptualize the distance between the time of living and the time of writing, the transitory hero as a term for the specific problematic of his late style serves a similar purpose of separation: to detach the autobiography of the writer from his autobiographical text. In the wake of the death of the novel – and with it, all that is fictionalized – that his manifesto proclaims, we can trace not only the birth of a new literary form, but also the birth of a new visceral and above all emotional narrative strategy. Although personal experience would not always be the basis for what he wrote next, the following texts are undoubtedly permeated by personal emotion. Shalamov's emotions constitute the truth neither of 'new prose' nor of 'living life,' but rather the truth of his late style.

## Chapter II. *The Revival of the Larch: Return of the Writer*

### 1. Introduction

Shalamov began *The Revival of the Larch* (1965-7), the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, shortly after composing his literary manifesto. Consequently, it seems logical to expect this cycle to be, if not the practical realization of his aesthetic theory, then at least a creative response to the program he himself proclaimed. The first impression of *The Revival of the Larch* certainly suggests fidelity to the recently formulated rules of ‘new prose’ and indicates a culmination both for *Kolyma Tales* and for Shalamov as a writer. The fifth cycle appears to belong to the first of the two types of late style proposed by Said: an accomplished late style as the peak of an artist’s life and works. We may approach and appreciate its delicate texture and elaborate cyclicity as signs of “a special maturity” and “a renewed, almost youthful energy that attests to an apotheosis of artistic creativity and power.” In this vein, the fluctuations between personal experiences and the stories of others could be “a miraculous transfiguration of a common reality.”<sup>158</sup> However, first impressions can be deceiving and this is the case with *The Revival of the Larch*: this continuation and perhaps even conclusion to the earlier cycles comes with cracks in its sophisticated literary texture. Through these cracks, there is a glimpse of Said’s second type of late artist and a sudden foretaste of the difficult and ultimately unreconciled late style that will erupt fully in *The Glove or KT-2*, the sixth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*. Contrary to what Shalamov thought while writing *The Revival of the Larch*, it was not an end but a beginning.

In “On Prose,” Shalamov argued for a problematic yet imperative union of primary experience (‘living life’) – the testimony of the witness – with secondary representation (‘new prose’) – the creative process of the writer – but his later short stories disrupt this union. The bifunctionality that epitomizes the earlier cycles, in that they can be read as both testimony and works of art,<sup>159</sup> is complicated and to some extent compromised in the last two cycles. Several of the narratives in *The Revival of the Larch* become closer in form to testimony,<sup>160</sup> which make them “furrowed, even ravaged” works of art and “bitter and spiny”<sup>161</sup> expressions of experience. Yet the voice that emerges in them is no longer solely that of a witness – but of a writer.<sup>162</sup> Undoubtedly, Shalamov was no less a witness to the atrocities of the Gulag in his late style period than he had been decades earlier, but the fifth cycle also bears witness itself, as a work that

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<sup>158</sup> Said, *On Late Style*, 6-7.

<sup>159</sup> “Gulag narratives are bifunctional objects whose informational and aesthetic functions become ‘marked’ at different periods of reception: they can be read as historical documents or publicistic statements *and* as works of art.” Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 7. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>160</sup> “As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not yet settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. What the testimony does not offer is, however, a completed statement, a totalized account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge.” Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. London: Routledge, 1992, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Adorno, *Late Style*, 564.

<sup>162</sup> “The discovery that an allegedly authentic testimony is a fiction or a plagiarism immediately robs it of its power. However, misrepresented facts in a testimony to some extent remain unimportant. A witness is allowed to err, but the writer may not pretend to be a witness.” Engdahl, Horace. “‘Philomena’s Tongue’: Introductory Remarks on Witness Literature” in *Witness Literature: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2002, 7.

articulate a “crisis in literature”<sup>163</sup> as well as a crisis within their author. To have a professional writer (and not a ‘survivor-writer’) in charge of testimony, a mode of inscription characterized above all by truth,<sup>164</sup> is a paradox that defines the subjective, self-conscious, and contradictory aspects of *The Revival of the Larch*. Is reconciliation possible – can the writer ever be reconciled with his own “bitter and spiny” text?

In the fall of 1966, while Shalamov was engaged in an intensive period of creativity and wrote *The Revival of the Larch* faster than any cycle before it (he completed it already in 1967), he contemplated the point of producing such challenging literary works:

I do not write so that what is described will not be repeated. That does not happen and nobody needs our experience. I write to let people know that such short stories are written and that they themselves decide to do some worthy action – not in the sense of a short story, but in any way, to contribute to some kind of small plus.<sup>165</sup>

Unlike the ethical imperative that informed the writing of some testimonies to the Gulag as well as to the Holocaust, Shalamov did not write ‘so that it will not happen again.’ The aim of his writing is rather modest: any action from his readers that amounts to a “small plus” would be enough. Yet it is difficult to correlate this humble approach with his simultaneous writing of the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, which might be considered the most successful from an artistic point of view. Did he not understand what he was writing – or was this not what he wanted to have written? Two years later, in 1968, he seems to have changed his mind as to the meaning of his latest prose work: his dedication of *The Revival of the Larch* to Sirovinskaya suggests a sense of artistic as well as of personal achievement: “And I want to look through the whole book of life... My last book, *The Revival of the Larch*, is dedicated to Irina Pavlovna S. She is the author of this book together with me. Without her, this book would not exist.”<sup>166</sup> Even though the fifth cycle neither concluded *Kolyma Tales* nor his literary oeuvre, as the dedication implies, it was the last to circulate almost immediately in *samizdat*.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Shalamov’s complex engagement with *Kolyma Tales* during his late style recalls the “radical crisis of witnessing the Holocaust” for Albert Camus, which, as Shoshana Felman argues, becomes an “ongoing, as yet unresolved *crisis of history*, as crisis which in turn is translated into a *crisis of literature* insofar as literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself.” Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, xvii-xviii. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>164</sup> “To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth: to speak, implicitly, from within the legal pledge and the juridical imperative of the witness’s oath.” *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>165</sup> “Я пишу не для того, что описанное – не повторилось. Так не бывает, да и опыт наш не нужен никому. Я пишу для того, чтобы люди знали, что пишутся такие рассказы, и сами решились на какой-либо достойный поступок – не в смысле рассказа, а в чем угодно, в каком-то маленьком плюсе” (5:297).

<sup>166</sup> “И хочется всю книгу жизни перелистать... Последняя моя книга ‘Воскрешение лиственницы’ посвящается Ирине Павловне С. Она – автор этой книги вместе со мной. Без нее не было бы этой книги” (6:460). Shalamov dedicated the second cycle *The Left Bank* to Sirovinskaya, even though parts of it was written before they met in 1966: “Ире – мое бесконечное воспоминание, заторможенное в книжке ‘Левый берег’” (1:222). [To Ira – my endless remembrance, inhibited in the book *The Left Bank*.]

<sup>167</sup> “Мало кто знал, что Шаламов продолжал работать над прозой. Характерно, что почти все написанное им после 1967 г. выходило в России (СССР) и на Западе со значительным временным разрывом, как бы вдогонку, и эта пауза, как представляется, повышает основания для предложенной периодизации – для того, чтобы говорить об отрезке конца 60-х – начала 70-х гг. как о новом, сравнительно самостоятельном этапе литературной работы Шаламова, внесшем качественно иные черты в его прозу, прежде всего в ее содержание.” [Few knew that Shalamov continued to work on his prose. It is significant that almost all of what he wrote after 1967 was published in Russia (USSR) and the West with a significant time lag, as if playing catch up, and this pause seems to increase the foundation for proposed periodization, to talk about this interval, between the end of

*The Revival of the Larch*, as the title implies and the dedication proposes (“to look through the whole book of life again”), is about return: not the return of a witness to the scene of the crime, but of the writer to his text. Shalamov was a writer before Kolyma – even before Vishera – and the distinction between the ‘survivor-writer,’ who uses the medium of literature to testify, and the professional writer, who performs his craft through literature, is central to the multiplicity of returns in the fifth cycle. Although words derived from either the imperfective and cyclical ‘воскрешение’ (‘revival’) or the perfective and singular ‘воскресение’ (‘resurrection’) occur in only five of its thirty short stories, this should be compared with their appearance only once in *Kolyma Tales*, *The Left Bank*, and *An Artist of the Spade*.<sup>168</sup> In four of the short stories in *The Revival of the Larch* where resurrection or revival is named, the reference is not to bodily resurrection but rather resurrection through writing. In “Графит” [“Graphite”] (1967), the second short story in the cycle, the writing of the names of those buried in mass graves with graphite – not ink – indicates preservation as well as a possible return of the dead.<sup>169</sup> This connection between writing and resurrection is echoed in “Термометр Гришки Логуна” [“Grishka Logun’s Thermometer”] (1966) and establishes the revival of the writer together with his text as the overarching theme.<sup>170</sup>

In the final short story “The Revival of the Larch,” which gave the cycle its title, a larch twig is sent from Kolyma and receives a second life in a Moscow apartment. Had Shalamov stopped writing after this short story, *Kolyma Tales* would have finished with a symbol for the singular resurrection of the writer, who survived Kolyma, represented in the cyclical revival of the twig from Kolyma that promises to connect the past with the present:

Sending the larch branch, the person did not understand, did not know, did not think that the larch branch would be revived in Moscow and that, resurrected, it would begin to smell of Kolyma and bloom on a Moscow street, that the larch branch would prove its strength, its immortality; six hundred years of life for a larch – that’s practically immortality for a person; that the people of Moscow would touch the rough, unpretentious tough larch branch, will look at its dazzling green needles, at its renewal, revival, would inhale its scent – not as a memory of the past, but as living life.<sup>171</sup>

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the 1960s and the early 1970s, as a new, relatively independent stage in the literary works of Shalamov, ushering in qualitatively different traits to his prose, especially in its content.] Esipov, Valerii. “‘Razveyat’ etot tuman’ (Pozdniaia proza V. Shalamova: motivatsii i problematika” in *Shalamovskii sbornik*, vyp. 3, 170.

<sup>168</sup> In the last short story “Тифозный карантин” [“Typhus Quarantine”] (1959) in *Kolyma Tales*; in “По лендлизу” [“Lend-Lease”] (1965) in *The Left Bank*; and in “Инженер Киселев” [“Engineer Kiselev”] (1965) in *An Artist of the Spade*. It should be noted that two of these short stories were written in close proximity to “On Prose.”

<sup>169</sup> “Казалось, к чему этот расчет на эксгумацию? На воскресение? На перенесение праха? Мало ли безымянных братских могил на Колыме – куда валили вовсе без бирок. Но инструкция есть инструкция. Теоретически говоря – все гости вечной мерзлоты бессмертны и готовы вернуться к нам, чтобы мы сняли бирки с их левых голеней, разобрались в знакомстве и родстве” (2:109). [What was the point of this plan for exhumation? Because of resurrection? Because of the transfer of the ashes? As if there aren’t plenty of mass graves in Kolyma where they threw corpses without tags. But instructions are instructions. Theoretically speaking, all the guests of the permafrost are immortal and are ready to return to us, so that we’ll remove the tag from their left legs and sort out who they are.]

<sup>170</sup> “Трудно было писать, потому что мозг загрубел так же, как руки, потому что мозг кровоточил так же, как руки. Нужно было оживить, воскресить слова, которые уже ушли из моей жизни, и, как я считал, навсегда” (2:127). [It was difficult to write, because the brain had become coarse just like the hands, because the brain bled just like hands. I had to revive, to resurrect the words that have left my life, as I thought, forever.]

<sup>171</sup> “Посылая ветку, человек не понимал, не знал, не думал, что ветку в Москве оживят, что она, воскресшая, запахнет Колымой, зацветет на московской улице, что лиственница докажет свою силу, свое бессмертие; шестьсот лет жизни лиственницы – это практическое бессмертие человека; что люди Москвы будут трогать



Although this short story, like many in the cycle, concerns memory – specifically, keeping the memory of the camps for the dead poet’s wife in whose home the branch is placed – the revival of the larch in the city apartment is not a piece from the past but smells of ‘living life.’ Past events accessed through the process of memory remain in the past; by contrast, ‘revival’ as well as ‘resurrection’ articulates a new embodiment of the past for the future. The attempt at producing a renewed and enduring ‘living life’ for the legacy of Kolyma in the capital, where Shalamov wrote *Kolyma Tales*, runs like a red thread throughout the fifth cycle. The tension between the representation of an averted death and the experience of a continued life becomes its focus; physical and literary survival, on which the writing of both the past and ‘living life’ is premised, seems to be the sustenance as well as the inspiration for this work. Compared with the earlier cycles, there are fewer scenes of death in *The Revival of the Larch* – an affirmation of life, albeit tainted by the death it has encountered or overcome, eclipses the commemoration of the deaths of others. However, death still finds its way into some of the short stories, but the representation of it does not confront the readers directly, as it did previously, but attains its complete and harrowing image within the dialogue constructed within the cycle.

The most graphic death scene occurs in “Храбрые глаза” [“Brave Eyes”] (1966), short story 8 of 30 in the cycle; but this is not the death of a person but of an animal. The transitory hero, an unnamed “I,” becomes witness to the killing of a weasel by the geologist Makhmutov:

The rear paw of the pregnant weasel was shot off, and the weasel dragged behind her a bloody mess of unborn little animals, who would never be born, children who would have been born an hour later, when I and Makhmutov would be far from the broken larch, who would have been born and gone into the difficult and serious life of animals in the taiga. I saw how the weasel crawled after Makhmutov, I saw audacity, anger, revenge, despair in her eyes. I saw that in them there was no fear.<sup>172</sup>

The transitory hero notes the absence of fear in her eyes and someone else calls them “brave.”<sup>173</sup> The bloody “porridge” of unborn progenies that the wounded animal drags along their path is a disturbing image in itself, but this death before life appears as a placeholder for the untimely death of human children in the next short story. In “Марсель Пруст” [“Marcel Proust”] (1966), which follows “Brave Eyes,” the transitory hero loses his volume of *In Search of Lost Time* in the camp hospital where he also meets a beautiful woman named Nina. In the ending, he encounters Nina again and finds out what happened to her and his book:

- <...> I gave birth to twins. They weren’t made for life. They died.
- The children died? That is your happiness, Nina.

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руками эту шершавую, неприхотливую жесткую ветку, будут глядеть на ее ослепительно зеленую хвою, ее возрождение, воскрешение, будут вдыхать ее запах – не как память о прошлом, но как живую жизнь” (2:280).

<sup>172</sup> “Задняя лапка беременной ласки была отстрелена, и ласка тащила за собой кровавую кашу еще не рожденных, не родившихся зверьков, детей, которые родились бы на час позже, когда мы с Махмутовым были бы далеко от сломанной листовницы, родились бы и вышли в трудный и серьезный таёжный звериный мир. Я видел, как ползла ласка к Махмутову, видел смелость, злобу, месть, отчаяние в ее глазах. Видел, что там не было страха” (2:137).

<sup>173</sup> “Но глаза ласки угасли, и злоба в ее глазах исчезла. Подошел Пиулев, нагнулся над мертвым зверьком и сказал: – У нее были храбрые глаза. Что-то он понял? Или нет? Не знаю” (2:138). [But the weasel’s eyes faded away, and the anger in her eyes disappeared. Piulev approached, bent over the dead little animal and said: – She had brave eyes. Did he understand something? Or not. I do not know.]

- Yes. Now I’m a free bird. I’ll heal. Did you find the book back then?
- No, I didn’t find it.
- It was I who took it. Volodya asked for something to read.<sup>174</sup>

The dead twins of Nina, the “free bird,” implies a disturbing yet unrepresentable experience when read after the graphic death of the weasel’s unborn offspring. The bloody trace on the path in the previous short story becomes a substitution for the death beyond the transitory hero’s field of vision in “Marcel Proust.” He calls the dead children “her happiness” but this too is a way of averting one’s eyes since Shalamov only touched upon the life of children near the camps briefly in *Kolyma Tales*.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, the Proustian intertext provides the short story with possible paraphrased titles: not only *In Search of a Lost Book*, but also *In Search of Lost Children*. The two deaths that connect these succeeding short stories – and the difference between what was witnessed and what was never seen – suggests a new dimension in the fifth cycle: representation is no longer limited to his own experiences and his status as a witness thus becomes ambiguous.

This dialogue between separate short stories, where an event in one resonates in another, happens not only sequentially in *The Revival of the Larch*. The dialogue moves in a multitude of directions and reflects the imperfective process of ‘revival.’ ‘Revival,’ and its double ‘resurrection,’ reverberates in the displacement of a detail, an event, or an image from one short story to another. For example, in the ending of “Brave Eyes,” the transitory hero and Makhmutov opt for another path back, perhaps so as not to encounter the corpse of the weasel and her bloody trace again: “Tomorrow we’ll begin the way back, just not by this path, but another.”<sup>176</sup> This ending recalls the conclusion of the cycle’s opening short story, “Тропа” [“The Path”] (1967), in which the path where the transitory hero experiences a rebirth of poetry can no longer be of use after he notices someone else’s tracks on it:

But during the third summer a person walked on my path. I wasn’t at home at that time, I don’t know if it was some wandering geologist, a hiking mountain postman, or a hunter – the person left traces of heavy boots. From then on poems could no longer be written on this path. The strange trace was left in the spring, and all summer I didn’t write a single line on this path. And when winter came, I was transferred to another place but I wasn’t upset about it – the path was hopelessly ruined. And I tried many times to write a poem about this path but was never able to.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> “– <...> У меня родилась двойня. Не жильцы были. Умерли. – Дети умерли? Это твое счастье, Нина. – Да. Теперь я вольная птица. Подлечусь. Нашел книгу-то тогда? – Нет, не нашел. – Это я ее взяла. Володя просил что-нибудь почитать” (2:141-2).

<sup>175</sup> See “Детские картинки” [“A Child’s Drawings”] (1959) from the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*: “Ребенок ничего не увидел, ничего не запомнил, кроме желтых домов, колючей проволоки, вышек, овчарок, конвоиров с автоматами и синего, синего неба” (1:108). [The child did not see anything, did not remember anything except the yellow houses, the barbed wire, the watchtowers, the German shepherds, the guards with machineguns, and the blue, blue sky.]

<sup>176</sup> “Завтра мы начнем обратный путь – только не этой, другой тропой” (2:138).

<sup>177</sup> “А на третье лето по моей тропе прошел человек. Меня в то время не было дома, я не знаю, был ли это какой-нибудь странствующий геолог, пеший горный почтальон, или охотник – человек оставил следы тяжелых сапог. С той поры на этой тропе стихи не писались. Чужой след был оставлен весной, и за все лето я не написал на этой тропе ни строчки. А к зиме меня перевели в другое место, да я и не жалел – тропа была безнадежно испорчена. Вот об этой тропе много раз пытался я написать стихотворение, но так и не сумел написать” (2:106).

As an opening, “The Path” is reminiscent of other openings in *Kolyma Tales*, for example “По снегу” [“Through the Snow”] (1956) that begins the first cycle.<sup>178</sup> Whereas “Through the Snow” can be read as an allegory for writing and reading about the camps,<sup>179</sup> “The Path” opens the fifth cycle with a difficult intersection between two common tropes in Shalamov’s prose: the survival of the witness and the ambition of the poet. Initially the site for his renewed engagement with poetry, which is only possible because of an almost exceptional freedom of movement, ‘his’ path in the woods becomes a contaminated territory when someone else discovers and uses it. As “Through the Snow” can be read as an entryway into the world of the Kolyma camps, “The Path” can be read as an attempt to exit the same world. However, exit does not equal release – both the transitory hero and *The Revival of the Larch* will be pulled back into the camps. Rather, this exit suggests a new freedom of movement that will expand from the poet’s solitary creativity, an event of personal significance for Shalamov, to the representation of others and their stories in the fifth cycle. The destruction of the path after someone else finds it anticipates the complex relationship between his own creative work as a writer and the stories of others in some of the narratives that follow.

Shalamov never excluded the figures of real people in his earlier *Kolyma Tales*, but after *The Revival of the Larch* he received an unprecedented critique for this practice from his contemporary readers. Some of the readers who found themselves, or a relative, in its short stories were neither satisfied with nor grateful for his literary representation. The daughter of Aleksandr Tamarin in “Хан-Гирей” [“Khan-Girei”] (1967) demanded that all future publications of it contain a disclaimer with correct information about her father and his life.<sup>180</sup> Natalya Stolyarova, the daughter of Natalya Klimova about whom Shalamov wrote “Золотая медаль” [“The Golden Medal”] (1966), accused him of misrepresenting not only herself, but also her father. Moreover, Shalamov wrote “Житие инженера Кипреева” [“The Life of Engineer Kipreev”] (1967) about Georgii Demidov, whom he knew in Kolyma, after disappointment with Demidov’s own texts about this experience. By offering to help him, Shalamov questioned Demidov’s ability to write not only about Kolyma but also his own story. Their argument about literature almost ended with a physical fight.<sup>181</sup> These three short stories are not the only ones in

<sup>178</sup> For more about the compositional structure of *Kolyma Tales*, see Nekrasova, *Sud’ba i tvorchestvo*, 169-90.

<sup>179</sup> “А на тракторах и лошадях ездят не писатели, а читатели” (1:47). [But on the tractors and horses travel readers instead of writers.]

<sup>180</sup> Kline, “Novaya Proza” *Vartama Shalamova*, 224-5.

<sup>181</sup> Valentina Demidova, Demidov’s daughter, witnessed one such argument between them: “Я присутствовала при их разговоре, когда у них уже были горячие споры по поводу литературы. Это было в 1960-е, в самый разгар их полемики. Я сидела в уголке, а они часа два разговаривали, спорили. Я сама слышала, как Шаламов говорил: ‘Таких как ты и я, прошедших всё это, выживших, сумевших уцелеть и умеющих это описать, почти нет. Поэтому нечего размазывать по странице сопли, нужны факты. Не надо всего этого: любит-не любит, чувства – это всё вторично и никому не нужно. Как можно больше фактов, фактов, фактов, фактов. Сколько успеешь, об этих фактах только и писать. А остальное – никому не нужно.’ Они, как два бычка, встали, уперев руки в стол, оба красные – я думала, бодаться начнут. Я сидела в уголочке, боялась пошевеливаться. И я помню, как мы шли с папой пешком, а он весь кипел: ‘Ну ты пойми, мы там жили. Это страшная, невозможная каторга. Там немногие выживали после общих работ, и всё равно - там жили люди. Эти люди любили, дружили... И не писать об этом я не могу.’” [I was present during their conversation, when they had heated debates about literature. It was in the 1960s, in the midst of their polemics. I sat in the corner, and they were talking and arguing for two hours. I myself heard how Shalamov said: “There are almost no people like you and me, who have gone through all this, who survived and were able to survive, and who can describe it. Therefore, there is no need to smear snot on the page – people need facts. Who cares who loved or who did not love somebody, all these emotions – all of this is secondary and not needed by anybody. As much as possible: facts, facts, facts, facts. As much as you can, just write about these facts. As for the rest – nobody needs it.” They stood up

*The Revival of the Larch* about real-life individuals, but they prompted an indignant response from readers who were ‘characters’ themselves or relatives of his ‘characters.’

These reactions show not only how *Kolyma Tales* were received by its first readers in *samizdat* – as verifiable accounts of real-life events and of identifiable individuals – but also point to the implicit claim of entitlement that they contain and sustain. My reading of the rights to representation and the problems of representation the claim to such rights produce is aided by Amy Shuman’s discussion of the dynamics of storytelling. Her discussion of the challenges that entitlement claims present when the stories of others are told and eventually circulated appears capable of illuminating an imperative aspect of Shalamov’s writing in *The Revival of the Larch* that has thus far been overlooked. Working with the relationship between tellers and listeners in everyday storytelling through a folkloristic framework, Shuman critiques the interdependency of entitlement and empathy provoked in these situations:

Entitlement and empathy are in one sense contradictory, the first claiming ownership of one’s own stories and the second claiming understanding of other people’s stories; in another sense, they are two dimensions of the same problem; together they negotiate the relationship between the personal and the more than personal, or allegorical, meaning of stories about experience.<sup>182</sup>

Storytelling situates experiences and narratives in time and place as well as in relation to each other and is thus important for our understanding of Shalamov’s late short stories. Even that which is clearly “more than personal,” for example the stories of others in “The Life of Engineer Kipreev” and “The Golden Medal,” is still negotiated through “the personal” perspective of Shalamov as the writer responsible for the composition of these texts. His style is consciously less oral (which can be compared to the polyphonic fusion of diverse voices in Solzhenitsyn’s *Архипелаг ГУЛАГ* [*Gulag Archipelago*] (1973)); he mediates the experiences of others by both stating them as such and by representing them through his own aesthetic and ethical engagement with the material. His authorial claims to both primary experience (‘living life’) and secondary representation (‘new prose’) expand to narratives that cannot be completely controlled for their meaning, since his participation in them is often marginal. In his usage of other people’s stories, he enters the contested territory of witnessing and writing, of the truth of testimony and the freedom of literature, and of entitlement and authenticity.

Shalamov appears to enter this contested territory knowingly and willingly in *The Revival of the Larch*. In “Рябokonь” [“Ryabokon’”] (1966), the transitory hero claims his right to tell the story of the prisoner Ryabokon’, whom he met in the hospital, because Ryabokon’ died first:

His [Ryabokon’s] dream came true – he lay down on Peters’ bunk. And I lay down on Ryabokon’s – and I write this short story. Ryabokon was in a hurry to tell, he was in a hurry to tell, and I was in a hurry to remember. We were both experts of death as well as of life. We knew the law of memoirists, their constitutional, their basic law: he is right who writes later, who survives, who swims across a stream of witnesses and delivers his verdict

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against each other like two bulls, with their hands on the table, both red – I thought they were going to fight. I sat in the corner, afraid to move. And I remember how I was walking with dad and he was seething: “Well, you understand, we lived there. This was a terrible, impossible penal servitude. There were few who survived the forced labor, but still – people lived there. These people loved, they were friends... And I cannot not write about that.” [“Budushchemu na proklyatoe proshloe...” Interv’iu s Valentiom Demidovoi.” *Shalamovskii sbornik*, vyp. 4, 2011, 63-4.

<sup>182</sup> Shuman, Amy. *Other People’s Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy*. Urbana: UP Illinois, 2005, 149.

with the appearance of a man who possesses the absolute truth.<sup>183</sup>

In the fifth cycle, the “I” who writes this short story is the survivor who “swam across a stream of witnesses” to arrive in front of his reader – both last and as the last man standing. Although he may not know the “absolute truth,” he delivers his narrative “with the appearance” of a person who does. This person is a writer who takes on “the privilege and authority of [the] witness” in his literary representation of an experience, albeit not always his own. Paradoxically, this experience must be defined by being devoid of both privilege and authority in its lived reality.<sup>184</sup> The writer, in other words, fills this absence of agency with his own control over the text.

## 2. “The Life of Engineer Kipreev”: Telling His Story

Shalamov and Demidov (1908-87) came to know each other in the camp hospital at Debin where Shalamov worked as a paramedic and Demidov as an x-ray technician. In the 1960s, they both became writers of short stories called *Kolyma Tales*.<sup>185</sup> Their friendship was steeped in literature from the beginning, Shalamov immortalized their time together in the recently discovered poem “Ночью (В рентгенкабинете)” [“At Night (In the X-ray Room)”] (1949-50) with a quite pretentious warning: “A workshop for geniuses. No entrance for talents.”<sup>186</sup> A decade and a half later, Shalamov tried to lower Demidov’s literary status – from “genius” to a mere “talent” – because of his disappointment with Demidov’s understanding and writing of their common Kolyma experience. Their conflict, which shows how uncompromising Shalamov became after his explanation of his own poetics in his manifesto, inspired him to write “The Life of Engineer Kipreev” in 1966 about Demidov. This short story, together with their disagreement about literature, ended their friendship already in 1967.<sup>187</sup>

Shalamov searched for Demidov for fifteen years before finding him. In a letter from 1955, he asks a friend from Kolyma: “Where is Demidov?”<sup>188</sup> They found each other in the summer of 1965, after Shalamov’s play *Anna Ivanovna*, which he dedicated to Demidov, was read by a mutual acquaintance.<sup>189</sup> In the play, the dramatic personae informed by Demidov, a doctor, bears the last name Platonov. In real life, Demidov was a physicist and he lived in Ukhta when they reconnected and began a correspondence via mail. They were both writing about their past in the camps and Demidov offered to share a few of his “Kolyma Tales,” although he anticipated

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<sup>183</sup> “Мечта его [Рябокоть] сбылась – он лег на койку Петерса. А на койку Рябокотья лег я – и пишу этот рассказ. Рябокоть торопился рассказывать, он торопился рассказывать, а я торопился запоминать. Мы оба были знатоками и смерти и жизни. Мы знали закон мемуаристов, их конституционный, их основной закон: прав тот, кто пишет позже, переживя, переплывя поток свидетелей, и выносит свой приговор с видом человека, владеющего абсолютной истиной” (2:150).

<sup>184</sup> In this regard, James E. Young’s understanding of the construction of a witness dimension in documentary novels of the Holocaust is especially relevant: “By interweaving into the fictional narrative the words of actual witnesses, perhaps written at the time, these novelists would thus create the texture of fact, suffusing the surrounding text with the privilege and authority of witness.” Young, James E. “Holocaust Documentary Fiction: Novelist as Eyewitness” in *Literature of the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004, 85.

<sup>185</sup> See Demidov’s letter to Shalamov from June 30 1965: “Сейчас пишу серию ‘Колымских рассказов.’ Получается что-то плохо” (6:397). [I’m now writing a series of *Kolyma Tales*. It’s turning out bad somehow.]

<sup>186</sup> “Мастерская для гениев. Вход недоступен талантам.” Shalamov, “Noch’iu (v rentgenkabinete)”: <http://shalamov.ru/library/8/25.html>.

<sup>187</sup> See Demidov’s last letter to Shalamov from August 23 1967 (6:406).

<sup>188</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Dobrovolsky from August 13 1955: “Где Демидов?” (6:122). [Where is Demidov?]

<sup>189</sup> Shalamov relates this event toward the end of “The Life of Engineer Kipreev” (2:165).

that they would not make much of an impression on the author of *Kolyma Tales*.<sup>190</sup> In his reply, Shalamov claimed that Demidov did not see enough of Kolyma to represent it in its fullness,<sup>191</sup> repeated the central assertions of his manifesto (which he had recently composed),<sup>192</sup> and ended the letter with “don’t be angry.”<sup>193</sup> Yet Demidov was angry when he wrote back:

“It is necessary to feel it personally.” And now I’m slamming on the typewriter primarily because my fingers, wrecked in the mine, no longer bend. Or, rather, they never did unbend. And my broken spine hurts in old age. And the silicosis, which I earned while serving as a “dry” driller, makes itself known. I was a “goner” ten times and twice dying of “hypothermia.” With whom are you confusing me, Varlam?<sup>194</sup>

The distraught tone of Demidov’s letter notwithstanding, Shalamov responded that they should have begun their correspondence in this emotional way.<sup>195</sup> However, Shalamov still did not approve of Demidov’s approach to the literary representation of the camps (albeit now reminded of the magnitude of his experience) and questioned his ability to tell his own story:

I’m not confusing you with anyone, you’re one of the few people in Kolyma who showed some resistance to time. But listen to me, you must write simply. I, Georgii Georgievich Demidov, was brought to Kolyma – the rest will be provided by your suffering and

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<sup>190</sup> See Demidov’s letter to Shalamov from July 21 1965: “Пару-тройку ‘Колымских рассказов’ я тебе привезу. Тебя они, вероятно, интересуют больше всего со стороны трактовки темы, которую разрабатываешь и ты. Это не совсем настоящий интерес, но уж ладно” (6:399). [I’ll bring you a couple of *Kolyma Tales*. You’ll probably be interested in them from the perspective of the interpretation of the same theme that you’re developing. That’s not real interest, but it’s okay.]

<sup>191</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Demidov (dated only 1965): “Не скрою, меня покорила фраза твоя о том, что я ‘разрабатываю’ колымскую тему. Я прекратил бы переписку с любым, кто может применить такое выражение к тому, что мы видели. Тебе же на первый раз прощается по трем причинам: 1) нашему с тобой знакомству, 2) твоей биографии, 3) то, что ты не был на Колыме на золоте. Ты приехал уже к концу 1938 года, года исключительного, да и вообще Колыму без золота не понять, не почувствовать. Только разницей опыта можно объяснить это твое неудобное, неподходящее выражение” (6:400). [Frankly, I was jarred by your phrase that I’m “developing” the Kolyma theme. I would have stopped correspondence with anyone who can use such an expression for what we have seen. You are forgiven for the first time for three reasons: 1) our acquaintance, 2) your biography, and 3) the fact that you were not in the Kolyma gold mines. You came toward the end of 1938, an exceptional year, and indeed without the gold mines one cannot understand Kolyma, cannot feel it. Your uncomfortable, inappropriate expression can only be attributed to this difference in experience.]

<sup>192</sup> “Кроме того, пытаюсь поставить вопрос о новой прозе, не прозе документа, а прозе, выстраданной, как документ. Я не пишу воспоминаний и рассказов тоже не пишу. Вернее, пытаюсь написать не рассказ, а то, что было бы не литературой” (ibid.). [In addition, I’m trying to pose the question of new prose, not the prose of a document, but a prose that has been suffered through as a document. I do not write reminiscences and neither do I write short stories. Or rather, I try to write not a short story but something that would be not literature.]

<sup>193</sup> “Надеюсь, что это письмо еще более содержательное, чем предыдущее. И ты непременно поумнеешь. Не сердись” (6:401). [I hope that this letter is even more substantial than the previous one. And you’ll certainly get smarter. Don’t be angry].

<sup>194</sup> “‘Надо лично почувствовать.’ А я вот теперь хлопаю на машинке прежде всего потому, что не сгибаются сломанные в шахте пальцы. Вернее, не разгибаются. И постоянно болит на старости разбитый позвоночник. И дает себя знать заработанный в бытность ‘сухим’ бурильщиком силикоз. Я десять раз ‘доходил’ и дважды умирал от ‘переохлаждения.’ С кем ты меня спутал, Варлам?” (6:402)

<sup>195</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Demidov from July 30 1965: “Дорогой Георгий, вот с такого письма и надо было начинать, а не с балагурства в вопросах, где никаких шуток не может быть” (6:403). [Dear George, well, we should’ve begun with such a letter, and not with chitchats about matters in which no jokes are allowed.]

talent.<sup>196</sup>

Despite correspondence and meetings, the artistic differences between Shalamov and Demidov were irreconcilable. When Demidov rejected the beginning so generously offered to him – “I, Georgii Georgievich Demidov, was brought to Kolyma...” – Shalamov took his story for himself. Unlike in the earlier “Иван Фёдорович” [“Ivan Fedorovich”] (1962) from *The Left Bank*, where he is a secondary character called Georgii Georgievich Demidov,<sup>197</sup> his new fictional last name (he lacks a first name and a patronymic) recalls ‘кипрей’ [‘fireweed’], which also appears in Shalamov’s works as ‘иван-чай’ – the flower of forgetting.<sup>198</sup> While he had thought Demidov had died in Kolyma when he wrote “Ivan Fedorovich,” he knew his friend was alive when he wrote “The Life of Engineer Kipreev.”<sup>199</sup> His new moniker suggests forgetfulness, but the short story is about remembering, a specific type of remembrance: what happens when one remembers the life of someone else?

The sentence “I, Georgii Georgievich Demidov, was brought to Kolyma...” is missing from Shalamov’s literary appropriation of Demidov’s experiences in the camps: the ‘I’ of the short story is not Kipreev but the transitory hero who also functions as its first-person narrator. Instead, other – more poignant and memorable – phrases by Demidov appear in the text and from Kipreev’s mouth: comparisons of Kolyma with “чудная планета” [“strange planet”]<sup>200</sup> and as “Освенцим без печей” [“Auschwitz without ovens”]. Although the short story contains verifiable events from Demidov’s camp biography, Shalamov rearranged Kipreev’s statements according to a fictional timeline; thus, this narrative ‘based on a true story’ is both true and not.<sup>201</sup> Kipreev compares Kolyma to Auschwitz in 1943 when limited, if any, information about

<sup>196</sup> “Ни с кем я тебя не спутал, ты один из немногих людей на Колыме, которые оказали какое-то сопротивление времени. Но послушай меня, надо написать просто. Я, Георгий Георгиевич Демидов, был привезен на Колыму – остальное даст выстраданность и талант” (6:403)

<sup>197</sup> “Это был харьковский физик-атомщик, инженер Георгий Георгиевич Демидов – литерник с пятилетним сроком – не то ‘аса,’ не то что-то в этом роде” (1:251). [It was the nuclear physicist, the engineer Georgii Demidov – with a letter-combination in his five-year sentence, not “Anti-Soviet Agitation,” not something like that.]

<sup>198</sup> See the short story “The Glove” (1972): “На развалинах Серпантинки процвел иван-чай – цветок пожара, забвения, враг архивов и человеческой памяти” (2:283). [On the ruins of Serpantinka the willow-herb blossomed – the flower of fire, of oblivion, and enemy of the archives and human memory.] Shalamov’s fifth poetry cycle is entitled *Kипрей* [Fireweed] and can in many ways be read as a companion text to the fifth prose cycle.

<sup>199</sup> “[Шаламов] был уверен, что папа на Колыме погиб. А папа знал, что Шаламов в Москве, но не искал ни с кем контакта.” [(Shalamov) was convinced that my dad was killed in Kolyma. But dad knew that Shalamov in Moscow, but he did not seek contact with anyone.] “Budushchemu na proklyatoe proshloe,” 63.

<sup>200</sup> See Demidov, Georgii. *Chudnaia Planeta. Rasskazy. Vospominaia ob ottse*. Moskva: Vozvrashchenie, 2008.

<sup>201</sup> See Esipov’s comment: “В рассказе есть небольшая доля художественного вымысла. С учетом реальных обстоятельств колымского дела Г. Г. Демидова есть основания считать, что ключевые фразы рассказа, вложенные Шаламовым в уста Кипреева (Демидова): ‘Колыма – это Освенцим без печей’ и ‘Американских обносок носить не буду,’ – были высказаны героем не в описываемой обстановке, а скорее во время встреч и бесед Шаламова и Демидова в лагерной больнице, либо позже, в Москве.” [There is a small portion of fiction in the short story. Taking into account the actual circumstances of the Kolyma case of G. G. Demidov, there is reason to assume that the key phrases of the short story, embedded by Shalamov in the mouth of Kipreev (Demidov): “Kolyma is Auschwitz without ovens” and “I will not wear American castoffs,” were expressed by him not in the situations described, but rather during Shalamov’s and Demidov’s meetings and discussions in the camp hospital, or later, in Moscow.] Shalamov. *Kolymskie rasskazy*. Sankt Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2013. Cited from the electronic version: <http://shalamov.ru/research/249/>.

the Nazi death camps had reached the inmates in the Soviet concentration camps.<sup>202</sup> Historical truth seems secondary to the ethical effect and aesthetic impression Shalamov wanted to create.

All the years mentioned in the short story occur beyond Kipreev's time in Kolyma;<sup>203</sup> time thus becomes an unreliable point of reference. The event, after which Kipreev is arrested a second time for having said "Kolyma is Auschwitz without ovens" together with another memorable phrase, appears to take place in 1943.<sup>204</sup> He creates his first invention, the revival of burned out electric light bulbs, inspired by the hope for a reduced sentence or early release. The invention is a success. However, when the authorities claim their prizes for Kipreev's work, he is not even mentioned by name. They have another reward in mind, which situates the event during World War II – a pair of leather boots and a suit – which were gifts to the Soviet Union from the United States of America. At the official ceremony, Kipreev rejects the gift: "The engineer went to the table brightly lit by lamps – his lamps – and took the box from the hands of the director of Dalstroi. Kipreev said distinctly and loudly: 'I will not wear American castoffs,' and put the box on the table."<sup>205</sup>

The narrator, who thus far has been in control of the narrative and its meaning, admits that he does not know the article for Kipreev's new crime:

Right then and there Kipreev was arrested and sentenced to an additional eight years according to article – which one, I do not know, but it doesn't matter in Kolyma and nobody cares. Then again, what is the article for refusing American gifts? Not only that, not only that. In the conclusion to Kipreev's new "case," the investigator wrote: he said that Kolyma is Auschwitz without ovens.<sup>206</sup>

Instead of becoming an unreliable narrator, he claims that his lack of definitive information has no significance in Kolyma and thus regains control of the short story. Demidov received another eight years in the camps for the expression "Kolyma is Auschwitz without ovens" in 1946, a vital difference between his life and the "life" of Kipreev, but another rearrangement of events and years appears more ahistorical and perplexing. Whereas Shalamov and Demidov met in 1948, the beginning of a friendship between Kipreev and the narrator is set in 1945.<sup>207</sup> The first "we" in the short story introduces a dialogue between them that further destabilizes historical time:

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<sup>202</sup> "После 1945 г. в лагерях появилось выражение 'Освенцим без печей.' Слово 'Колыма' стало символом Гулага." [After 1945, the expression "Auschwitz without ovens" appeared in the camps. The word "Kolyma" became a symbol of the Gulag.] Thun-Hohenstein, Franziska. "Poetik der Unerbittlichkeit. Varlam Shalamov: Leben und Werk" in *Osteuropa* 57, vol. 6, June 2007, 35-52. Cited from the Russian translation: <http://shalamov.ru/research/61/2.html>.

<sup>203</sup> Only three years are mentioned: 1938 (2:153), 1953 (2:160), and 1964 (2:164).

<sup>204</sup> Since Kipreev was brought to Kolyma in 1938 with a five-year sentence, it would make sense if this event took place in 1943 as prisoners were often sentenced a second time at the end of their first. Shalamov was also sentenced a second time in 1943 for another ten years, although his first five-year sentence ended in 1942.

<sup>205</sup> "Инженер вышел к столу, ярко освещенному лампами, – его лампами, – и взял коробку из рук директора Дальстроя. Кипреев выговорил раздельно и громко: 'Американских обносков я носить не буду,' – и положил коробку на стол" (2:158).

<sup>206</sup> "Тут же Кипреев был арестован и получил восемь лет дополнительного срока по статье – какой, я не знаю, да это и не имеет никакого значения на Колыме, никого не интересует. Впрочем, какая статья за отказ от американских подарков? Не только, не только. В заключении следователя по новому 'делу' Кипреева сказано: говорил, что Колыма – это Освенцим без печей" (2:158).

<sup>207</sup> See Esipov's comment: "В рассказе несколько смещена дата встречи Шаламова и Демидова в лагерной больнице – она состоялась не в 1945-м, а в 1948 г." [In the short story, the date for the meeting between



Here we met Hiroshima.

- There it is – the bomb, that’s what we were working on in Kharkov.
- Forrestal’s suicide. The flow of contemptuous telegrams.
- You know what this is about? For the Western intellectual, the decision to drop the atomic bomb is very problematic, very difficult. Psychological depression, madness, suicide is the price the Western intellectual must pay for such decisions. Our Forrestal would not go mad. How many good people have you met in your life? Real people, who you would like to emulate, to serve?
- Now I recall: the engineer-wrecker Miller and five other people.
- That’s a lot.
- The assembly signed the protocol about genocide.
- Genocide? That sounds like a condiment, but with what is it eaten?
- We signed the Convention. Of course, 1937 wasn’t genocide. That was the destruction of the enemies of the people. We may sign the Convention.
- The regime is tightening all the screws. We cannot remain silent. As in the primer: “We are not slaves. Slaves we are not.” We’ve got do something, prove it to ourselves.
- To oneself one proves only one’s own stupidity. To live, to survive – that is the task. And not to fall apart... Life is more serious than you think. (2:159)<sup>208</sup>

This dialogue seems to be an exchange between two people at one point in time. However, its mixture of historical, cultural, and personal references indicates that such an interpretation might be unsatisfactory. The fragmented structure and various topics suggest that this dialogue is a conflation of multiple conversations, similar to how the short story conflates historical events. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima took place in 1945, whereas the suicide of James Forrestal happened in 1949.<sup>209</sup> Moreover, the dialogue does not indicate who – Kipreev or the narrator – says what. The biographies of Demidov and Shalamov are necessary for this disambiguation. The first line refers to work on the atomic bomb in Kharkov and thus belongs to Kipreev (Demidov was a disciple of the Soviet physicist Lev Landau in the 1930s). It is also Kipreev who asks the narrator how many good people he met in his life, since the person named in the answer, “the engineer-wrecker Miller and five more,” appears again later in the cycle.<sup>210</sup> Kipreev’s short

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Shalamov and Demidov in the camp hospital was somewhat changed – it took place not in 1945 but in 1948.] Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazy*, cited from the electronic version: <http://shalamov.ru/research/249/>.

<sup>208</sup> “Здесь мы встретили Хиросиму. – Вот она – бомба, это то, чем мы занимались в Харькове. – Самоубийство Форрестала. Поток издевательских телеграмм. – Ты знаешь, в чем дело? Для западного интеллигента принимать решение сбросить атомную бомбу очень сложно, очень тяжело. Депрессия психическая, сумасшествие, самоубийство – вот цена, какую платит за такие решения западный интеллигент. Наш Форрестал не сошел бы с ума. Сколько встречал ты хороших людей в жизни? Настоящих, которым хотелось бы подражать, служить? – Сейчас вспомню: инженер-вредитель Миллер и еще человек пять. – Это очень много. – Ассамблея подписала протокол о геноциде. – Геноцид? С чем его сдят? – Мы подписали конвенцию. Конечно, тридцать седьмой год – это не геноцид. Это истребление врагов народа. Можно подписывать конвенцию. – Режим закручивают на все винты. Мы не должны молчать. Как в букваре: ‘Мы не рабы. Рабы не мы.’ Мы должны сделать что-то, доказать самим себе. – Самим себе доказывают только собственную глупость. Жить, выжить – вот задача. И не сорваться... Жизнь более серьезна, чем ты думаешь” (2:159).

<sup>209</sup> See Esipov’s comment in *ibid*.

<sup>210</sup> Pavel Petrovich Miller, whom Shalamov knew during his first sentence in the northern Urals, appears far from a “good person” in *The Antinovel Vishera*: “Все это были фокусы Миллера – бывшего начальника Самарского военного строительства, осужденного на 10 лет за вредительство, – вполне в духе Миллера, хитрожопого

yet evocative response – “that’s a lot” – is central to the narrative as it suggests that the narrator misunderstands Kipreev’s question and perhaps does not yet understand what a ‘good person’ is. In 1962, Shalamov wrote that he considered Demidov the “most worthy person” he had met in his life.<sup>211</sup> In this dialogue, Kipreev counters the narrator’s vexed “we cannot keep silent” with a more measured plan of action: “to live, to survive.” “Life is more serious than you think,” he adds and echoes the framing device used in the narrative. The short story begins and ends with the narrator’s reflections on their shared past;<sup>212</sup> he first explains how Kipreev changed his understanding of the relationship between life and death:

For many years, I thought that death was a form of life, and, reassured by the oscillation of this judgment, I drew up a formula for the active defense of my existence on this bitter earth. I thought that a person can only consider himself a person when he at any moment with his whole body feels ready to commit suicide, ready to intervene himself in his own life. It is this consciousness that gives the will to life. I checked myself several times and, feeling the force of death, remained alive. Much later I realized that I just built myself a shelter, I avoided the question, because in the decisive moment I won’t be like I am now, when life and death is not like now, when life and death is a volitional game. I’ll get weak, I’ll change, I’ll cheat on myself. I never thought about death, but I felt that my previous decision needed another answer, that the promise to myself, the vows of my youth, were too naïve and very conditional. The story of the engineer Kipreev convinced me of this.<sup>213</sup>

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до мозга костей, хитрившего всю жизнь, но не перехитрившего власть” (4:189). [All these were tricks of Miller, the former head of the Samara military construction, sentenced to 10 years for sabotage, quite in the spirit of Miller, a smart-ass to the bone, who was sly his whole life, but didn’t outsmart the authorities.] Later in *The Revival of the Larch*, in “Вечерняя молитва” [“Evening Prayer”] (1967), Miller lacks moral sensitivity: “Начальник производственного лагеря Павел Петрович Миллер знал Финдикаки по тюрьме. И хотя сам Миллер выдержал и конвейеры и плюхи и получил десять лет, он как-то безразлично относился к проступку Виктора Петровича. Сам же Виктор Петрович мучился своим предательством ужасно” (2:250). [Pavel Petrovich Miller, the head of the production camp, knew Findikaki since prison. Although Miller himself endured both conveyors and beatings and got years, he was somehow indifferent to Viktor Petrovich’s misdemeanor. Viktor Petrovich himself suffered terribly because of his betrayal.]

<sup>211</sup> See Shalamov’s “Двадцатые годы” [“The 1920s”] (1962): “Что же касается моих многих наблюдений, то самым умным и самым достойным человеком, встреченным мной в жизни, был некто Демидов, харьковский физик. Узкие в щелочку глаза, невысокий лоб с множеством складок, скошенный подбородок...” (4:356). [As for my many observations, the most intelligent and the worthiest person that I encountered in my life was a certain Demidov, a physicist from Kharkov. With narrow eyes, low forehead with a lot of wrinkles, a receding chin...]

<sup>212</sup> Here, I disagree with Sarah Young who considers Kipreev to be the “primary consciousness” of the short story: “The real-life engineer Georgii Georgievich Demidov, a secondary figure in ‘Ivan Fedorovich,’ undergoes a change of identity when he becomes the ‘focalizer,’ or primary consciousness through which the narrative is filtered, of ‘Zhitie inzhenera Kipreeva’...” Young, Sarah J. “Recalling the Dead: Repetition, Identity, and the Witness in Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolymskie rasskazy*” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (SUMMER 2011), 357-8.

<sup>213</sup> “Много лет я думал, что смерть есть форма жизни, и, успокоенный зыбкостью суждения, я вырабатывал формулу активной защиты своего существования на горестной этой земле. Я думал, что человек тогда может считать себя человеком, когда в любой момент всем своим телом чувствует, что он готов покончить с собой, готов вмешаться сам в собственное свое житие. Это сознание и дает волю на жизнь. Я проверял себя многократно и, чувствуя силу на смерть, оставался жить. Много позже я понял, что я просто построил себе убежище, ушел от вопроса, ибо в момент решения я не буду таким, как сейчас, когда жизнь и смерть – волевая игра. Я ослабею, изменюсь, изменю себе. Я не стал думать о смерти, но почувствовал, что прежнее решение нуждается в каком-то другом ответе, что обещание самому себе, клятвы юности слишком наивны и очень условны. В этом убедила меня история инженера Кипреева” (2:152-3).

“The story of engineer Kipreev” overwrites this beginning: unlike the narrator, who envisioned the ultimate form of human resistance in the will to death, Kipreev bears witness to not only physical strength, but also moral tenacity through his will to life. The prisoner Kipreev endures – violence, slave labor, hunger, and cold – but, more importantly, the good person Kipreev endures. Life is indeed too “serious” to abandon with suicide, and each event in the narrative (albeit ahistorical or fragmented) testifies to this moral advantage of Kipreev. In the ending, the narrator is unable to change Kipreev in the same fundamental way that Kipreev changed his perception of life and death. The end overwrites the previous narrative, alters Shalamov’s search for Demidov during fifteen years – “We search for each other little, and fate takes our lives into its own hands”<sup>214</sup> – and omits a discussion of literature from their reunion. Nonetheless, reconciliation between the former friends appears unattainable:

I met up with the engineer Kipreev.

– I won’t be a scientist. Just a regular engineer. To return disenfranchised, after I’ve fallen behind – all my co-workers, my classmates have already been laureates for a long time.

– What nonsense.

– No, not nonsense. I find it easier to breathe in the north. Until my retirement, I’ll breathe easier.<sup>215</sup>

The narrator dismisses Kipreev’s modest plans as “nonsense,” but the last word still belongs to Kipreev. His correction of the narrator shows that, as in the beginning, Kipreev holds an elusive yet pervasive power to embody difference. Thus, he is less a representation of Demidov and more Shalamov’s attempt at achieving a revival for the man who attained the ultimate difference: he remained a good person in the camps. The exclusive status of Kipreev as a good person permeates the narrative and is reflected in the genre included in its title: ‘жизне’ [*vita*], the Russian term for hagiography, written accounts of the lives of saints and martyrs for the Christian faith. Kipreev’s *vita* is devoid of religious connotations, yet faithful to the genre of hagiography in that it chronicles the suffering and endeavors of one good person.<sup>216</sup> In many ways, Shalamov’s narration about the engineer turned prisoner can be interpreted through the meaning of the Greek word for martyr, μάρτυς – ‘witness.’ Kipreev is not only a witness to Kolyma but also a witness to his own moral clarity that, although threatened by the violence and dehumanization of the camps, remains his distinguishing trait. Unlike the narrator, who was arrested in 1937, Kipreev was arrested in 1938 and beaten during his interrogation:

I didn’t betray anyone in my life, I didn’t sell out. But I don’t know how I would’ve behaved if I’d been beaten. I went through all my investigations in the most successful manner: no beating, no method number three. <...> And he survived this beating,

<sup>214</sup> “Мы мало ищем друг друга, и судьба берет наши жизни в свои руки” (2:165).

<sup>215</sup> “Я повиделся с инженером Кипреевым. – Ученым я уже не буду. Рядовой инженер – так. Вернуться бесправным, отставшим – все мои сослуживцы, сокурсники давно лауреаты. – Что за чушь. – Нет, не чушь. Мне легче дышится на Севере. До пенсии будет легче дышаться” (2:166)

<sup>216</sup> “The use of the term *Zhiznie*, traditionally used in hagiography, transforms Demidov-Kipreev’s tribulations into those of a saint <...>. The stoically endured trials of Demidov-Kipreev, a function not of divine planning but of pointless suffering and petty injustice (demonstrated in ‘Ivan Fedorovich’ by the mindless and indiscriminate victimization perpetrated by the eponymous director of Dalstroi and his wife), suggest that in a godless world of ubiquitous pain and misery, candidacy for sainthood is rendered meaningless by its universality. All that is to be gained from endurance is further suffering.” Ibid., 358.

throwing himself at the investigator and, beaten up, he was put in solitary confinement. But the investigators easily attained the necessary signatures from Kipreev: they threatened him with the arrest of his wife and Kipreev signed. And this terrible moral blow Kipreev carried with him through his whole life.<sup>217</sup>

Kipreev does not suffer because of the violence inflicted against him – he even resists it – but rather because of the “terrible moral blow” of having signed the interrogation documents after it. This decisive moment is then repeated, and thus undergoes a ‘revival,’ as if the narrator attempts to come to terms himself with what this experience means for Kipreev as a person and for his subsequent experience in the camps: “Kipreev was beaten, thrown into solitary confinement. *Everything began again from the beginning.* <...> Kipreev signed. They threatened him with the arrest of his wife.”<sup>218</sup> The narrator locates the meaning of this first moral blow in the difference between Kipreev’s internal suffering and the apathetic response of others who surrendered to the violence in prison: “By the way, it was only Kipreev who thought his action was shameful. Beside him on the bunks laid those who had also signed and slandered others. They laid there without dying.”<sup>219</sup> Unlike others, Kipreev enters the world of the camps with a heightened ethical response to his own actions. In Kolyma, his unshakable dedication to remain himself, as an individual and as an engineer, shape the actions he takes even though they do not bring the results he hopes for.

Kipreev instigates and oversees the reconstruction of burned out light bulbs with the hope of freedom; instead, his moral objection to the unanticipated and humiliating reward for it brings him a second sentence. With another eight years looming large over his future, Kipreev takes another action and performs his own death:

Kipreev met this second sentence calmly. He knew what he was in for when he refused the American gifts. But he did take some precautions concerning his private safety. These were the precautions: Kipreev asked an acquaintance to write a letter to his wife on the mainland and tell her that he, Kipreev, had died. And he himself stopped writing letters.<sup>220</sup>

Prompted by a moral responsibility toward his family, Kipreev disappears further into the world of the camps. He faces physical challenges during excruciating forced labor and is eventually brought to the camp hospital. There he is placed in charge of the x-ray machine, which requires constant observation and technical support, yet knows that this moment of reprieve is temporary. He does not think about himself when he trains the criminal prisoner who will take over his

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<sup>217</sup> “Я никого в жизни не предал, не продал. Но я не знаю, как бы держался, если бы меня били. Я прошел все свои следствия удачейшим образом – без битья, без метода номер три. <...> И он выдержал это битье, кинувшись на следователя, и, избитый, посажен в карцер. Но нужной подписи следователя легко добились у Кипреева: его припугнули арестом жены, и Кипреев подписал. Вот этот страшный нравственный удар Кипреев пронес сквозь всю жизнь” (2:153).

<sup>218</sup> “Кипреев был избит, брошен в карцер. *Все начиналось сначала.* <...> Кипреев подписал. Угрожали арестом жены” (2:154; emphasis added).

<sup>219</sup> “Впрочем, только Кипрееву его действие казалось позорным. Рядом с ним на нарах лежали также подписавшие, оклеветавшие. Лежали и не умирали” (2:154).

<sup>220</sup> “Этот второй срок Кипреев встретил спокойно. Он понимал, на что идет, отказываясь от американских подарков. Но кое-какие меры личной безопасности инженер Кипреев принял. Меры были вот какие. Кипреев попросил знакомого написать письмо жене на материк, что он, Кипреев, умер. И перестал писать письма сам” (2:158).

position: “As soon as Rogov learned the ropes – this was a profession for life – Kipreev would be sent to Berlag, a camp for repeat offenders where the prisoners had numbers instead of names. Kipreev understood this and wasn’t planning to contradict fate. He taught Rogov without thinking about himself.”<sup>221</sup> After his removal to another, more ominous, camp, the x-ray machine breaks and he is brought back. Yet he refuses to hope again as he did before. He is almost executed, but receives a second chance at life because of the intervention of friends in the camp hospital. When Kipreev suffers from an actual life-threatening illness while in the hospital – mastoiditis – he is provided an operation, and is thus saved again, but refuses to hope:

Kipreev realized that he could hope no longer, that he won’t be allowed to stay in the hospital for even an extra hour. The camp where the prisoners had numbers instead of names was waiting for him, where they’d go to work in rows of five, elbows to elbows, where thirty dogs surrounded a column of people, when they were herded. In this last hopelessness Kipreev stayed true to himself. When the head of the department ordered for the patient who had been operated for mastoiditis, a serious operation, a special order, that is, an improved, nutritional diet, Kipreev refused and said that in this department with three hundred patients there are those who are sicker than him and are more entitled to a special order. And Kipreev was taken away.<sup>222</sup>

Even after his operation, while anticipating a transfer to the frightening camp from which he returned, Kipreev remains a witness to his own moral tenacity: he rejects the special food ration assigned to such severely ill patients as himself for the benefit of someone else. The actions of Kipreev are not simply selfless; they are the conscious acts of a good person.

The narrator also benefitted from Kipreev’s moral stance, especially in the affirmation of a life of suffering over a death by choice, and he presents himself as the keeper of his story. He has kept something else from Kipreev as well: the mirror that Kipreev made for him as a part of his many scientific experiments and innovations in the camp hospital where they knew each other. “Mirrors don’t keep memories,”<sup>223</sup> the narrator laments as he prefaces the meaning of this mirror for himself and for the short story:

The mirror is with me. This is not an amulet. I don’t know if the mirror brings happiness. Maybe the mirror attracts the rays of evil, reflects the rays of evil, and won’t let me dissolve into the flow of humans in which nobody but me knows Kolyma and nobody knows the engineer Kipreev.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> “Как только Рогов научился бы делу – это была профессия на всю жизнь, – Кипреева послали бы в Берлаг, номерной лагерь для рецидивистов. Все это Кипреев понимал и не собирался противоречить судьбе. Он учил Рогова, не думая о себе” (2:160).

<sup>222</sup> “Кипреев понял, что надеяться больше нельзя, что в больнице он оставлен не будет ни на один лишний час. Ждал его номерной лагерь, где на работу ходили строем по пять, локти в локти, где по тридцать собак окружали колонну людей, когда их гоняли. В этой безнадежности последней Кипреев не изменил себе. Когда заведующий отделением выписал больному с операцией мастоидита, серьезной операцией, заключенному-инженеру спецзаказ, то есть диетическое питание, улучшенное питание, Кипреев отказался, заявив, что в отделении на триста человек есть больные тяжелее его, с большим правом на спецзаказ. И Кипреева увезли” (2:165).

<sup>223</sup> “Зеркала не хранят воспоминаний” (2:159).

<sup>224</sup> “Зеркало со мной. Это не амулет. Приносит ли это зеркало счастье – не знаю. Может быть, зеркало привлекает лучи зла, отражает лучи зла, не дает мне раствориться в человеческом потоке, где никто, кроме меня, не знает Колымы и не знает инженера Кипреева” (2:160).

The abilities of this mirror appear as ambiguous and unstable as the representation of historical time within the narrative. As the story of Kipreev captivates the narrator, so the narrator is a captive of the mirror. Yet the mirror cannot tell what it has seen and is thus unable to witness the past; additionally, in it, he can only see a reflection of himself. It is the exchange of this gift, which was brought from Kolyma much like the larch twig in the fifth cycle's concluding short story, from its inventor to its owner that connects the past with the present. Through the short story, this relationship is inverted: Kipreev, the 'owner' of his story, becomes an object of reflection for the narrator, the inventor of "The Life of Engineer Kipreev." Although he still sees himself within the text, and appears in the beginning, the middle (through the dialogue), and the end, he disappears when the *vita* of Kipreev is narrated. This mirror can only face one way.

Yet the literary text, unlike a mirror, can keep memories. A literary text also has the ability to refracture reality and reorganize a human life. Kipreev, unlike Demidov, is not a writer although several powerful statements worthy of a writer are attributed to him. The narrator fears that Kipreev will be forgotten if he does not write about him; in the end, the narrator is the only writer in the short story. Albeit differentiated from the good person that Kipreev was and remained, the narrator is the one who delivers a 'based on a true story' narrative and makes it a truth of literature. His narrative appears to be bifunctional – being both testimony and art – in the way it utilizes the idealizing dimension in hagiography and echoes the martyr through a witness to the camps. As many other texts that allude to hagiography, Shalamov's narrator "sacrifices historical accuracy" and takes great liberties with facts borrowed from Demidov's life.<sup>225</sup> However, a reading of "The Life of Kipreev" as either testimony or a work of art becomes complicated when we know that a real-life individual and an actual friendship, albeit arduous, inspired Shalamov to write it. The testimonial and literary dimensions of this narrative become both suspended and unpredictable once we know the 'other' story. As a text, this short story bears witness to a crisis within both these modes of inscription for Shalamov. The man who remained a good person within the camps and the professional writer who writes about the camps inhabits the same ambivalent text, unlike Shalamov and Demidov who could not coexist within the larger text of "Kolyma Tales."

The placement of "The Life of Engineer Kipreev" in the cycle also indicates the tension between the writing of testimony and the writing of literature for Shalamov. It is placed after "Ryabokon," in which the narrator states his prerogative for writing the story of the eponymous prisoner he met in the hospital: "His [Ryabokon's] dream came true – he lay down on Peters' bunk. And I lay down on Ryabokon's – and I write this short story."<sup>226</sup> In the short story that follows, the transitory hero turned narrator expands his claims to the story of Kipreev. Yet this story has repercussions not only for the narrator, whom he profoundly impacted through his moral tenacity, but also for the next short story. "The Life of Engineer Kipreev" is followed by

<sup>225</sup> Hagiography is about idealization, not representation; see, for example, the following observation about *The Life of Anthony*: "Anthony is chosen as an *exemplum* for imitation, rather than as the model of an authentic portrait. Like many biographers before him and many hagiographers after him, Athanasios is ready to sacrifice historical accuracy in order to promote the higher truth that is his real message. He embodies his own ideal of the ascetical life in the figure of Anthony, as Plato had embodied his own philosophical ideal in the figure of Socrates. <...> So, instead of a dry theoretical treatise, we get an engaging narrative with a charismatic hero. What the historical Anthony was really like, we shall never know." Hägg, Tomas. "The Life of St Anthony between Biography and Hagiography" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography: Volume 2*. Ed. Efthymiades, Stephanos. Surrey, England & Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2014, 28. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>226</sup> "Мечта его [Рябокonia] сбылась – он лег на койку Петерса. А на койку Рябокonia лег я – и пишу этот рассказ" (2:150).

“Боль” [“Pain”] (1967), which appears fictional in its content and deliberately literary in its form: the central character, Shelgunov, is enchanted by the criminals and agrees to write letters for one of them to this criminal’s wife. The criminal is eventually executed and Shelgunov informs the wife of this death. However, Shelgunov’s letters were sent to his own wife who, after reading about his death, commits suicide: “After you were shot, she threw herself under a train. Just not where Anna Karenina did it, but in Rastorguevo. She put her head under the wheels. Her head was cut off smooth, clean.”<sup>227</sup> Thus, Kipreev’s performance of his own death in a letter to his wife after his second sentence is transformed in the following text and receives a tragic consequence. The beginning of “Pain” warns that this type of disastrous transformation of the same events occur in the “concave mirror” that is the criminal world:

There is a banal phrase: history repeats itself, the first time as a tragedy and the second time as a farce. No. There is also a third reflection of the same events, of the same scene, reflected in the concave mirror of the underworld. The plot is unimaginable and yet it is real, it truly exists and lives next to us.<sup>228</sup>

The mirror, a detail with possibly menacing qualities in “The Life of Engineer Kipreev,” resounds in “Pain” through the mirror world of the criminals and the plot that is at once “real” and “unimaginable.” In a similar way, Kipreev’s comparison of Kolyma as “Auschwitz without ovens” reappears in the next short story, and as the mirror, the potential for evil has become an actuality: “It was necessary to live, and yet on the ships, as on the carts for the gas ovens of Auschwitz, they transported and transported across the sea, steamer after steamer, prison dispatch after prison dispatch.”<sup>229</sup> The placement of “The Life of Engineer Kipreev” after a text that can be read as factual (“Ryabokon”) and before one that must be interpreted as fictional (“Pain”) suggests that this narrative inhabits a borderline between them: where the *vita* of the witness/martyr becomes a story for the writer.

### 3. “The Golden Medal”: Telling Her Story

Women are scarce in *Kolyma Tales*. Women were scarce in Kolyma too, and Shalamov blamed their absence in his life on the camps as point 39 out of 46 on his list “Что я видел и понял в лагере” [“What I Saw and Understood in the Camps”] (1961) declares: “Women did not play a big role in my life – the camp is the cause for this.”<sup>230</sup> For this reason, the short story “The Golden Medal” is exceptional: it narrates the fates of two women, Natalia Klimova (1885-1918) and her daughter Natalia Stolyarova (1912-84). Both of Shalamov’s heroines were exceptional women intrinsically linked to Russian history in the twentieth century. Klimova was a terrorist active in the Socialist Revolutionary Party and bombed the summerhouse of Petr Stolypin in 1906; she was sentenced to death and wrote the famous “Письмо перед казнью” [“Letter

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<sup>227</sup> “После того как тебя расстреляли, она бросилась под поезд. Только не там, где Анна Каренина, а в Расторгуеве. Положила голову под колеса. Голову ровно, чисто отрезало” (2:171).

<sup>228</sup> “Есть банальная фраза: история повторяется дважды – первый раз как трагедия, второй раз как фарс. Нет. Есть еще третье отражение тех же событий, того же сюжета, отражение в вогнутом зеркале подземного мира. Сюжет невообразим и все же реален, существует взаправду, живет рядом с нами” (2:166).

<sup>229</sup> “Надо было жить, а на кораблях, как на тележках для газовых печей Освенцима, везли и везли за море пароход за пароходом, этап за этапом” (2:166-7).

<sup>230</sup> “Женщины в моей жизни не играли большой роли – лагерь тому причиной” (4:627).

before the Execution”] (1906);<sup>231</sup> her sentence was commuted to prison in 1907. She escaped in 1909 and lived the rest of her life in exile before her death in Paris. Born in emigration, Stolyarova returned to the Soviet Union in 1934, the same year she graduated from the Sorbonne; she was arrested in 1937 and spent eight years in the camps. She later became the secretary of Ilya Ehrenburg (whom she knew as a child in Paris) and was active in dissident circles in Moscow.<sup>232</sup> She helped Solzhenitsyn smuggle *The Gulag Archipelago* out of the Soviet Union<sup>233</sup> and perhaps she did the same with *Kolyma Tales*.<sup>234</sup> Yet she seems to have excluded “The Golden Medal” from the *tamizdat* version of *The Revival of the Larch*.<sup>235</sup> Why did Stolyarova object to this short story and what can this tell us about Shalamov’s late style?

Solzhenitsyn compared his ‘bomb’ of *The Gulag Archipelago* sent by Stolyarova to the bomb Klimova carried some sixty years earlier in Saint Petersburg.<sup>236</sup> Comparing the actions of mother and daughter, he saw “all the forces of a healthy Russia united.”<sup>237</sup> Shalamov approached these two women in a similarly idealized way. In his letter to Stolyarova from 1965, he apologizes for his “bold” idea to write about her mother yet considers there to be “physical connections” between her and her mother as well as between him and her mother:

It was far too bold of me to offer to write a story about your mother. The story of our fathers – and not because this is not close to home for me. On the contrary, not only has the theme been close to me from my youth, from my early childhood, but also the physical hero, the physical connections are the same – for you and for me?<sup>238</sup>

Shalamov wanted to write “our fathers’ story” (a citation from Pasternak’s poem “1905”), but what he wrote is rather ‘our mothers’ story.’ “The Golden Medal” is the longest short story in *The Revival of the Larch* – around 30 pages – and one of the longest in *Kolyma Tales*. The main part (22 pages) of it is devoted to Klimova, but the ending belongs to Stolyarova (8 pages). The short story is connected through the object indicated in its title: the golden medal. It begins with

<sup>231</sup> Klimova’s letter was re-published in 2006 online by the journal *Skepsis*: [http://scepsis.net/library/id\\_808.html](http://scepsis.net/library/id_808.html).

<sup>232</sup> See Neystadt, Ilya. “Dve Natashi.” (Israel, 2008): <http://www.neystadt.org/ilya/Dve%20Natashi.pdf>.

<sup>233</sup> See Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “Natalia Ivanovna Stolyarova” in *Vestnik RXD*, vol. 160 (3), 1990, 167-86.

<sup>234</sup> See, for example, the comment by Liliana Lungina: “Это именно [Н. И. Столярова], не без моей подсказки, организовала переправку рукописей Шаламова с помощью своих французских друзей.” [It was exactly (N. I. Stolyarova) who, not without my hints, organized the transfer of Shalamov’s manuscripts with the help of her French friends.] Nich, Dmitrii. *Varlam Shalamov v svidetel’stvakh sovremennikov. Sbornik. Lichnoe izdanie*, 2013 (PDF; izdanie chetvertoe), 313.

<sup>235</sup> “В отношениях Шаламова со Столяровой есть какая-то тайна, которую я не могу разгадать за отсутствием материала. Рассказ ‘Золотая медаль’ появляется в корпусе КР только в советском издании, следовательно, в списки, передававшиеся на Запад, он не включался. Можно объяснить это нежеланием Шаламова править рассказ в соответствии с претензиями Столяровой и обижать ее публикацией того, что вызвало ее гнев.” [In the relationship between Shalamov and Stolyarova there is some mystery that I cannot unravel due to the absence of materials. The short story “The Golden Medal” appears in the corpus of КТ only in the Soviet edition, therefore, it is not included in the lists transmitted to the West. It is possible to explain this by Shalamov’s reluctance to edit the short story in accordance with the complaints of Stolyarova and to hurt her by publishing that which caused her anger.] Nich, Dmitrii. *Moskovskii rasskaz. Zhisneopisanie Varlama Shalamova, 1960-80 gody. Lichnoe izdanie*, 2011 (PDF), 115.

<sup>236</sup> See Solzhenitsyn, “Natalia Ivanovna Stolyarova,” 180-3.

<sup>237</sup> “Все силы здоровой России вот уже соединились, вот уже действуют заодно.” [All the forces of a healthy Russia have already merged and already operate in concert.] Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> “Было чересчур смело с моей стороны предложить написать повесть о Вашей матери. Повесть наших отцов – и не потому, что мне не близко это. Напротив, не только эта тема близка мне с юности, с раннего детства, но и физический герой, физические связи одни и те же – для Вас и для меня?” (6:386).



Klimova being rewarded for excellent behavior in school with this medal and ends with Stolyarova selling the same to aid her material survival after the camp. This is a peculiar text in that its plot is split not only between mother and daughter but also fractured by fragments from several other texts: documents about the trial of 1906, excerpts from Klimova's father's letter and Klimova's letters. A lengthy extract from the journal "Каторга и ссылка" ["Hard Labor and Exile"] – over six pages – about Klimova's subversive circle in France is inserted into the narrative and further contributes to its textual mosaic. Although Shalamov heralded the document as imperative to his 'new prose' in his manifesto – and documents abound in this short story – "The Golden Medal" also appears to break the rules of his own literary program. He rewrote it several times,<sup>239</sup> thus no longer relying on the aesthetically superior effect of a first version.<sup>240</sup> Moreover, he inserts his transitory hero into the narrative in a manner that is both unprecedented and symptomatic of his engagement with this story that otherwise would not be based on his personal experience.

Shalamov could perhaps claim proximity to the fate and personality of Klimova because of how other representations of her in Russian literature had inspired him since his youth. Growing up, Shalamov's favorite author was Boris Savinkov (who published under the pseudonym Ropshin) and he memorized the *roman à clef* *То, чего не было* [*What Never Happened: A Novel of The Revolution*] (1912).<sup>241</sup> Savinkov knew Klimova and appears in Shalamov's correspondence with Stolyarova as well as in "The Golden Medal." Shalamov also remembered the representation of Klimova as Natasha Kalymova in Mikhail Osorgin's novelistic dilogy *Свидетель истории* [*History's Witness*] (1932) and *Книга о концах* [*Book about Endings*] (1935).<sup>242</sup> The depiction of Klimova in these novels includes paraphrases from her "Letter before the Execution;" this is one letter Shalamov does not cite. He cites from her other letters, which Stolyarova lent him and which he reread many times.<sup>243</sup> His personal engagement with Klimova's private letters haunts the fragmentary structure of his short story and the transitory hero who studies them like a literary text:

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<sup>239</sup> "[Золотая медаль] переписывалась несколько раз. Черновики показывают, как Шаламов буквально пробует слова на вкус, перечеркивает, одновременно набрасываются фразы, которые потом встречаются в письмах, в рассказах." ["The Golden Medal"] was rewritten several times. The drafts show how Shalamov literally tastes the words, crosses out some, while at the same time phrases appear that are later found in the letters, in the short stories.] Solov'ev, Sergei. "Povest' nashikh otsov' – ob odnom zamysle Varlama Shalamova" in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoï istorii*. Moskva: Litera, 2013, 210.

<sup>240</sup> See Shalamov's letter to Sirotinskaya (1971): "Наиболее удачные рассказы – написанные набело, вернее, переписанные с черновика один раз. Так писались все лучшие мои рассказы. В них нет отделки, а законченность есть: такой рассказ, как 'Крест,' записан за один раз, при нервном подъеме, для бессмертия и смерти – от первой до последней фразы. Рассказ 'Заговор юристов' – лучший рассказ первого сборника, весь написан с одного раза" (6:484). [The most successful stories were written without corrections, or rather, they were rewritten once from the draft. That is how all my best short stories were written. There is no decoration in them, but they do have a completeness: such a short story as "The Cross" was written at one time during a nervous elevation, for immortality and death – from the first to the last sentence. The short story "The Lawyers' Plot," the best story in the first collection, was written all at one time.]

<sup>241</sup> He writes about this in *The Fourth Vologda*: "Книгу Ропшина 'То, чего не было' всю почти помню на память. Знаю все почему-то важные для меня абзацы, целые куски помню. Не знаю почему, я учил эту книгу наизусть, как стихи. Эта книга не принадлежит к числу литературных шедевров" (4:95). [I remember almost all of Ropshin's book *What Never Happened* by heart. I know all the paragraphs that were for some reason important to me, I remember whole chunks. I don't know why I learned this book by heart like poetry. This book is not a literary masterpiece.]

<sup>242</sup> See Shalamov's letter to Nikolai Gusev (Tolstoy's secretary 1907-9) from March 27 1966 (6:440-1).

<sup>243</sup> See Solov'ev, "Povest' nashikh otsov," 211.

There are lines in the letters that are stronger than those in “A Letter before the Execution.” This enormous life force – it is the solution to the problem, and not a doubt as to the correctness of the path. The ellipsis was Natalia Sergeevna Klimova’s favorite punctuation mark. There are clearly more ellipses than in normal written Russian. <...> There are no ellipses in the letters from the last years. The handwriting becomes less certain. Points and commas still stand in their places, but the ellipses have disappeared altogether. Everything is clear even without ellipses. Calculations of the rate of the Franc do not require ellipses.<sup>244</sup>

Shalamov’s work on this short story has been studied in the same way: his handwriting changes from meticulous in the beginning to rushed toward the end.<sup>245</sup> His obsession with Klimova’s letters – her writing, her words – reverberates in the form of “The Golden Medal:” his telling of her story becomes a kind of letter itself. Number 21 out of 30 in the cycle, it is placed after “За письмом” [“Retrieving the Letter”] (1966) that ends with: “This was a letter from Pasternak.”<sup>246</sup> The citations from her letters, but even more their material presence in his hands (“I held in my hands the letter of Natalia Sergeevna Klimova...”<sup>247</sup>), imply that this short story is addressed to someone rather than told on behalf of someone else. The first intended recipient was Stolyarova, but it can also be read as a letter to a future reader of Russian literature. “The Golden Medal,” like Shalamov’s manifesto, extends beyond past and present and envisions a future – which it, at least partially, wants to construct. In his discussion of “The Golden Medal,” Sergei Solov’ev argues that Shalamov acted as a “researcher”<sup>248</sup> and that he strove to become “a chronicler of [Klimova’s] soul”<sup>249</sup> which echoes an important aspect of his poetics.<sup>250</sup> Although this observation is accurate for his preparatory work, the epistolary dimension of this short story appears to cause a conflict between its intimate focus, historical topic, and literary form: the lives of Klimova and Stolyarova are framed by the transitory hero’s participation not only in the act of writing but also in the actions of the narrative, although his actual involvement was either nonexistent (for Klimova) or marginal (for Stolyarova).

For our understanding of “The Golden Medal” as a breaking point in *Kolyma Tales* and a reading of it as representative of a nascent problematic in Shalamov’s late style, the letters

<sup>244</sup> “В письмах есть строки и поярче ‘Письма перед казнью.’ Огромная жизненная сила – решение вопроса, а не сомнения в правильности пути. Многоточие было любимым знаком препинания Натальи Сергеевны Климовой. Многоточий явно больше, чем принято в нормальной русской литературной речи. <...> В письмах последних лет – нет многоточий. Почерк становится менее уверенным. Точки и запятые по-прежнему стоят на своих местах, а многоточия вовсе исчезли. Все ясно и без многоточий. Расчеты курса франка не нуждаются в многоточиях” (2:223).

<sup>245</sup> “Меняется почерк: от почти каллиграфических записей до торопливых неразборчивых набросков. Очевидно, этот замысел был для Шаламова очень важен и в 1965–1966 гг. постоянно занимал его мысли.” [The handwriting changes from almost calligraphic notes to hasty, illegible sketches. Obviously, the idea was very important for Shalamov and constantly occupied his thoughts in 1965 and 1966.] Ibid., 210.

<sup>246</sup> “Это было письмо Пастернака” (2:203).

<sup>247</sup> “Я держал в руках письмо Натальи Сергеевны Климовой...” (2:222).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>249</sup> “Задача Шаламова – проникнуть в личность Натальи Климовой с помощью этих ‘человеческих документов,’ стать ‘летописцем ее души.’” [Shalamov’s task was to penetrate the personality of Natalia Klimova using these “human documents,” to become a “chronicler of her soul.”] Ibid., 211.

<sup>250</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Kremenskoi from 1972: “Так что в познавательной части в ‘КР’ тоже есть кое-что полезное, хотя для художественной прозы это прежде всего душа художника, его лицо и боль. Я летописец собственной души, не более” (6:580). [So there’s something useful in the informative aspect of *K.T.* too, although literary prose is primarily about the soul of the artist, his face and pain. I’m a chronicler of my own soul, no more.]

exchanged between him and Stolyarova are as significant as Klimova's letters. He first explained to Stolyarova that the short story was mainly of personal significance to him: "I wrote the short story for myself – about the great continuity, a short story about those living Buddhas, by whom the Earth is alive."<sup>251</sup> His plans changed drastically after he read Klimova's letters:

Dear Natalia Ivanovna, I write to you in great excitement. I've read the letters of your mother and all that I've read greatly increases the magnitude of the work on her biography. In addition, and about which I didn't think and didn't dreamed before (1) a large biography, 2) a large short story, and 3) a small short story, 4) a montage of memoiristic documents), will also be added "The Letters of N. Klimova." Under all circumstances, these letters must be prepared for publication. <...> I dictate these letters, so as not to miss a word, so that the word, the soul of Klimova enters into me by reading...<sup>252</sup>

Of the four texts about Klimova that Shalamov wanted to write, he seems to only have written one: the large short story (although it contains elements of a montage). His ambitious plans for Klimova's story and the publication of her letters would only be realized in 2012 by Grigorii Kan's *Наталья Климова: жизнь и борьба* [*Natalia Klimova: Life and Fight*], which Kan considered the fulfillment of Shalamov's dream.<sup>253</sup>

Shalamov may have become discouraged by the reaction from Stolyarova, his intended first reader, who did not approve of "The Golden Medal." After reading an early draft, she provided a list with seven points for his consideration. Although she in the first point grants him the freedom to write as he sees fit ("1. I think you're absolutely free to write how and what you think right, and it is not for me to indicate, I can only thank you. If, however, I do indicate, it is because you have pressured me to do so"<sup>254</sup>), she is displeased in the second that he did not make significant changes after her comments: "2. In my opinion, you didn't change anything that bothered me, just shortened it."<sup>255</sup> Points three, four, five, and six concern real-life individuals and his characterization of them; she did not approve of his representations of Aleksandra Tarasova and Nadezhda Terent'eva but was especially opposed to how he depicted her father, Ivan Stolyarov: "3. I asked not to characterize a person who is completely unknown to you, my father. N. S. was not one of those who seek a husband and marriage, did you not think that he had to have captivated her with something?"<sup>256</sup> In a new draft, Shalamov removed Stolyarov's

<sup>251</sup> "Я написал рассказ сам для себя – о великой преемственности, рассказ о тех живых Буддах, которыми живет земля" (6:387).

<sup>252</sup> "Дорогая Наталья Ивановна, пишу Вам в большом волнении. Я прочел письма Вашей матери и все прочитанное все увеличивает масштабность работы по ее жизнеописанию. К тому, о чем мне не думалось и не мечталось раньше (1) большая биография, 2) большой рассказ и 3) малый рассказ, 4) монтаж документов в сборнике воспоминаний), добавятся еще 'Письма Н. Климовой.' Эти письма при всех обстоятельствах должны быть подготовлены к публикации. <...> Я продиктую эти письма, чтобы не пропустить ни слова, чтобы слово, душа Климовой чтением этим вошла в меня..." (6:388).

<sup>253</sup> Kan, G. S. *Natal'ia Klimova: zhizn' i bor'ba*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo im. N. I. Novikova, 2012. See also Solov'ev, "Povest' nashikh otsov," 210-1.

<sup>254</sup> "1. Думаю, что Вы абсолютно вольны писать, как и что Вам кажется правильным, не мне Вам указывать, я могу только благодарить Вас. Если все же указываю, то под Вашим давлением" (6:389).

<sup>255</sup> "2. По-моему, из того, что царапало меня, Вы ровно ничего не изменили, разве что сократили" (ibid.).

<sup>256</sup> "3. Я просила не характеризовать совершенно неизвестного Вам человека, моего отца. Н. С. была не из тех, кто ищет мужа, замужество, Вы не подумали, что чем-то он должен был увлечь ее?" (6:389).

name and an interpretation of his marriage to Klimova.<sup>257</sup> However, point seven was the only one not up for discussion (“Everything, except point 7, is up to your discretion”).<sup>258</sup> Stolyarova protested his inclusion of herself in the ending and considered it akin to defamation:

7. The most important thing. I strongly disagree with the last page and I regret that I told you so remarkably inaccurately about this event. This is defamation of both my childhood friend, who reluctantly, only for the sake of N. S. bought the medal from me, and of myself. <...> How poorly you must know me if you can imagine me in a torn quilted jacket, going through the old friends of N. S., begging them for help. I thought it was a misunderstanding, that you didn't understand, but now I've been assured that you definitely want to include this fiction <...>. Understand, for God's sake, that with this delicate story you'll not only pervert reality, not only defame a person who wished me well, but humiliate me. In general, from the short story it appears that I went to beg for help from a stranger. Would you have been capable of that?<sup>259</sup>

In his reply, Shalamov seems delighted by the emotional objections he provoked in Stolyarova: “Наконец зазвучал настоящий человеческий голос” (6:391). Yet he retained the original ending to his short story – in which Stolyarova sells the golden medal that Klimova received in school – even though he altered the scene significantly (and, it should be noted, for the better).<sup>260</sup> Still, the new draft failed to impress her: “I'm not very happy that you put me in your short story, I've got decisively nothing to do with it, and if you hadn't named my mother, then you could've come up with anything.”<sup>261</sup> Had the short story been written differently, he might have been able to leave her out of it; all Shalamov did was omit Stolyarova's name – she is referred to instead as “Klimova's daughter.” The eventual fate of the golden medal symbolizes the link Shalamov attempts to establish in Russian twentieth-century history. With the fate of Stolyarova – the daughter of a Socialist Revolutionary terrorist who ended up in a Soviet camp – as its climax, the

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<sup>257</sup> “Её [Столяровой] неприятие прежде всего вызвали суждения об её отце: ‘Муж Натальи Сергеевны не стал её близким другом. Тысяча причин, о которых можно только гадать. <...> Возможности сердца Климовой иные, чем границы сердца обыкновенных людей. Просто это были люди разных масштабов.’ Фамилия ‘Столяров’ вообще была убрана из рукописи и местами заменена словом ‘гость.’” [Her [Stolyarova's] opposition was primarily caused by the judgments about her father: “Natalia Sergeevna's husband didn't become her close friend. A thousand reasons, about which we can only guess. <...> The opportunities of Klimova's heart were different than the borders of the hearts of ordinary people. They were simply people of different dimensions. The last name “Stolyarov” was generally removed from the manuscript and in places replaced by the word “guest.”] Ibid., 216.

<sup>258</sup> “Все, кроме пункта 7, на Ваше усмотрение” (6:390)).

<sup>259</sup> “7. Самое главное. Я решительно не согласна с последней страницей и каюсь в том, что так поразительно неточно передала Вам об этом случае. Это клевета и на подругу с детства, которая нехотя, только ради Н. С. купила у меня медаль, и на меня. <...> Как плохо Вы меня знаете, представляя себе, как я в рваной телогрейке брожу по старым друзьям Н. С., выпрашивая помощь. Я думала это недоразумение, Вы не поняли, что этого не может быть, но сейчас убедилась, что Вы обязательно хотите включить эту небылицу <...>. Поймите, ради бога, что этой чувствительной историей Вы не только извращаете действительность, не только порочите человека, желавшего мне добра, а унижаете меня. По рассказу вообще получается, что я пришла кланяться помощи у незнакомого человека. А Вы были на это способны?” (6:390).

<sup>260</sup> Solov'ev cites the earlier version of the ending in its fullness: *ibid.*, 216-7.

<sup>261</sup> “Мне не очень приятно, что Вы меня припутали в свой рассказ, решительно я в нем ни при чем, и если бы Вы не назвали мать, то и могли бы придумывать все что угодно” (*ibid.*).

short story is about forging a connection as well as forcing a relationship. As its writer, witness, and narrator, the transitory hero is responsible for both acts.

If Shalamov read Klimova's letters like a literary scholar, the transitory hero begins "The Golden Medal" by tracing her steps in Russian history like a geographer marks a territory for a map. In the second paragraph, he combines present and future tense in his journey through the spaces of Klimova: "I'm searching for alleys. Leningrad, the city museum, preserves the features of St. Petersburg. I'll find Stolypin's dacha on Aptekarsky island <...>. I'll go into the Trubetskoi bastion in the Peter and Paul Fortress..."<sup>262</sup> She is introduced through her absence – he will not find her in these locations – and given her name through a fragment from the trial of 1906. The "excellent behavior" for which she received the golden medal ("For excellent achievements and behavior"<sup>263</sup>) becomes transformed in her misbehavior at the conclusion of this trial:

And in her final statement – before death, before the execution, this "infatuated girl" Klimova suddenly gave way to her nature, to her rabid blood – she said, did something for which the chairman of the court, interrupting her final statement, removed Klimova from the courtroom "for indecent behavior."<sup>264</sup>

Yet the narrative excludes what it was that Klimova said. Another absence – the absence of her voice – seems to mar his telling of her story here. Instead, he retraces his steps from historical documents to historical spaces and renews his search for Klimova in them: "I'm searching for alleys. This game of youth: to climb the stairs already marked by history, but not yet turned into a museum. I guess, I repeat the movements of people who went up these same steps..."<sup>265</sup> The kind of connection he wants to make in history demands both a personal presence and a material manifestation of the past: "Much has been written about this, very much, too much. But after all I don't need books, but people, not the maps of streets, but quiet alleys."<sup>266</sup> His need for "people" instead of books and "streets" instead of maps is reflected in his search in space for the breaking point in time: "Everything morally important and strong accumulated by the nineteenth century – everything was turned into a living deed, into living life, into a living example, and thrown into the last battle against autocracy."<sup>267</sup> This type of 'living life' appears to be epitomized by Klimova – a representative as well as a catalyst for the morally positive legacy of the nineteenth century – and he seems unconcerned with the fact that the bomb she carried killed 28 people and wounded several children on August 25 1906.

"The Golden Medal" describes historical events and even includes inserted historical documents, but it does not write 'history' in any traditional sense: the image it presents of Klimova is detached from the deaths her terrorist activities caused. She becomes an idealized

<sup>262</sup> "Я ишу переулки. Ленинград, город-музей, бережет черты Петербурга. Я найду дачу Столыпина на Аптекарском острове <...>. Зайду в Трубецкой бастион Петропавловской крепости..." (2:203).

<sup>263</sup> "За отличные успехи и поведение" (2:203).

<sup>264</sup> "И вот в последнем слове – перед смертью, перед казнью 'увлекающаяся девушка' Климова вдруг уступила своей натуре, своей бешеной крови – она сказала, сделала такое, за что председатель суда, прервав последнее слово, удалил Климову из зала суда 'за неприличное поведение.'" (2:205).

<sup>265</sup> "Я ишу переулки. Это развлечение юности – подниматься по лестницам, уже отмеченным историей, но еще не превращенным в музей. Я угадываю, я повторяю движения людей, всходивших на эти же ступени..." (2:206).

<sup>266</sup> "Обо всем этом много писали, очень много, слишком много. Но мне ведь нужны не книги, а люди, не чертежи улиц, а тихие переулки" (ibid.).

<sup>267</sup> "Все, что накопил великий XIX век нравственно важного, сильного, – все было превращено в живое дело, в живую жизнь, в живой пример и брошено в последний бой против самодержавия" (2:206-7).

woman in whom the fate of Russia as a country is not only mirrored but also created. Although she escapes from prison, she is forced into exile where she encounters an obstacle that becomes more monumental than the terrorism in her past. According to Shalamov's short story, Klimova faces the ultimate test in motherhood: "Instead of dynamite bombs, she had to carry diapers, mountains of diapers, to wash, to iron, to clean."<sup>268</sup> Her difficult new role as a mother of three children while living in exile is first stated and then repeated for emphasis:

All her passionate assertion of self was suddenly channeled into motherhood. The first child. The second child. The third child. A difficult emigrant life. <...> Motherhood – the first child, second child, third child – had been just as sacrificial, just as complete as her whole life as a dynamite maker and terrorist. The calm destroyed her. An unsuccessful marriage, the trap of the everyday, the little things, the bustle of life tied her down.<sup>269</sup>

This is the type of mundane female fate for which a woman like her was not made: "Klimova was made for everything, but not for everyday life."<sup>270</sup> Moreover, her death, too, becomes tainted by the dull concerns of motherhood; while attempting to return to Russia with her two daughters (her youngest daughter did not live beyond infancy) Klimova contracts the Spanish flu from her sick children while caring for them. However, she is saved from this mundane death as her final act in history by the transitory hero who sees in it the "crack" that split time in half:

The crack which split time in half – not only for Russia, but for the world, where on one side of which could be found all the humanism of the nineteenth century, its sacrifice, its moral climate, its literature and art, and on the other – Hiroshima, a bloody war and concentration camps, medieval torture and the violation of souls, where betrayal as a moral virtue is the frightening sign of a totalitarian state. The life of Klimova, her fate is inscribed in human memory because this life and this fate is the crack that split time in half. The fate of Klimova is immortality and a symbol.<sup>271</sup>

Her fate becomes a symbol for Russian history – and her struggle with motherhood appears as an unfortunate parenthesis in her story – yet Klimova herself is not the only symbol in this short story. The writing of "The Golden Medal" is a symbolic act for the transitory hero who after her death digresses into the meaning of his role as the writer of her story. His presence, signaled previously in his search for the spaces of Klimova, becomes an act of overwriting and rewriting:

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<sup>268</sup> "Вместо динамитных бомб приходится таскать пеленки, горы детских пеленок, стирать, гладить, мыть" (2:220).

<sup>269</sup> "Все страстное утверждение себя вдруг обращается на материнство. Первый ребенок. Второй ребенок. Третий ребенок. Трудный эмигрантский быт. <...> Материнство – первый ребенок, второй ребенок, третий ребенок – было столь же жертвенным, столь же полным, как и вся ее жизнь динамитчицы и террористки. Штиль погубил ее. Неудачный брак, капкан быта, мелочи, мышья беготня жизни связали ее по рукам и ногам" (2:219-20).

<sup>270</sup> "Климова годилась для всего, но не для быта" (2:220).

<sup>271</sup> "Трещина, по которой раскололось время – не только России, но мира, где по одну сторону – весь гуманизм девятнадцатого века, его жертвенность, его нравственный климат, его литература и искусство, а по другую – Хиросима, кровавая война и концентрационные лагеря, и средневековые пытки и растление душ – предательство – как нравственное достоинство – устрашающая примета тоталитарного государства. Жизнь Климовой, ее судьба потому и вписаны в человеческую память, что эта жизнь и судьба – трещина, по которой раскололось время. Судьба Климовой – это бессмертие и символ" (2:221-2).

“The story is a palimpsest that holds all of its secrets. The short story is an occasion for magic, the subject of sorcery, a living thing that has not yet died, that has seen the hero.”<sup>272</sup> The living object that has seen the “hero” appears to be Klimova’s letters that have been held by her, Stolyarova, and the transitory hero. The materiality of this object overwrites the short story as a textual reality: “There is no short story. It is the thing that tells.”<sup>273</sup> Yet the words of her letters are only inserted intermittently into the narrative; the words of others as well as other objects seem to overshadow the significance of this type of living historical document for his telling of her story. The transitory hero even admits to sometimes not using Klimova’s words.<sup>274</sup> The conclusion to her story comes not in her death, but in the second life of other ‘objects’ that have seen this heroine: not only her golden medal but also her daughter.

The result of the unfortunate parenthesis of motherhood in an otherwise revolutionary female trajectory, this daughter possesses all that is left of her mother’s life: “What remains of this passionate life? Only the gold medal from school in the pocket of a padded jacket from the camp that belongs to the oldest daughter of Natalia Sergeevna Klimova.”<sup>275</sup> However, she is not the only one in possession of Klimova’s story, or even of her own story. As the transitory hero searches for Klimova in the spaces of the past, he follows Stolyarova on her search for her mother’s traces: “I do not walk alone on the trail of Klimova. Her eldest daughter is with me, and we find the house we’re looking for, then the woman enters inside, into the apartment, while I remain on the street or, entering after her, I hide somewhere along the walls and merge with the window curtain.”<sup>276</sup> From his hiding place, he becomes witness to all Stolyarova’s life:

I saw her as a newborn and I recalled how her mother’s powerful, strong hands, which easily carried around heavy dynamite bombs designated for Stolypin’s assassination, with greedy tenderness embraced the little body of her first child. The child will be named Natasha – the mother gives her her own name, to condemn her daughter to a feat, to continue the maternal deed, so that all her life the voice of her blood will sound, this call of destiny, so that the woman named after her mother will respond to this maternal voice all her life, the voice that calls her by name.<sup>277</sup>

His attachment to Stolyarova – this woman given the same name as her mother, and thus condemned to reflect her life rather than to live her own – continues with a visit together with

<sup>272</sup> “Рассказ – это палимпсест, хранящий все его тайны. Рассказ – это повод для волшебства, это предмет колдовства, живая, еще не умершая вещь, видевшая героя” (2:222).

<sup>273</sup> “Никакого рассказа нет. Рассказывает вещь” (ibid.).

<sup>274</sup> “Бальмонт был любимым поэтом Натальи Сергеевны. Это был ‘модернист’ – а то, что ‘искусство с модернизмом,’ Наталья Сергеевна чувствовала, хотя это и не ее слова” (2:224). [Bal’mont was Natalia Sergeevna’s favorite poet. This was a “modernist,” and that “art with modernism” Natalia Sergeevna felt, although these are not her words.]

<sup>275</sup> “Что же осталось от этой страстной жизни? Только школьная золотая медаль в кармане лагерной телогрейки старшей дочери Натальи Сергеевны Климовой” (2:225).

<sup>276</sup> “Я хожу не один по следу Климовой. Со мной ее старшая дочь, и когда мы находим дом, который ищем, женщина входит внутрь, в квартиру, а я остаюсь на улице или, войдя следом за ней, прячусь где-нибудь у стены, сливаюсь с оконной шторой” (ibid.).

<sup>277</sup> “Я видел ее новорожденной, вспоминал, как сильные, крепкие руки матери, легко таскавшие пудовые динамитные бомбы, назначенные для убийства Столыпина, с жадной нежностью обнимали тельце своего первого ребенка. Ребенка назовут Наташей – мать назовет своим именем, чтобы обречь дочь на подвиг, на продолжение материнского дела, чтобы всю жизнь звучал этот голос крови, этот призыв судьбы, чтобы названная именем матери всю свою жизнь откликалась на этот материнский голос, зовущий ее по имени” (2:225).

her to Nadezhda Terent'eva in 1934, to Ekaterina Nikitina, and to the Museum of the Revolution. In all these places, Klimova haunts them both. He is by Stolyarova's side after her release from the camps, before the momentous selling of the golden medal: "Now it's 1947 and we stand again together on Sivtsev Vrazhek Lane."<sup>278</sup> In his representation of her time in the camps, he adds another two years (ten instead of eight) and echoes both his own experience in them and Klimova's life: "Unnamed hands that support you in a blizzard, that bring you into the barracks, that wash, warm, enliven you. Who are they, these anonymous people, nameless like the terrorists Natalia Klimova's youth."<sup>279</sup> But the year 1947 is another breaking point in time; perhaps not as historically significant as the fate of Klimova for Russian history, but crucial for the self-identification of Stolyarova: "It was here in 1947 that the young woman for the first time understood and felt that she had come into the world not to glorify the name of her mother, that her fate is not the epilogue, not the afterword to someone else's life, be it a big life of a relative. That she has her own destiny."<sup>280</sup> Although Stolyarova's story appears to be an epilogue in this short story, this is not how she relates to her life: "...she is as much a representative of the century and time as her mother."<sup>281</sup> Despite this moment of her self-awareness, Stolyarova is deprived intermittently of a voice of her own in "The Golden Medal" much like the words of her mother's letters are cited sparingly and intermittently. In the first statement spoken by her in the short story, the last part comes from one of Shalamov's notebooks and thus reflects his experience and not hers:<sup>282</sup>

– The operation was very difficult – liver stones. It was in 1952 – the most difficult, the worst year of my life. And, as I was lying on the operating table, I thought... These operations – of liver stones – are not done under general anesthesia. General anesthesia during such operations results in 100% deaths. They gave me local anesthesia and I thought of only one thing. I must cease to suffer, cease to live – and it is so easy – to weaken the will ever so slightly and the threshold is crossed, the door is open to non-existence... Why live? Why resurrect again to 1937? 1938, 1939, 1940, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 1950, 1951 the years of my life that were so terrible?<sup>283</sup>

<sup>278</sup> "Сейчас сорок седьмой год, и мы снова стоим вместе на Сивцевом Бражке" (2:226).

<sup>279</sup> "Безымянные руки, которые поддерживают в метели, приводят в барак, оттирают, отогревают, оживляют. Кто они, эти безымянные люди, безымянные, как террористы молодости Натальи Климовой" (2:227).

<sup>280</sup> "Вот здесь в 1947 году молодая женщина впервые поняла и почувствовала, что не материнское имя прославить пришла она на землю, что ее судьба – не эпилог, не послесловие чьей-то, пусть родной, пусть большой жизни. Что у нее своя судьба" (2:228).

<sup>281</sup> "...она – такая же представительница века и времени, как и ее мать" (ibid.).

<sup>282</sup> From Shalamov's notebooks dated only to the 1960s and 1970s: "Зачем воскресать? К 1937 году – к аресту, к предательству друзей, к 1938 году – к Бутырской тюрьме, к 1939, к 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951" (5:348). [Why resurrect? To the year 1937 – to the arrest, to the betrayal of friends, to 1938 – to Butyrka prison, to 1939, to 1940, 1941, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951.]

<sup>283</sup> "– Операция была очень тяжелой – камни печени. Был 1952 год – самый трудный, самый плохой год моей жизни. И, лежа на операционном столе, я думала... Операции эти – камни в печени – не делаются под общим наркозом. Общий наркоз при этих операциях дает сто процентов смертей. Мне делали под местным, и я думала только об одном. Надо перестать мучиться, перестать жить, – и так легко это – чуть-чуть ослабить волно – и порог будет перейден, дверь в небытие открыта... Зачем жить? Зачем воскресать снова к 1937? 1938, 1939, 1940, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 1950, 1951 годам всей моей жизни, такой ужасной?" (2:228-9).



Rather than Stolyarova speaking, although the operation described may have been told by her to Shalamov in conversation (it is not mentioned in their correspondence), it is his words that once again overwrite and rewrite this “palimpsest” that the short story imitates. Thus, it appears that the resurrection that she unwillingly submits to in “The Golden Medal” is more connected to *The Revival of the Larch* as a cycle than to her individually lived life. Her resurrection becomes meaningful for the overarching focus of this cycle and for the transformation of ‘living life’ in this short story. Unlike Klimova who dies, Stolyarova is resurrected – and her concept of ‘living life’ seems intentionally contrasted to the ‘living life’ of the early twentieth century in her mother’s fate. If Klimova’s ‘living life’ was connected to the moral concerns of the revolutionary intelligentsia, ‘living life’ enters the story of Stolyarova after the death of Stalin: “In 1953, Stalin died and a new life with new hopes began, a living life with living hope. My resurrection was the meeting with March 1953. Being revived on the operating table, I knew that I must live. And I was resurrected.”<sup>284</sup> The ‘living life’ that Klimova represented is resurrected with the ‘living life’ of her daughter, which after half a century appears as also a second life for the Russian intelligentsia and a renewal of history.

Yet Stolyarova’s resurrection is not the end of Shalamov’s short story. In the ending, she takes control of the narrative and provides it with a conclusion that the transitory hero appears to want to alter (although we know now that it was she who wanted to change it): for Stolyarova to become her own person, and not only a reflection of her mother, the golden medal that she preserved throughout her years in the camps must be displaced. The transitory hero refuses to leave the final scene but inserts himself into the dialogue in which the golden medal reappears: “On Sivtsev Vrazhek Lane we wait for an answer.”<sup>285</sup> Once again, he hides behind a curtain as he did when he watched Stolyarova being born:

I stood there merging with the window curtain, with a heavy dusty curtain. I who have known the past and seen the future. I’ve already been in a concentration camp; I’ve been a wolf and could appreciate a wolf-like grip. I’ve understood a few things about the habits of wolves. In my heart, I felt anxiety – not fear, but anxiety – I saw the next day of this short fair-haired woman, the daughter of Natasha Klimova. I saw her the next day and my heart ached.<sup>286</sup>

The dialogue that he witnesses, and which makes him anxious, is strange for several reasons. The woman who is willing to buy Klimova’s golden medal is familiar with her story, yet makes one poignant mistake in her attempt to gain Stolyarova’s trust: “– Yes, I heard about this escape. It was a romantic time. And I’ve read “The Letter after the Execution.”<sup>287</sup> She misremembers the title of Klimova’s famous letter – not as “Letter before the Execution” but as “Letter after the execution.” Such a letter would not exist, yet neither she nor Stolyarova notes this oxymoron.

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<sup>284</sup> “В 1953 году умер Сталин, и началась новая жизнь с новыми надеждами, живая жизнь с живыми надеждами. Воскресением моим было свидание с мартом 1953 года. Воскресая на операционном столе, я знала, что надо жить. И я воскресла” (2:229).

<sup>285</sup> “На Сивцевом Бражке мы ждем ответа” (2:229).

<sup>286</sup> “Я стоял, сливаясь с оконной занавеской, с тяжелой запыленной шторой. Я, знавший прошлое и видевший будущее. Я уже побывал в концлагере, я сам был волком и мог оценить волчину хватку. Я кое-что в повадках волков понимал. В сердце мое вошла тревога – не страх, а тревога – я увидел завтрашний день этой невысокой русоволосой женщины, дочери Наташи Климовой. Я увидел ее завтрашний день, и сердце мое заныло” (ibid.).

<sup>287</sup> “– Да, я слышала об этом побеге. Романтическое время. И ‘Письмо после казни’ читала” (ibid.).

This mistake, which may be missed at a first reading of “The Golden Medal,” anticipates his reaction to Stolyarova’s selling of Klimova’s golden medal. The final exchange in the dialogue is not between the unnamed woman and Stolyarova, but between him and Stolyarova: “– You have to leave, I whispered. – I have to live, said firmly the daughter of Natasha Klimova. – Here. And from the pocket of her padded jacket from the camp she took a cloth parcel.”<sup>288</sup>

We know that Shalamov was not there for this event in 1947; he never held Klimova’s golden medal in his hands as he did her letters. His aesthetic program proclaimed in “On Prose,” which insisted on personal participation in the primary experience before gaining the right to a secondary literary representation, appears here to be pushed to its limits and perhaps even exceeded. The participation of his transitory hero in this short story, not as a narrator but as a hero in his own right because he has seen the object that has seen the heroine, is an attempt at telling the story of two exceptional women according to the rules of his ‘new prose.’ Yet “The Golden Medal” remains a literary text fraught with an unresolved conflict. The connection he forges in Russian twentieth-century history is compromised by the selling of the golden medal, a symbol that fulfills its promise as an object that speaks instead of a short story – but it also speaks against this short story. The relationships between himself and both Klimova and Stolyarova appear forced and unequal: instead of allowing these women to claim a place in Russian history, as “The Golden Medal” explicitly sets out to do, Shalamov’s usage of their stories is an implicit claim to a place for himself in Russian literature. He maps the spaces of Klimova and becomes a witness to the life of Stolyarova, thus making himself an integral part of them. Although the premise of this short story is promising, the finished text remains an unfulfilled promise: it comes across a collection of fragments rather than a mosaic palimpsest, and the emotional effect, though it will not leave the reader indifferent, seems perplexing because his presence is a troublesome interference rather than a helpful mediation. Perhaps this was what Stolyarova, the first intended reader, recognized in it: it is a letter to the future not about her mother the terrorist but about Shalamov the writer who retrieved and preserved her story. Although he still imagines himself as a witness, in “The Golden Medal” he has already produced a work emblematic of his late style as a professional writer.

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<sup>288</sup> “– Вам надо уходить, – прошептал я. – Мне надо жить, – твердо сказала дочь Наташи Климовой. – Вот. – И из кармана лагерной телогрейки она достала тряпичный сверточек” (2:230).

### Chapter III: The Late Shalamov Writes the Early Shalamov

#### 1. Introduction

The late Shalamov becomes preoccupied with the early Shalamov in *The Fourth Vologda*, about his childhood, and the antinovel *Vishera*, about his first incarceration in the northern Urals 1929-31. Both works appear informed by literary conventions: *The Fourth Vologda* inscribes itself in the Russian and Soviet traditions of childhood narratives whereas *Vishera* could have been subtitled *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Convict*. These two texts may be read in relation to the Bildungsroman and the Künstlerroman, since they focus on the coming of age of Shalamov as past child and present writer and Shalamov as past young prisoner and future survivor of Kolyma respectively. However, neither *The Fourth Vologda* nor *Vishera* are novels, although they are the longest prose works he wrote; the latter is even designated as an antinovel. Beyond the absence in *The Fourth Vologda* as well as in *Vishera* of the more common features of the novel, an omnipresent challenge to literary conventions permeates them. For example, his childhood narrative lacks not only a chronological construction of a ‘literary’ childhood but also a child’s point of view; the antinovel explores his initiation into the camp through a simultaneous destruction of the novelistic tradition and a reconstruction of his perception as a young man.

The destabilization of generic expectations in these two autobiographical works echoes Adorno’s conception of the tension between convention and subjectivity in late style: “The relationship of the conventions to the subjectivity itself must be seen as constituting the formal law from which the content of the late works emerges – at least to the extent that the latter are ultimately taken to signify more than touching relics.”<sup>289</sup> Adorno suggests a problematic relationship between history and the individual experience and personal expression of the same in late works. This problematic relationship seems to describe the often fragmentary and sometimes difficult aspects of *The Fourth Vologda* and *Vishera*. Albeit set in the past, they are products of a period of literary experimentation in search of a new mode of expression – subjective, intimate, and emotional – which constitutes a present for Shalamov’s late style. Therefore, even though an analysis of *The Fourth Vologda* as a Künstlerroman and of *Vishera* as a Bildungsroman could be productive, the outcome appears given: neither is a successful adaption of the conventional model. Yet success appears to not have been a factor for the late Shalamov in his representation of the early Shalamov; rather, it is the combination of the experiment with subjectivity that allows for both works to fail in fascinating ways.

The spaces of the early Shalamov – the city of Vologda and the northern Urals – are not exclusively represented during his late style. Some of the short stories in the first cycles of *Kolyma Tales* are set in these geographic locations.<sup>290</sup> However, these spaces become the setting for attempts at constructing different narrative structures in his two longer retrospective texts. This extended form indicates another literary method that allows for a more focused narrative through one place, one historical period, and one perspective: that of Shalamov himself, as a

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<sup>289</sup> Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 566.

<sup>290</sup> For example, we find Vologda in “Крест” [“The Cross”] (1959) from *The Left Bank* and in “Белка” [“The Squirrel”] (1966) from *An Artist of the Spade*. Also the northern Urals is present in these two cycles: through “Алмазная карта” [“The Diamond Map”] (1959) in *The Left Bank* and through “Первый зуб” [“The First Tooth”] (1964) and “Эхо в горах” [“An Echo in the Mountains”] (1959) in *An Artist of the Spade*. *The Resurrection of the Larch* contains a small cluster of five short stories that together constitute ‘Ural Tales’ within *Kolyma Tales*: “У стремени” [“At the Stirrup”] (1967), “Khan-Girei,” “An Evening Prayer,” “Борис Южанин” [“Boris Yuzhanin”] (1967), and “Визит мистера Поппа” [“Mister Popp’s Visit”] (1967).

child and as a youth. Through a new lens of personal contemplation and self-representation, he searches for the writer he was before *Kolyma Tales* and, more importantly, before Kolyma.

Both *The Fourth Vologda* and *Vishera* share a focus on the past and a concern with locating the early Shalamov in relation to the space and the time of this past. Yet these two texts are more different than they are alike. Whereas his childhood narrative is an exploration of his private past centered on his family and his hometown, *Vishera* mirrors the initiation of the young transitory hero into the camp with the development of the Gulag during the first five-year plan. His representation of himself as a child strives to return to, and even to resurrect, his family; as a contrast, *Vishera* creates a protagonist and a form that can challenge not only the novel but also his own transitory hero and the cyclical structure in *Kolyma Tales*. If *The Fourth Vologda* is an important text for the becoming of Shalamov as an individual, *Vishera* traces the rupture of this individual in his first encounter with the camps: a rupture which, when narrated from a distance of almost forty years, demands also an aesthetic rupture in the text about this encounter.

These two works are literary experiments with the potential to take Shalamov beyond Kolyma and the short story form in which he represented this experience. They both failed: he did not finish *Vishera* and *The Fourth Vologda* falls apart after the first fifty pages of this approximately 150-page long text. We do not know why he abandoned them both in 1971.<sup>291</sup> In his programmatic letter from the same year to Sirotinskaya, which she published as an essay after his death with the title “(О моей прозе)” [“(About My Prose)”] (1965), he acknowledges the unfinished quality of both texts when he discusses possible literary plans:

What to begin at 64 years? To add an extra volume or two after *An Artist of the Spade* or to resurrect *Vologda*? Or to finish *The Antinovel Vishera* – an important chapter in my creative method and in my understanding of life? Or to write five plays that are about to be written? Or to prepare a large collection of poems? Or to push a volume of memoirs: Pasternak and so on.<sup>292</sup>

The prospective paths for this new beginning in his writing, and the surge in creative activity they show, are connected with an improvement in Shalamov’s living arrangement in the early 1970s. He had finally acquired a room of his own in central Moscow.<sup>293</sup> It seems that the privacy of this room granted him the opportunity to not only consider new, and longer, projects but also to follow through with several of them. In 1971, he contemplates the prospect of returning to both *The Fourth Vologda* and *Vishera* (while also indicating the possibility of more cycles of *Kolyma Tales*)

<sup>291</sup> For an exploration of others who gave up on their works in a similar way: Posnock, Ross. *Renunciation: Acts of Abandonment by Writers, Philosophers, and Artists*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2016.

<sup>292</sup> “Что начать в 64 года? Лишний том или два добавить вслед ‘Артисту лопаты’ или воскресить ‘Вологду’? Или закончить ‘Вишерский антироман’ – существенную главу и в моем творческом методе, и в моем понимании жизни? Или написать пять пьес, которые вот-вот должны написаться? Или подготовить большой сборник стихов? Или гнать мемуарный том: Пастернак и так далее” (6:494-5).

<sup>293</sup> “В мае [1968 года] Шаламов наконец-то, после долгих хлопот через Литфонд как писатель-инвалид, получил отдельную просторную комнату в коммунальной квартире в том же доме на Хорошевском шоссе и в том же подъезде, но этажом выше. Переехал из квартиры 2 в квартиру 3. Чтобы понять его радость, надо учесть, что все это время после развода с О. С. Неклюдовой – почти два года – он продолжал жить в ее квартире, в той же узкой комнате-‘пенале.’” [In May (1968) Shalamov finally, after a lot of hassle with the Literary Fund as a writer with a disability, received a separate large room in a communal apartment in the same house on Khoroshevskoye highway and in the same entryway, but one floor above. He moved out of apartment 2 into apartment 3. To understand his joy, we must note that all the time after the divorce from O. S. Nekliudova – almost two years – he had continued to live in her apartment, in the same narrow room.] Esipov, *Shalamov*, 283-4.

but employs different verbs in relation to each. He uses the perfective verb *воскресить* [resurrect] for his childhood narrative and would thus ‘resurrect’ this text, rather than finish it, as he wishes to do with *Vishera*. The prospect of a ‘resurrection’ for Vologda suggests the specific dimension of his writing in this text: it is concerned not only with his childhood, but also with a more ambiguous aim of creating a narrative that would allow him to return to his private past and to resurrect those in it – his father, mother, and siblings who all died before he could write it – from death to the immortality of the literary work. His emphasis on an elusive ‘resurrection’ in relation to *The Fourth Vologda* in his literary plans might clarify the chaotic chronology of this text and the absence of even the semblance of a plot.

By contrast, *Vishera* has a distinct plot: the formation of identity through initiation into a penal institution shaped by systematic violence, dehumanization, and degradation. In his 1971 letter, Shalamov writes that he wishes to finish *Vishera* because it would display his “creative method” as well as his “understanding of life.” After his rejection of the novel in his manifesto, this “creative method” can be partly explained by the genre of *Vishera* that is often included in its title: this is an antinovel, and thus it is supposed provide an alternative to the conventions of the novelistic tradition. To postulate a similarly evident interpretation for how *Vishera* represents his “understanding of life” is a more daunting task. The connection between his “understanding of life” and his unfinished antinovel requires an analysis of the young transitory hero and his relationship with the implicit presence of an older double who hovers over it: the late style Shalamov. For *Vishera*, not only the content and form of the novel but also the content and form of *Kolyma Tales* represent literary conventions from the past that must be overcome.

It could be argued that *Kolyma Tales* contain a similar tension between the exclusive experience of the camps and the conventions of the past literary tradition. However, in Shalamov’s short story cycles this dichotomy is hidden in intertextual allusions that the reader does not always need to be aware of to appreciate the aesthetic effect of these texts. In *The Fourth Vologda* and *Vishera*, the challenge to convention is the aesthetic effect.

## 2. City, Century, and Child in *The Fourth Vologda*

*The Fourth Vologda* is not only a late text, but also a work haunted by belatedness.<sup>294</sup> Born in 1907 as the last child in a large clergy family, Shalamov missed the greatest adventure of his family that returned in 1905 from twelve years in Alaska where his father Tikhon Shalamov served as a missionary priest for the Russian Orthodox Church. In this autobiographical work, his belatedness is connected with the forging of a space in his family as well as in his century that would turn the disadvantage of being late into an advantage for him as a writer:

I always felt constricted everywhere. I felt constricted on the trunk, where I slept as a child for many years, I felt constricted at school, in my hometown. I felt constricted in Moscow, constricted at the university. I felt constricted in solitary confinement at Butyrka prison. It always seemed to me that there was something I hadn’t done – didn’t have time to do, what I should’ve done. I hadn’t done anything for immortality, like Schiller’s

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<sup>294</sup> “For some composers, late style is associated with a sense of authorial belatedness, a feeling of having been born too late, when everything worth saying has already been said.” Straus, “Disability and ‘Late Style’ in Music,” 4-5.

twenty-year-old King Carlos. I'd arrived too late in life, not for the distribution of the pie, but for participation in the kneading of the dough, of this drunken sourdough.<sup>295</sup>

The sentiment from Friedrich Schiller's play *Don Carlos* (1783-87) is echoed toward the end of *Vishera* when the transitory hero passes the age of Carlos, twenty-three, and turns twenty-four without having done anything to achieve "immortality."<sup>296</sup> In *The Fourth Vologda*, not only lost time but also time never experienced shapes Shalamov's representation of himself as a child who missed the social, political, and historical turning point for Russia in the twentieth century. Similarly, his perception of the restrictive family home reverberates in the text that cannot be confined to the genre of a childhood narrative in the Russian tradition but searches to escape its conventions. He often must interrupt the narrative, as if to remind both himself as author and his reader that this is indeed about childhood: "But now is neither the time nor place to remember anything except Vologda – all my past was yet to come."<sup>297</sup> Thus, with all his past still ahead of him, he acknowledges the belated quality of his work; yet the realization that he himself had become late seems to have inspired him to shift the century on its head: if the early Shalamov was too late, then the late Shalamov is early. His expansive post-factum knowledge of a tumultuous twentieth century, in which he as a child felt too young, and how it relates to his individual life becomes the central thread in his late style childhood retrospective.

Shalamov might never have found this guiding principle of framing the century through his private history in *The Fourth Vologda* without its intended first reader. This reader was Sirotinskaya, who, born in 1932, came even later to the twentieth century. He began writing *The Fourth Vologda* in 1968, inspired by her recent visit to his hometown.<sup>298</sup> They corresponded during July 1968 when she traveled to Crimea with her husband and three sons; he wrote to her almost daily, she replied as often as she could, and their letters appear as one uninterrupted and sometimes overlapping conversation in which their impressions of Vologda feature frequently. In one of her letters, Sirotinskaya depicts how she recently climbed up a steep mountain together with her sons and, being afraid of heights, was too scared to descend on her own. She found the strength she needed by imagining a young Shalamov giving her a helping hand:

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<sup>295</sup> "Мне все время было всюду тесно. Тесно было на сундуке, где я спал в детстве много лет, тесно было в школе, в родном городе. Тесно было в Москве, тесно в университете. Тесно было в одиночке Бутырской тюрьмы. Мне все время казалось, что я чего-то не сделал – не успел, что должен был сделать. Не сделал ничего для бессмертия, как двадцатилетний король Карлос у Шиллера. Я опаздывал к жизни, не к раздаче пирога, а к участию в замесе этого теста, этой пьяной опары" (4:96).

<sup>296</sup> "Темной осенней ветреной ночью 1931 года я стоял на берегу Вишеры и размышлял на важную, болезненную для меня тему: мне уже двадцать четыре года, а я еще ничего не сделал для бессмертия" (4:254). [On a dark and windy autumn night in 1931, I stood on the bank of the river Vishera and thought about an important, and for me sensitive, subject: I'm twenty-four years old and I haven't done anything for immortality.]

<sup>297</sup> "Но сейчас не время, да и не место вспоминать что-либо, кроме Вологды, – все мое прошлое было еще впереди" (4:96).

<sup>298</sup> The image of Sirotinskaya in Vologda soon became a part of Shalamov's new room of his own, see Esipov's description of his 61<sup>st</sup> birthday on June 18 1968 after which he wrote the poem "Грозы с тяжелым градом" ["Thunderstorms with Heavy Hail"]: "У этого стихотворения есть своя история. 18 июня того же года они праздновали день рождения Варлама Тихоновича – ему исполнился 61 год, и гадали по сборнику стихов Тютчева, одного из их любимых поэтов. На столе стояла фотография: Ирина у Вологодского кремля (это было вскоре после ее поездки в Вологду с туристической группой из архива)." [This poem has its own history. On June 18 the same year, they celebrated Varlam Tikhonovich's birthday – he turned 61, and they told their fortune with a collection of Tyutchev, one of their favorite poets. On the table there was a photograph of Irina at the Vologda Kremlin (this was shortly after her trip to Vologda with a tour group from the archive).] Esipov, *Shalamov*, 285.

And before sliding down, I scraped your name on the rock. It seemed to me all the time that you were with me. You walked and gave me your hand when it was steep. I can imagine you very well as a boy – in Vologda. And now you were 25-26 years old, and I was only 17 years. Oh, dear, how beautiful you were today! Tanned, blue-eyed, fearless! It seems to me that I was always with you. Did you really live 58 years without me?<sup>299</sup>

As an autobiographical work, *The Fourth Vologda* is in many ways Shalamov's response to Sirotinskaya's surprised question at the end of this letter. Writing about his childhood, he invites her to be present during seventeen years – the years he spent in Vologda – of the fifty-eight years of his life without her. The young Shalamov that emerges in *The Fourth Vologda* both echoes her imagination and challenges its idealization of him. In a later letter from the same summer of 1968, he replies that he would have been unfit to help her down from a mountain for he is just as afraid of heights as she is:

Thank you for your lovely words that I don't deserve. I have exactly the same fear of heights as you – in Kolyma, I could never walk on a log, which was sufficiently thick and sturdy, across a chasm, a gorge, a rift, but I sat down and went over it with my hands. In Vologda, in my childhood, in my youth, I didn't go up the bell tower and didn't look down at the city from above, I was afraid to approach the railing and they shouted at me: "He's a coward, he can't."<sup>300</sup>

This memory of Shalamov being too afraid to climb the bell tower resurfaces in *The Fourth Vologda* and his fear of heights brings shame to his father who served as a priest in this cathedral.<sup>301</sup> His fear of heights was a consequence of Ménière's disease from which he suffered already in childhood. The ailment was unknown to his father and its symptoms misunderstood. When Shalamov remembers Vologda for the first time in his letter to Sirotinskaya in 1968, his father is not mentioned. Instead, he connects his wish to forget his birth town with his mother's death:

I thought that the city was forgotten long ago, and meetings with old friends – Vologda enthusiasts residing on Begovaya street caused no emotion – either latent or open – in me; after my mother's death, it was all over, I was done with the city, despite the

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<sup>299</sup> "И прежде чем сползать, я выскоблила на скале твое имя. Мне все время казалось, что ты со мной. Ты шел и подавал мне руку, где круто. Я очень хорошо представила тебя мальчиком – в Вологде. А теперь ты был лет 25-26, а мне и совсем было 17 лет. Ах, милый, какой ты был сегодня красивый! Загорелый, голубоглазый, бесстрашный! Мне кажется, что я всегда была с тобой. Неужели ты прожил без меня 58 лет?" (6:470).

<sup>300</sup> "Спасибо тебе за твои милые слова, которые я не заслуживаю. А боязнь высоты у меня точно такая же, как и у тебя, – на Колыме я никогда не мог перейти по бревну, достаточно толстому и устойчивому через пропасть, ущелье, распадок – садился и перебирал руками. Я в Вологде, в детстве, юности не ходил на колокольню и не смотрел город с высоты, боялся подойти к перилам – а мне кричали: "Трус, не может." (6:478)

<sup>301</sup> "Каждое воскресенье колокольня открывается – такие виды на весь город, и весь город тянется пролезть к железным перилам, весь город, кроме сына отца Тихона, который шарахается от высоты, плачет и бежит вниз. Все это было расценено как заговор против доброго имени отца – вырастил неженку" (4:56). [Every Sunday, the bell tower opens with such views over the entire city, and the entire city runs to climb up the iron railing, the whole city, except for the son of Father Tikhon, who shies away from the altitude, cries and runs down. All of this was seen as a conspiracy against the good name of his father, that he'd raised a sissy.]

strenuous actions of the Union of Writers in Vologda and the first secretary of the regional committee that tried to enroll me in the ranks of “compatriots.”<sup>302</sup>

His mother, Nadezhda Shalamova (née Vorob’eva), passed away in 1934, a year after his father. Shalamov visited Vologda for the last time in December the same year for her funeral. However, he wrote about his memories of Vologda before *The Fourth Vologda*. In 1964, the writers’ union of Vologda asked him to furnish the publication of his poetry with an autobiography. He composed an autobiographical text titled “Несколько моих жизней” [“A Few of My Lives”], which he later deemed unfitting for the Vologda context and it was never published in his lifetime.<sup>303</sup> His childhood takes up the first ten pages of this autobiography and focuses on his development as an aspiring poet. His parents are mentioned only in passing and without their names: his mother appears as an untapped resource for poetry that he only discovered as an adult<sup>304</sup> and his father is presented as a keeper of domestic animals and a hunter before being identified as an Orthodox priest. In one of his autobiographical notes from the 1960s, which might have been preparatory material for either “A Few of My Lives” or *The Fourth Vologda*, Shalamov introduces a dialogue from his childhood with the observation that he began his sexual life early, at the age of fourteen.<sup>305</sup> The dialogue that follows is about the role of each child in the family according to his father. His brother, Sergei, is the hunter and his oldest brother Valery the artist, but the youngest son Varlam is left without a designation and thus without a space of his own in the family:

Only after everything, as a mature man, I realized that I has simply been born too late – there was no place left in the family for me. Everything had been decided somewhere in

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<sup>302</sup> Я думал, город давно забыт и встречи со старыми знакомыми – вологодскими энтузиастами, проживающими на Беговой улице – никаких эмоций – ни подспудных, ни открытых – у меня не вызывали, после смерти матери все было кончено, крест был поставлен на городе, несмотря на энергичные действия Союза писателей Вологды и первого секретаря обкома по зачислению меня в ‘земляки’” (6:461).

<sup>303</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 15 1964: “Недавно мне пришло письмо из Вологодского отделения Союза писателей с просьбой дать книгу, написать ‘писательскую’ автобиографию. Писательская автобиография должна (по тексту письма) быть написана ‘сочно,’ ‘образно.’ Честное слово, так и пишут, письмо у меня. <...> Я начал свою автобиографию и написал уже листа четыре. Хочу показать Вам. Это вещь не для Вологды — велика по объему, так сказать, называется ‘Несколько моих жизней’” (6:298-9). [I recently received a letter from the Vologda branch of the Writers’ Union with a request for a book, to write a “writer’s” autobiography. A writer’s an autobiography must be (according to the text of the letter) to be written “lusciously,” “imaginatively.” Honestly, that’s how they write, I’ve got the letter. <...> I started my autobiography and I’ve already written four sheets. I want to show you. This thing is not for Vologda – it is large in volume, so to speak, called “A Few of My Lives.”]

<sup>304</sup> “Мне не открыл поэзии никто. Мама моя могла бы это сделать, как я догадывался позже, уже в разлуке с семьей. <...> Мама моя знала бесконечное количество стихов – на всякие случаи из классиков-авторов – я не мог сообщить ей ничего нового. Всевозможные стихотворные цитаты имелись у мамы на все случаи жизни, и именно поэтому я думаю, что стихи играли в ее жизни роль очень большую и вполне реальную” (4:299-300). [Nobody introduced me to poetry. My mother could’ve done it, as I figured out later, when I’d already separated from my family. <...> My mother knew an endless number of poems – for any event from the classical authors; I couldn’t have told her anything new. My mother had all sorts of poetic quotations for all occasions, and that is why I think that poetry played a very large and very real role in her life.]

<sup>305</sup> From his notebooks dated only to the 1960s-70s: “Я, рано начавший половую жизнь (с четырнадцати лет), прошедший жесткую школу двадцатых годов, их целомудренного начала и распутного конца, давно пришел к заключению (пришел к заключению в заключении, прошу прощения за каламбур), что чтение даже вчерашней газеты больше обогащает человека, чем познание очередного женского тела...” (5:349). [I, who had my sexual debut early (at age fourteen), who went through the tough school of the 1920s, with their chaste start and dissolute end, long ago concluded (concluded while incarcerated, sorry for the pun) that even the reading of yesterday’s newspaper enriches a man more than the knowledge of yet another female body...]



Alaska: the son Sergei was the Nimrod, the best hunter of the best. The son [Valery] was the painter, our Rubens, although he didn't go above sawing, coloring books with store-bought cut-out patterns. But he was always doing something: sawing, banging with a hammer. In any case, he didn't write poems.<sup>306</sup>

In a later note, which is also shaped as a dialogue, his father adds that his sister Galia is the singer and his sister Natasha the failure because “every family can have a failure.”<sup>307</sup> Shalamov emphasizes that his brother Valery, the artist, does not write poetry and therefore positions himself as the family's literary talent. Despite his dedication to this self-chosen role, his childhood narrative never recovers from the realization of belatedness and he struggles to forge a space and an identity for himself that would be an alternative to the exile of the outcast. As for the start of his sexual life at the age of fourteen, which frames these dialogues from his childhood in his notes, neither sexual relations nor romantic relationships are included in *The Fourth Vologda*.<sup>308</sup> One reason for this could be that Shalamov envisioned Sirotinskaya as his first reader and that he may have been reluctant to include this part of his past life in a text meant, at least initially, for her. Another reason might be the other implicit intended reader of this work: his mother.

At a first reading, his childhood narrative seems to be more about Shalamov's father than about himself. However, a closer analysis of the text reveals his mother to be the center of the form of his narrative, whereas his father is the focus for much of its content. His father lived a public life in Vologda, by personal choice and professional aspirations, and the story of his life was well known to Shalamov as a child. His mother's story is the story he never knew, and could therefore not access in 1968, but in *The Fourth Vologda* he attempts to resurrect her through the act of writing: when he addresses the reader as ‘you’ in this text, he is speaking to his mother. His appeals to her give the work a subjective and intimate dimension, a dimension in which one of the problems in his late style – the return through resurrection – makes this work about the overcoming of Shalamov the child through the overcoming of the loss of his mother's story.

Shalamov had a rich tradition of childhood pseudo-autobiographies to draw from in Russian and Soviet literature – from Tolstoy's *Детство* [*Childhood*] (1852) and Maxim Gorky's *Детство* [*Childhood*] (1913) to Andrei Bely's *Котик Летаев* [*Kotik Letaev*] (1922), Osip Mandel'shtam's *Шум времени* [*The Noise of Time*] (1923), Bunin's *Жизнь Арсеньева* [*The Life of Arsen'ev*] (1930), and even Pasternak's *Детство Любева* [*The Childhood of Liubers*] (1922) – when he crafted his own. However, the childhood he writes was neither to have been a “happy, happy

<sup>306</sup> “Уже после, зрелым человеком, я сообразил, что я просто опоздал родиться – места в семье мне не осталось. Все было решено еще где-то на Аляске: сын Сергей – Нимрод, охотник лучший из лучших. Сын [Валерий] – художник, Рубенс, хотя он не пошел выше выпиливания, раскраски по купленным в магазине вырезкам. Но все что-то делал: что-то пилит, молоточком стучит. Стихов, во всяком случае, не пишет” (5:350).

<sup>307</sup> “– Нашей семье грех жаловаться на Бога, – разъяснял отец за столом, Валерий – художник, сестра Галя – певица, Сергей – это Нимрод семьи, ее физическая сила. Бессребреничество израсходовано на мать. Наташа – неудачница. В каждой семье может быть неудачница, – разъяснял отец, размазывая ножом горчицу по свежему, дымящемуся черному хлебу” (5:351). [– Our family cannot complain to God, Father explained by the table. Valery is the artist, the sister Galia is the singer, Sergei is the family's Nimrod, its physical strength. Poverty was all expended on your mother. Natasha is the failure. Every family can have a failure, Father explained while wiping mustard with the knife on fresh, steaming black bread.]

<sup>308</sup> “[У]езжая из Вологды навсегда, я не оставил разбитых сердец” (4:139-40). [(L)eaving Vologda forever, I didn't leave any broken hearts behind].

time,” in accordance with the nineteenth-century tradition informed by Tolstoy’s *Childhood*,<sup>309</sup> nor a time of social challenges and class disparities, a model pioneered by Gorky’s *Childhood* that inspired many twentieth-century narratives about pre-Soviet upbringings.<sup>310</sup> Several of the conventions observed in these works are evoked only to be undermined in *The Fourth Vologda*, a childhood narrative that wants to be different. Shalamov’s upbringing in a clergy family seems to be a sufficient difference from previous texts about childhood, but this unique family background receives an added dimension of differentiation: his father was an unusual priest who was brought back from over a decade in Alaska to his home country by the excitement of the first Russian revolution in 1905. To add to the exclusive circumstances of Shalamov’s childhood, his father soon became involved in ‘Обновленчество,’ the Renovationist movement in the Russian Orthodox Church. An Orthodox priest with unorthodox views, he fought the church authorities in Vologda and welcomed the February revolution in 1917; however, after his favorite son, Sergei, was killed in battle in 1920 during the Civil War he became blind. His youngest son witnessed not only the debilitating disability of his father, but also the consequences of his involvement in the Renovationist church against the backdrop of an enormous disruption in Russian history. His family suffered in several disastrous and deeply personal ways: his father lost his right to serve, before he lost his sight, and with it the family lost their livelihood. The son of an Orthodox priest, albeit disabled and all but defrocked, Shalamov did not have the right to pursue higher education in the newly founded Soviet state. Instead, he wrote that his father was an invalid on his application to Moscow State University. For this he was expelled in 1928 – even though Shalamov had left Vologda, his childhood eventually caught up with him.

When Vologda caught up with him again in 1968, forty years later, Shalamov used the exceptional circumstances of his childhood to his advantage. Writing for Sirotinskaya – and, by extension, for his mother – rather than for publication, he did not have to concern himself with producing a polished or even chronologically coherent work. It is the writing of the past, rather than the living of it, which shapes his childhood narrative. His private past is punctured by historical and familial anecdotes, gossip and rumors, events from his youth in Moscow, and other information that sometimes appears irrelevant. This makes his childhood retrospective a chaotic and difficult text. He traces the tumultuous changes in his city, the violent changes in his century, as well as the equally turbulent private changes within his family that influenced both his identity and his relationship with literature. For it is the making of a writer that is the underlying emphasis of *The Fourth Vologda*: in his struggle for a space of his own, against the restrictive reading practices of his father and for the unknown poetic legacy of his mother, the last child becomes the writer of his own story. The ‘late’ early Shalamov was in this city, in this century, as a child – but it is the ‘early’ late Shalamov, the author of *The Fourth Vologda*, who reinstates his presence in his own childhood through a literary work, be as it may a belated return.

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<sup>309</sup> “The [fifteenth] chapter begins with two sentences in the author’s voice: ‘Happy, happy irretrievable time of childhood! How can one not love, not cherish its memories?’ For the Russian cultural mind, these may have been the most unforgettable sentences Tolstoy ever wrote. For the next 80 years, practically every first-person description of childhood in Russia, whether in fictional or nonfictional forms, was oriented toward them.” Wachtel, Andrew. *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP, 1990, 45-6.

<sup>310</sup> “The ‘happy, happy time’ of the Russian gentry boy of Tolstoy’s *Childhood* was replaced in Gorky’s [*Childhood*] with recollections of pain, loss, and, most of all, social injustice that dominated the world of an author deprived of the privileges of an upper-class child’s existence. <...> In creating his anti-gentry model of childhood, Gorky went on to compose his own myth of poverty, neglect, and abuse, and thus established the new Soviet canon of childhood that became highly influential in Russian literature of the Soviet period.” Balina, Marina. “Troubled Lives: The Legacy of Childhood in Soviet Literature” in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Special Forum Issue: Russian Children’s Literature: Changing Paradigms, Summer, 2005, 249.

## 2.a. The Space of the City and Literary Creativity as Space

*The Fourth Vologda* begins with a reconstruction of the space of Shalamov's childhood that simultaneously overwrites previous historical conceptions of this city. He suggests an alternative fourth dimension for the writing of his past, which is reflected in the title,<sup>311</sup> and it becomes the site for his creativity as a nascent writer. The last child in a family of seven in a provincial town, the early Shalamov longs to escape the confinement of his childhood home, much like the late Shalamov searches for an exit from literary conventions in the act of writing about this childhood. Like his older siblings, he does not have a room of his own and his life unfolds in the public spaces of Vologda – in schools, theater groups, and libraries – and in a private space of creativity that he forges through his intimate relationship with literature. Thus, the space of Vologda as a city, and not only his private home within it, must be claimed at the beginning of his childhood narrative. He begins *The Fourth Vologda* by contrasting his Vologda as “the fourth” with the previous three conceptions of this city:

There are three versions of Vologda: the historical town, the regional center, and the place of exile. My Vologda is the fourth. I'm writing *The Fourth Vologda* at the age of sixty-four... In this book, I'm trying to connect three times: past, present and future in the name of the fourth time – art. What is there more of in it? Of the past? Of the present? Of the future? Who will answer this question?<sup>312</sup>

The struggle for a space of his own in childhood is mirrored in his personal interpretation of Vologda as a city in the first two chapters. The opening paragraph quoted above functions as both a narrative frame and a protective shield as it underlines the difference between his and the other three conventional conceptions of Vologda. This introduction suggests the non-linear chronology of the work, which does not begin with his first memories or even a temporal framework in which to situate Shalamov as a child in relation to the subsequent narrative. The reader of *The Fourth Vologda* is often confused as to the age of ‘the child’ in its scenes; sometimes a year or an age is mentioned, but the same year and the same age often reoccur. Not only is Shalamov's Vologda the “fourth,” but his “time of art” is also the “fourth”: a combination of past, present, and future that undermines any stable chronology or linear unfolding of events. His childhood narrative appears as a disordered work, one in which his “fourth” representation of Vologda as *his* city must also violate any conventional structure of a child's experiences within it.

The absence of a coherent temporality in *The Fourth Vologda* is reflected in the organization of the text. The first part, approximately 50 pages of this 150-page work, is divided into twelve chapters which each focus on a certain aspect of Shalamov's childhood. For example, chapter XI focuses on his mother and chapter XII on his father; however, chapter XII marks the end of this organization as it expands until the end. It is unclear whether he intended the

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<sup>311</sup> Although the title seems to allude to Mandel'shtam's essay “Четвертая проза” [“Fourth Prose”] (1929), the manuscript of *The Fourth Vologda* shows its title to have been an afterthought, after the extensive section about the other three conceptions of this town, written in the following way: “Эту рукопись **“Четвертую Вологду”** я пишу в шестьдесят четыре года от роду...” [This manuscript ***The Fourth Vologda*** I'm writing at the age of sixty-four...] V. T. Shalamov, *Chetvertaia Vologda*, F. 2596, op. 3, ed. khr. 108, 1.

<sup>312</sup> “Есть три Вологды: историческая, краевая и ссыльная. Моя Вологда – четвертая. ‘Четвертую Вологду’ я пишу в шестьдесят четыре года от роду... Я пытаюсь в этой книге соединить три времени: прошлое, настоящее и будущее – во имя четвертого времени – искусства. Чего в ней больше? Прошлого? Настоящего? Будущего? Кто ответит на это?” (4:7).

narrative to surrender its initial structure at this point or if he simply did not edit the last two-thirds of the work into separate chapters. The loss of the earlier organization seems to reflect a split in the process of writing which transforms the childhood narrative into a subjective and emotional tracing of everything that cannot be expressed through literary conventions.

Toward the end of the first chapter (I-II), Shalamov stops himself and the narrative to remind himself as well as his reader that the city is not the focus of his work: “But I’m writing neither the history of the revolution nor the history of my family. I’m writing the history of my soul – nothing more.”<sup>313</sup> This emphasis on a history of “his soul,” rather than the history of the revolution or of his family, appears strikingly similar to statements in his two programmatic letters from the early 1970s.<sup>314</sup> However, the appeal to subjectivity in this sudden break in the first chapters of *The Fourth Vologda* is also a challenge to a different literary strategy in another Russian childhood narrative that had become quite a convention by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the emphasis on history in Mandel’shtam’s *The Noise of Time*: “I want to talk not about myself, but to follow the century, the noise and sprouting of time. My memory is hostile to everything personal. If it was up to me, I would just frown remembering the past.”<sup>315</sup> Unlike Mandel’shtam, Shalamov underlines the private dimension of *The Fourth Vologda*.

The literary task of representing a soul is, perhaps, a more ambiguous aim than to illuminate a childhood through its location in geographic space and historical time. Without a room of his own, Shalamov has to locate a realm that would be accessible only to his soul. The first chapters of *The Fourth Vologda* describe the outline and furniture of his family’s small apartment in detail. Several of the items were brought from Alaska, and preserve the memory of the family’s missionary journey as well as show the international and intellectual orientation of his father. Shalamov shares a room with his brothers and does not have a bed but sleeps on a trunk which, as he emphasizes, has not been to “any America.”<sup>316</sup>

And on a mattress placed on the lid of the trunk I slept my whole life there, the mattress only grew longer. It was there that I grew up and learned how to play long literary solitaire games. My brothers’ weapons and their business did not cause the slightest

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<sup>313</sup> “Но я не пишу ни истории революции, ни истории своей семьи. Я пишу историю своей души – не более” (4:18).

<sup>314</sup> In his 1971 letter to Sirotinskaya, he stresses the subjective aspect of his prose: “Я летописец собственной души. Не более” (6:495) [I’m a chronicler of my own soul. Nothing more.], and he repeats this phrase in his letter to Kremenskoï in 1972 with an added context concerning the use of his type of prose: “Я летописец собственной души, не более. Можно ли писать, чтобы чего-то не было злого и для того, чтобы не повторилось. Я в это не верю, и такой пользы мои рассказы не принесут” (6:580). [I am a chronicler of my own soul, nothing more. Is it possible to write something that is not evil and so that it would not happen again. I do not believe in this and my short stories will not yield such use.]

<sup>315</sup> “Мне хочется говорить не о себе, а следить за веком, за шумом и прорастанием времени. Память моя враждебна всему личному. Если бы от меня зависело, я бы только морщился, припоминая прошлое.” Mandel’shtam, O. E. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem: v trekh tomakh*. Moskva: Progress-Pleiada, 2010, Vol. 2, 250.

<sup>316</sup> “В этой же комнате слева от двери – сразу у стены стоял большой купеческий сундук ‘со звоном.’ Этот сундук ни в какой Америке не бывал, но оказался очень удобной вещью гардероба в большой семье – сундук было удобно открывать, и мать держала в нем всякие свои вещи” (4:26). [In the same room on the left side of the door, directly toward the wall, there was a large merchant’s trunk “with a clatter.” This trunk hadn’t been to any America, but it was very convenient thing for clothes in a big family - the trunk was easy to open and my mother kept all sorts of her belongings in it.]

interest in me. I had my own business: school, comrades, reading, playing with candy wrappers.<sup>317</sup>

On this trunk, the creative life of Shalamov as a child begins. “Игра в фантики,” a popular children’s game in which candy wrappers are folded and used to signify various characters appears in several places throughout *The Fourth Vologda*. It is first mentioned in the opening chapter as a game that greatly “disturbed” his family.<sup>318</sup> In chapter IV, from which the above quotation is taken, he expands on the meaning of his “candy wrappers” as a way for him not only to create a sense of personal space but also to stop historical time: “And I still slept on the same trunk and played my literary solitaire games, with my mysterious candy wrappers.”<sup>319</sup> His brothers leave home and Shalamov moves into his parents’ room, in which he will remain until his departure for Moscow in 1924, but neither the relocation to another room nor to Moscow can stop his literary game. Later, in the expansive twelfth chapter, he explains what this game means for him as an aspiring writer:

From approximately the age of eight, with the help of so-called candy wrappers – the covers from candy pieces folded into little envelopes – I easily played out for myself the content of novels I’d read, short stories, historical works and, subsequently, my own short stories and novels that never reached paper and were never supposed to. This proved to be a highly exciting experience in the form of a literary solitaire. I played with these candy wrappers by myself for several years – Butyrka prison, it seems, stopped this game.<sup>320</sup>

This literary solitaire is a way, at first, for Shalamov to repeat what he reads but soon it becomes a laboratory for his own creations. This game holds the key to the disorganized structure and sometimes disorienting narrative strategies of *The Fourth Vologda*: in his childhood retrospective, he also repeats, even resurrects, the different scenes and memories in his past, just as he plays out the

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<sup>317</sup> “А на крышке сундука на тюфячке спал я всю тамошнюю жизнь, тюфячок только становился все длиннее. Тут я рос и вырос и научился раскладывать длинные литературные пасьянсы. Оружие братьев, их дела не вызывали у меня ни малейшего интереса. У меня были свои дела – школа, товарищи, чтение, игра в фантики” (4:26).

<sup>318</sup> “Проза тоже требует ритмизации и без ритма не существует. Но писание как особенность мгновенной отдачи, для которой я нашел мне принадлежащий, личный способ торможения, фиксации, – а торможение внешнего мира и есть процесс писания, – я отношу к десяти годам, к времени возникновения моей игры в ‘фантики,’ моих литературных пасьянсов, которые так тревожили мою семью” (4:8). [Prose also requires rhythm and doesn’t exist without rhythm. But writing as a characteristic of instant gratification, for which I found my own personal way of inhibition, of fixation – and the inhibition of the outside world is the process of writing – I attribute to the age of ten years, to the origin of my game with “candy wrappers,” my literary solitaire, which so disturbed my family.]

<sup>319</sup> “А я все так же спал на том же сундуке и раскладывал свои литературные пасьянсы, свои таинственные фантики” (4:26-7).

<sup>320</sup> “Лет примерно восьми с помощью так называемых фантиков – сложенных в конвертики конфетных обложек – легко проигрывал для себя содержание прочитанных мною романов, рассказов, исторических работ, а впоследствии и своих собственных рассказов и романов, которые не дошли до бумаги и не предполагалось, что дойдут. Это оказалось в высшей степени увлекательным занятием в виде литературного пасьянса. Я играл в эти фантики сам с собой несколько лет – тюрьма Бутырская, кажется, остановила эту игру” (4:61).

plots of other texts with candy wrappers as a child.<sup>321</sup> The absences of certain aspects of the young Shalamov's life, of which we can only be certain that he omitted his romantic and sexual relationships, mirror the technique in his literary game: it keeps as much from posterity as it preserves for others to read. This literary solitaire is also intimately connected with the struggle for space in Shalamov's childhood as it creates a realm beyond his marginal position in the family home: "We lived very cramped. My place was the last and the world of candy wrappers was my own world, the world of visions that I could create at any time."<sup>322</sup> Without the spatial limitations of his childhood, which force him to retreat into his own world of literary fantasies, Shalamov may have become a different writer.

However, his literary game is compromised when his father tests his son's knowledge from reading in a pivotal scene. He makes Shalamov repeat the content of a commonly read and widely known work, Henrik Ibsen's play *Bygmester Solness* [*The Master Builder*] (1892) which, as luck would have it, he read a year earlier. The son tries to pass his father's test by using the technique of his private literary game with candy wrappers:

I braced myself and my lips began by themselves to utter phrases in the way that was brought into my life through the "candy wrappers."

– An architect arrives in the Norwegian mountains to build a temple to God. My voice became steadier with each phrase and I confidently recounted *The Master Builder*. I hadn't forgotten it, especially since I'd read it only a year ago.

– Yes, that sounds kind of right, my father said, playing with his watch and trying to figure something out. It wasn't that he couldn't remember the content of Ibsen's play, on the contrary, he enjoyed remembering it.

– That's right! sighed the sisters in the dark.

– That's right! my mother appeared into the light.

But the performance was not over yet.

– But you're telling the plot? my father, illuminated by some new pedagogical idea, asked.

– The plot, I said.

– The plot, the sisters triumphantly exhaled.

– The plot, my mother confirmed as she disappeared into the dark.

– You're not catching the subtleties? my father asked sternly.

– I don't catch the subtleties, I agreed submissively.

– He doesn't catch the subtleties, the sisters exhaled.

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<sup>321</sup> Franziska Thun-Hohenstein connects Shalamov's game with the performative aspect of his childhood narrative: "Эта склонность к сценической форме, к диалогам позволяет, с моей точки зрения, вспомнить Шаламовскую детскую игру 'в фантики,' которая к форме игры тренировала в нем эту способность к построению диалогических сцен. <...> Пристрастие Шаламова к своеобразному проигрыванию сцен из собственной жизни я понимаю как своеобразный литературный отзвук этой детской игры 'в фантики.' В Шаламовских воспоминаниях читатель нередко наталкивается на такие 'фантики' жизни, в которых практически отсутствует комментирующий, рефлектирующий голос автобиографического 'я'..." [This tendency toward a scenic form, toward dialogues, allow, in my view, to recall Shalamov childhood game "with candy wrappers," which in its form of a game developed in him the ability to build a dialogical scenes. <...> Shalamov's predilection for a peculiar playback of scenes from his own life, I see as a kind of literary echo of the childhood game with "candy wrappers." In Shalamov's recollections, the reader often encounters such "wrappers" of life in which the commenting, reflective voice of the autobiographical "I" is practically absent...] Thun-Hohenstein, Franziska. "Fantiki zhizni'. К поэтике автобиографических текстов Варлама Шаламова" (forthcoming).

<sup>322</sup> "Мы жили очень тесно. Мое место было последним, а мир фантиков был моим собственным миром, миром видений, которые я мог создавать в любое время" (4:61).

- Doesn't catch, my mother exhaled from the kitchen.
- Then what exactly is this reading for? my father was going on about his favorite topic again. What is this empty reading for? After reading a work of art, one must be able to see the characters, to link them with their epoch, with their environment, rather than spending time on this, which is useless and downright harmful. Do you understand that if the reading is useless, it is therefore also harmful?<sup>323</sup>

In relating this literary test, Shalamov refers to it as a “performance” and the scene does indeed have an audience placed in the darkness beyond the lit area where father and son confront each other: his sisters repeat their words and his mother moves from the darkness into the light to recap the interpretation of the failed test. The child is defeated by his father who demands more than simply a repetition of the “plot,” the main feature in his literary game. The reading preferred by his father focuses on historical context and the depiction of heroes within a certain social setting; an objective explanation of the significance of the works is far more important than what happens within them. This scene of a literary defeat staged in the presence of his family shows two types of reading that are not applicable to *The Fourth Vologda*. Although set in a recognizable historical context and familiar social setting, there are no heroes, not even a ‘transitory hero.’ In addition, the child would have been unable to retell his own future text through his candy wrappers because there is no plot. This performance demonstrates two types of reading, one belonging to a child focused on adventure and the other to an adult perceptive only to a realist aesthetic, neither of which can help a reader with the structure of *The Fourth Vologda*. His literary solitaire, which should have been accessible only to his “soul” and practiced in solitude, is here compromised twice: by being shattered by his father in childhood and by appearing insufficient as an interpretative device for his childhood narrative.

The loss of his “candy wrappers” signifies the end of Shalamov’s childhood. Unlike many other childhood narratives, his text lacks a definitive moment of closure that would bracket the time and space of childhood. He sustains the same creativity connected with childhood when he moves to Moscow: “I took the box of candy wrappers with me to Moscow and only after my first arrest, my sister, as she was destroying all my life – all my archives – burned also this precious box along with my diaries and letters.”<sup>324</sup> His time as a child ends when he parts with his literary game after his first arrest and has to invent new strategies to locate a space of his own, in the prison and later in the camp. When his sister burns his archive, she also destroys Shalamov’s

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<sup>323</sup> “Я напрягся, и губы сами собой начали выговаривать фразы тем способом, который внесли в мою жизнь “фантики.” – В норвежские горы приезжает архитектор, чтобы построить храм Богу. – Голос мой креп с каждой фразой, и я уверенно пересказал “Строителя Сольнеса.” Я ничего не забывал, а тем более читанное год назад. – Да, вроде правильно, – сказал отец, поигрывая часами и что-то соображая. Не то он сам не мог вспомнить содержание ибсеновской пьесы, не то, наоборот, с удовольствием вспоминая. – Правильно! – вздохнули сестры в темноте. – Правильно! – показала на свет мать. Но спектакль еще не был окончен. – Но ведь ты рассказываешь сюжет? – озаренный какой-то новой педагогической идеей, спросил отец. – Сюжет, – подтвердил я. – Сюжет, – торжествуя дохнули сестры. – Сюжет, – подтвердила мать, растворясь во тьме. – Тонкостей не улавливаешь? – строго спросил отец. – Тонкостей не улавливаю, – покорно согласился я. – Он не улавливает тонкостей, – задышали сестры. – Не улавливает, – дохнула из кухни мать. – Так зачем же такое чтение? – отец уже уселся на своего любимого коня. – Зачем же такое пустое чтение? Прочтя художественное произведение, человек должен уметь увидеть характеры героев, увязать их с эпохой, со средой, а не тратить время на это бесполезно, прямо-таки вредно. Ты понимаешь, если чтение бесполезно, то оно тем самым и вредно?” (4:70).

<sup>324</sup> “Я увез коробку фантиков в Москву, и только после моего первого ареста сестра, уничтожая всю мою жизнь – все мои архивы, – сожгла и эту драгоценную коробку вместе с моими дневниками и письмами” (4:62).

childhood that is inseparable from his “candy wrappers.” All that remains of this literary game is *The Fourth Vologda*: a resurrection of his childhood struggle for space and a recreation of a space of his own by using similar techniques when writing over half a century later. It is telling that *Vishera*, his autobiographical sequel focused on youth, takes over when he is imprisoned and parts with his literary game. Although the age of twenty-one is a late, and thus unconventional, breaking point in a Russian childhood narrative, it seems that this is also a conscious break with traditional representations of childhood.

## 2.b. The Revolutions of the Father and the Revolts of the Son

Shalamov’s father, Tikhon Nikolaevich, looms large over *The Fourth Vologda* and its reception in scholarship: his antagonistic relationship with his father depicted in the childhood narrative is considered to explain many facets of Shalamov’s later life.<sup>325</sup> Their relationship has even been interpreted as Oedipal.<sup>326</sup> Tikhon takes over his son’s autobiographical text in the expansive chapter XII, which begins as a description of his father like the previous chapter XI focuses on his mother. However, the image of Tikhon is split in two throughout the narrative: one image represents him before his blindness and the other after. These two images are not always separated from each other due to the disordered chronology of the text. Tikhon passed away in 1933, when Shalamov was twenty-six years old, and each image of his father therefore encompasses thirteen years in his life as a child and a young man. During the first thirteen years of his life, Tikhon is a strong male presence in the family with strict rules, regulations, and a specific worldview. The following thirteen years are marked by a different father figure who suffers from a disability. As a blind and unemployed priest, his centrality in the family is gone and the household transferred to his mother who ensures its material survival. In *The Fourth Vologda*, Shalamov attempts to understand the role played by both these images of his father in the formation of his identity: he seems intent on destroying the idealized figure of Tikhon before his disability who controls his first experiences as a child. Through a destruction of the dual legacy of his father, which permeates both his childhood and his childhood narrative, Shalamov writes a final revolt against everything his father stood for and believed in.

Tikhon was a man of the Russian revolutions in the early twentieth century who returned from Alaska to immerse himself in the renewed social climate of his home country. If Shalamov’s

<sup>325</sup> For example: “The image Varlam Tixonovich creates of his father is that of an insensitive, if progressive, tyrant. If the writer had great respect for his father’s achievements in the public arena, he felt antipathy toward him on the personal level.” Kline, “*Novaya Proza*,” 42; “Rejecting his father’s faith, Shalamov became involved with the left anti-Stalinist opposition and was arrested in 1929 for disseminating what is known as ‘Lenin’s Testament.’” Klots, Yasha. “From Avvakum to Dostoevsky: Varlam Shalamov and Russian Narratives of Political Imprisonment” in *The Russian Review* 75 (January 2016), 10; “Есть целый круг материалов, доказывающих, что Варлам – несмотря на всю жесткую мировоззренческую полемику с отцом (которую он ведет и на страницах ‘Четвертой Вологды’) – многое впитал, перенял, усвоил именно от него.” [There are a range of materials that prove that Varlam – despite the rigid ideological polemics with his father (which he conducts in the pages of *The Fourth Vologda*) – absorbed, borrowed, and learned much from him.] Esipov, *Shalamov*, 42.

<sup>326</sup> “Наличие у автора ‘Колымских рассказов’ Эдипова комплекса не вызывает сомнений. Дело не просто в резко негативном отношении Шаламова к отцу, но в абсолютной немотивированности этой неприязни, в неспособности писателя раскрыть ее причины.” [The presence of an Oedipus complex in the author of *Kolyma Tales* is beyond doubt. It is not only about Shalamov’s drastically negative attitude toward his father, but about the absolute lack of motivation for this hostility, and about the writer’s inability to disclose its reasons.] Bol’shev, A. “Shalamov i ottseubiistvo,” *Zvezda* 2006, vol. 6, 190.



return to his hometown is situated in a fourth dimension of art, his father returned to the third Vologda: “Naturally, my father – a shaman and the son of a shaman – returned after twelve years of service abroad <...> to the third Vologda, the Vologda of the liberation movement.”<sup>327</sup> Tikhon is introduced not as a priest, but as a shaman, and this eradication of his religious profession becomes a recurring feature in the revolt against him. The birth of Shalamov is connected with his father’s immersion in Vologda as a place of exile and a site for political and social resistance in the early twentieth century: “Already the idea of my birth was dictated by a different person than that priest who left for the Aleutian Islands in the last century.”<sup>328</sup> In the intellectual circles of educated exiles, the political and social movements of this time, his father shapes his public persona and his civic stance. As an active member in the Renovationist movement in the Russian Orthodox Church in the early twentieth century, Tikhon does not underestimate his own role in the future of Russia: “My father considered himself a person who had dedicated himself to the high goal of liberating Russia...”<sup>329</sup> His liberal religious views cause conflicts with the church authorities in Vologda and he did not live to see the official abolishment of the Renovationist movement in 1946. Neither would he live to read his youngest son’s declaration of atheism in *The Fourth Vologda*. Shalamov begins by rejecting the hereditary profession of priesthood as a child and ends his aversion to religion with a revolt against every strict rule, regulation, and even the specific worldview of his father in the conclusion to this childhood narrative.

The revolutions of Tikhon and Shalamov’s own revolts frame the interactions between them in several scenes. A large part of the chapter initially devoted to his father is set around 1917, when Shalamov is ten years old, and depicts how his father attempts to include his youngest son in his interpretations of the political upheaval of their country and of their time. The February Revolution of 1917 is remembered through two pairs of rubber overshoes, his own and his father’s, that venture out into central Vologda to watch the public celebrations:

For me, the February Revolution begins with the shine of rubber overshoes. The February Revolution was greeted with enthusiasm in the city. On a clear blue morning in Vologda a manifestation began – it was called that then. My father took me with him, repeating: “You have to remember this day forever,” and led me onto a city street. Both of us, taking off our caps, went to the City Council.<sup>330</sup>

In this first encounter with a political revolution, and the popular reception of it, Tikhon leads his youngest son through the streets and supervises his impressions. Shalamov provides a thorough account of the demonstration, through the titles of the songs sung by the crowds and his father’s commentary, yet eventually states that his father obstructs his perception of his first revolution:

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<sup>327</sup> “Естественно, что отец – шаман и сын шамана – вернулся после двенадцати лет заграничной службы <...> к третьей Вологде – Вологде освободительного движения” (4:17).

<sup>328</sup> “Уже замысел моего рождения продиктован другим человеком, чем тот священник, который уезжал в прошлом столетии на Алеутские острова” (ibid.).

<sup>329</sup> “Себя отец и считал человеком, посвятившим себя высокой цели освобождения России...” (4:52).

<sup>330</sup> “Февральская революция начинается для меня с блеска галош. Февральская революция встречена была в городе восторженно. В ясное голубое утро началась в Вологде манифестация – так это тогда называлось. Отец взял меня с собой, твердя: ‘Ты должен запомнить этот день навсегда,’ – и вывел меня на городскую улицу. Оба мы, сняв шапки, шли к городской Думе” (4:90).

If I'd run the streets alone on this day alone, rather than walked holding my father's hand, I would've felt more, would've understood more, since my nervous mechanism was so sensitive and always active. But my father didn't think about this option. He believed that if he himself led me by his hand through this celebratory Russia, I'd remember more of all that I see, and either way I'd remember his own participation in my admittance to the "great questions of Russia." Either way, except for a deaf malevolence toward my father and discontent with this journey – my memory has retained nothing.<sup>331</sup>

The conclusion to his memory of the February Revolution appears, after an extensive narration of impressions, to be both sudden and strange. Instead of holding his father's hand, Shalamov wanted to run alone through the streets on that historic day and, he claims, in this way he could have remembered more. This seems to be a later revelation, one that stems from the reevaluation of Tikhon's role in his life while writing *The Fourth Vologda* as an adult, as it is unlikely that the ten-year-old Shalamov notices what he misses by having his vision and participation guided by his father. Just like the childhood narrative contains two conflicting images of his father, one before the disability and the other after, there are also two interpretations of Tikhon. These two interpretations, like the two images, are not separated in the chronologically disorganized text; therefore, although the reevaluation of his father's interference with his participation in the February revolution of 1917 does not belong to the ten-year-old Shalamov, it becomes part of its belated representation. Since he does not recreate the perception of the child, his feelings seem to be undermined by the later realization, in the act of writing as an adult, that Tikhon is not the hero of his childhood: "It seemed to me for a long time that it was my father, the brilliant dialectician, the skilled orator of the secular persuasion, the popular city priest, who had taken on such a cruel blow of fate as blindness! My father is a hero."<sup>332</sup> The realization of his father's actual place in his childhood occurs to him the same space that took away his literary solitaire, which his father never understood, in Butyrka prison in 1929:

But later, as an adult, when I was already in prison, I changed that childhood opinion. Not that I changed it, but rather that the swollen, rough figure of my mother suddenly crept out of the large shadow that my father cast over the past; her fate had been crushed by my father.<sup>333</sup>

The juxtaposition of the two images of his father – one before disability and the other with a disability – mirrors the confrontation between Shalamov's two interpretations of his father, the first in early childhood when he views his father as a "hero" and the second of a father who obstructs his vision in childhood. Tikhon leads him through his first revolution, thus limiting his

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<sup>331</sup> "Если бы я пробежал на улице этот день один, а не прошагал, держась за руку отца, я больше бы почувствовал, больше бы понял, настолько был тонок мой нервный механизм, всегда напряженный. Но отец и не думал о таком варианте. Он считал, что, если он сам, своей рукой будет водить меня по праздничной России, я крепче запомню все, что увижу, запомню, во всяком случае, и его собственное участие в моем приобщении к 'великим вопросам России.' Во всяком случае, кроме глухого недоброжелательства к отцу и недовольства этим путешествием, – память моя ничего не сохранила" (4:96).

<sup>332</sup> "Мне все представлялось, что именно отец, блестящий диалектик, умелый оратор светского толка, популярный городской священник, принял на себя столь жестокий удар судьбы, как слепота! Отец – герой" (4:47).

<sup>333</sup> "Но потом, взрослым, уже сидя в тюрьме, я изменил это детское мнение. Не то что изменил, а из большой тени, что отбрасывала фигура отца на прошлое, выползала вдруг на самый яркий свет опухшая грубая фигура моей матери, судьба которой была растоптана отцом" (4:47).

access to history and prescribing its interpretation, and he holds the space of his son and the circumscribed story of his mother in an equally tight grip. When his mother begins to “crawl out of the shadow” cast by his father on their shared past, Shalamov also begins to formulate his own revolt against his father’s influence on him and his identity.

The first revolt happens when Shalamov changes his name. The child in his childhood narrative has the same name as he himself – except for its spelling. He was baptized Varlaam, in honor of the patron saint of Vologda Varlaam Khutynsky. He connects this name with Tikhon’s predilection for “паблисити” [“publicity”] which is the only English word used about his father throughout *The Fourth Vologda*: “Naming me in honor of the patron saint of Vologda was also a tribute to decorativeness, to the tendency to publicity, which always lived in my father.”<sup>334</sup> He changes his name to Varlam to rebel against the labeling of his father: “Only I by my own choice turned my name – Varlaam – into Varlam. Considering the acoustics, the new name seemed more appropriate, without a superfluous letter ‘a.’”<sup>335</sup> However, there is also a possible pseudonym for Shalamov as child in this childhood narrative: “Personally, my whole life I’ve disagreed with my father’s tricks with this baptism, I don’t like my name – it would’ve been more than enough to be give me the best Russian name Ivan...”<sup>336</sup> If Shalamov had wanted to, he could have written a pseudo-autobiography according to the convention observed in many previous Russian childhood narratives and called himself as a child ‘Ivan.’ The choice to retain Varlam, the name his father gave him but with his own preferred spelling, is an indication of one of the main themes of his work: the reevaluation and rewriting of his father’s influence on his identity. By suggesting another name for himself, which had it been used would have positioned *The Fourth Vologda* closer to the Russian canon of childhood narratives, he once again shows awareness of a past convention yet rejects this convention for his autobiographical text.

This name change, albeit only in spelling, is significant for Shalamov’s revolt against his father that permeates many of the events narrated in *The Fourth Vologda*. He provides also a subversive interpretation of their family name: “Our very last name – is shamanistic, tribal – by the contents of its sound it is located between frolics, mischief and shamanism, prophecy.”<sup>337</sup> Tikhon, who was brought up in a family where priesthood was the hereditary profession, is not a priest but a shaman and this pagan dimension is underscored in the depictions of his service in the Orthodox Church. The last child is not the only one to revolt in this family line of shamans, but his siblings also find ways to undermine the father’s rules. For example, Tikhon advocates for sobriety and for abstaining from tobacco, yet suffers a defeat that he never realizes: “The result of this dogmatic education was confirmed by personal example. All three brothers and two sisters – in our family there were five – all smoked. I myself smoke from the age of eight. At home, of course, nobody never smoked.”<sup>338</sup> Shalamov smokes openly for the first time at his father’s funeral and his mother takes up the same habit: “The first time I lit a cigarette was at my father’s funeral, I lit one openly at home. <...> After the death of my father, my mother began to smoke

<sup>334</sup> “Наречение меня в честь покровителя Вологды тоже дань декоративности, склонность к паблисити, которая всегда жила в отце” (4:15).

<sup>335</sup> “Только я по своей воле превратил свое имя – Варлаам – в Варлама. По звуковым соображениям новое имя казалось мне более удачным, без лишней буквы ‘а’” (4:14).

<sup>336</sup> “Лично у меня эти отцовские фокусы с крещением всю жизнь вызывали неодобрение, я не люблю свое имя – достаточно бы назвать лучшим русским именем Иван...” (4:138).

<sup>337</sup> “Сама фамилия наша – шаманская, родовая – в звуковом своем содержании стоит между шалостью, озорством и шаманизмом, пророчеством” (4:48).

<sup>338</sup> “Результат этого догматического воспитания подтвержден личным примером. Все три брата и две сестры – нас в семье было пятеро – курили все. Я сам курю с восьми лет. Дома, конечно, не курил никто, никогда” (4:86).

too, little by little, she smoked a whole year and then she died.”<sup>339</sup> Everything in Shalamov’s childhood, like his smoking, becomes a part of his rebellion toward his father – even literature, the space which he forges through his own creativity, serves to undermine Tikhon’s control.

Shalamov states that he learned to read by the age of three, and that his mother, who was a pedagogue by profession, taught him. Long before his father attempts to test his youngest son’s reading abilities, he tries to control his first explorations with writing:

Breaking his bad habit, my father gave me on my fifth birthday, having learned from my mother that I read since the age of three, a thick notebook, manufactured typographically and embossed with gold letters “The Diary of Varlam Shalamov.” All the passion of my father for publicity was in this gift. My father made a short speech, the general meaning of which was that here, as they say, is your diary – we’ll perform heroic deeds and you’ll describe them. But, of course, in prose: all sorts of facts, with insertions. In short, not a single word was ever written in this diary.<sup>340</sup>

Not a single line was written in “The Diary of Varlam Shalamov” and his defiance against Tikhon’s guidance of his literary experiments is illustrated in his reaction to this gift: “My diary was poetry. This is I felt distinctly, for concerning this gift, I wrote a poem about how I was given a diary.”<sup>341</sup> He uses poetry to challenge his father’s control and, unlike reading and writing, which are visible creative practices in such a limited space as their family home, poetry remains an impenetrable realm. Tikhon has neither an interest in nor the ability to understand poetry: “...my father did not like poetry; he feared its dark power, so far removed from the mind and, most importantly, from common sense.”<sup>342</sup> The composition of verse, which Shalamov presumably engages with in mainly oral forms as a child, becomes the ultimate untouchable space beyond his father’s control. Thus, to portray himself as a poet is another way to sustain a rebellion that can never be crushed. Although Tikhon supervises every other aspect of Shalamov’s upbringing, he can never penetrate poetry.

Shalamov expresses his final revolt against his father in an internal monologue toward the end of *The Fourth Vologda*, when he at the age of fourteen reacts against his father’s attack on his mother for her intellectual limitations. As a reply to this attack, he vows to live his life in the exact opposite way to what Tikhon prescribes:

This is what I thought: “Yes, I’m going to live, but not the way you live, but the exact opposite of your advice. You believed in God – I won’t believe in him; I haven’t believed for a long time and I’ll never learn. You love the public life, I won’t engage in it, and even if I will, then in a completely different form. You believe in success, in a career – I won’t

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<sup>339</sup> “Я первый раз закурил на похоронах отца, закурил дома открыто. <...> После смерти отца стала курить и мама, понемножку, целый год курила, а потом умерла” (ibid.).

<sup>340</sup> “Ломая дурную привычку, отец подарил мне к пятилетию, узнав от матери, что я читаю с трех лет, типографским способом изготовленную, тисненную золотыми буквами толстую тетрадку ‘Дневник Варлама Шаламова.’ Вся страсть отца к паблисити была в этом подарке. Отец произнес небольшую речь, общий смысл которой был таков: вот, дескать, тебе дневник – мы будем совершать героические поступки, а ты – их описывать. Но, конечно, в прозе: факты там всякие, делать вклейки. Словом, ни одной страницы в этом дневнике так и не было записано” (4:86).

<sup>341</sup> “Моим дневником были стихи. Это я отчетливо чувствовал, ибо по поводу этого подарка я сочинил стихи о том, как мне подарили дневник” (ibid.).

<sup>342</sup> “...отец не любил стихов, боялся их темной власти, далекой от разума, а главное – от здравого смысла” (4:15).

have a career, I'll die anonymous somewhere in Eastern Siberia. You like to dress well; I'm going to walk in rags and I won't care at all for a state salary. You lived on handouts, I won't accept them. You wanted me to become a public figure, I will only refute it all. You loved [the nineteenth-century artistic movement of] the Wanderers, I'll hate them. You hated selfless love of books, I'll love books wholeheartedly. You wanted to establish useful acquaintances, I won't establish any. You hated poetry, I'll love it. Everything will be done the other way around. And if you now boast of your family happiness, I'll campaign for the phalanx of Fourier where children are brought up by the state and a child won't fall into the hands of a tyrant like you. You want fame, I prefer to die in any swamp. You love farming, I won't love it. You want me to become a hunter, I won't take a gun in my hands and won't slaughter even ONE ANIMAL."<sup>343</sup>

This internal monologue, which addresses his father as 'you,' differs from when Shalamov speaks to his mother in the childhood narrative since it is bracketed by quotation marks. It is also different in that it is not meant to be heard by his father – his final revolt anticipates no response. This internal monologue reads like a credo about what he intends to value in life and how his future path will take him on a radically different route than what his father had planned for him. Unlike his father the Orthodox priest, he will not believe in God and, what is more, he will not aim for success but prefers to die “anonymous in a swamp somewhere in Eastern Siberia.” At fourteen, he could not have known that his future would come dangerously close to this in Kolyma. In his sixties, while writing *The Fourth Vologda*, he seems to be revolting against his father and simultaneously imitating his own interpretation of the romanticized narratives of incarceration in the Russian literary tradition that inspired him as a child. Instead of aspiring to fame, he wishes to die in “any swamp” which echoes a previous comment in *The Fourth Vologda*: “Heroism must be anonymous.”<sup>344</sup> Shalamov will have one final opportunity to express his credo to his father in their last meeting that takes place after this internal monologue in the narrative and after his first incarceration in the northern Urals.

Shalamov returns to his hometown to settle scores with his blind father, not as the seventeen-year-old who left Vologda for Moscow but as a young man after a three-year sentence in the camps. However, it turns out that his mother never informed his father of his arrest: “– We didn't tell your father after all, my mother said. We simply say that you're in the North. – It was of no purpose that you didn't tell him. What am I, a murderer? A thief?”<sup>345</sup> In their last

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<sup>343</sup> “Я думал так: ‘Да, я буду жить, но только не так, как жил ты, а прямо противоположно твоему совету. Ты верил в Бога – я в него верить не буду, давно не верю и никогда не научусь. Ты любишь общественную деятельность, я ею заниматься не буду, а если и буду, то совсем в другой форме. Ты веришь в успех, в карьере – я карьере делать не буду, – безмянным умру где-нибудь в Восточной Сибири. Ты любишь хорошо одеваться, я буду ходить в тряпках, в грош не поставлю казенное жалованье. Ты жил на подачки, я их принимать не буду. Ты хотел, чтобы я сделался общественным деятелем, я буду только опровергателем. Ты любил передвижников, я их буду ненавидеть. Ты ненавидел бескорыстную любовь к книге, я буду любить книги беззаветно. Ты хотел заводить полезные знакомства, я их заводить не буду. Ты ненавидел стихи, я их буду любить. Все будет делаться наоборот. И если ты сейчас хвалишься своим семейным счастьем, то я буду агитировать за фалангу Фурье, где детей воспитывает государство и ребенок не попадет в руки такого самодура, как ты. Ты хочешь известности, я предпочитаю погибнуть в любом болоте. Ты любишь хозяйство, я его любить не буду. Ты хочешь, чтобы я стал охотником, я в руки не возьму ружья, не зарежу ни ОДНОГО ЖИВОТНОГО” (4:142; emphasis in the original).

<sup>344</sup> “Героизм должен быть безмянным” (4:92).

<sup>345</sup> “– Мы ведь отцу не говорили, – сказала мама. Просто сказали, что ты – на Севере. – Напрасно не говорили. Разве я – убийца? Вор?” (4:142).

conversation, Tikhon attempts to circumscribe his son's experiences by imposing his own interpretation of "the North:" "– I, too, was in the North, my father continued his thought. In my youth. Like you. I worked as a teacher for a year and a half. – My North, I said harshly, is a prison, penal servitude. And we parted forever."<sup>346</sup> In the early 1930s, Shalamov and Tikhon had vastly differing impressions of "the North," and the difference between these impressions together with their experiences would only increase in the decades to come: although left unsaid in *The Fourth Vologda*, the greatest difference between their times in "the North" would materialize in Kolyma. Separated from Tikhon's greatest adventure on Kodiak Island in Alaska by the Bering Sea, the greatest challenge of the last child would not only defy his father's understanding of "the North" but also rebel against it with an entirely different story.<sup>347</sup>

### 2.c. The Mother's Last Child and Resurrection through Writing

If Shalamov's revolt against his father is an obvious concern throughout much of *The Fourth Vologda*, the resurrection of the memory and story of his mother is more oblique as her presence is scattered throughout the narrative. Images of her – fragmentary, subjective, and emotional in their essence – shape the disordered form of his autobiographical work. Although he devotes chapter XI to his mother, she appears both before and after it in the text. Often her image appears to stand for the opposite of his father. Shalamov prefaces the introduction of his mother with a legend about the leader of the Renovationist movement, metropolitan Aleksandr Vvedensky, who supposedly canonized his own mother<sup>348</sup>: "I'm not a bishop and not priest. But I'd like for my mother to be ranked among the saints. The vanity of my father was nourished by other, quite earthly sources."<sup>349</sup> By stating early in the narrative that he would have wanted, given the religious authority, to canonize his mother as a saint, both her status in his childhood and her role in the childhood narrative become different from that of his father. However, he does not idealize his mother; it is not the life of a saint that he writes for his mother as an adult

<sup>346</sup> "– Я тоже был на Севере, – продолжал отец свою мысль. – В молодости. Как и ты. Учительствовал полтора года. – Мой Север, – жестко сказал я, – это тюрьма, каторга. И мы расстались навсегда" (4:143).

<sup>347</sup> Kline notes that Magadan and Kodiak are located on the same latitude: "Когда я работала над этой темой, я посмотрела на географическую карту и обнаружила, что остров Кадьяк и Колыма находятся на одной параллели. Мне кажется, что в этом есть какой-то таинственный смысл. Подобно тому, как отец отдавал всего себя служению людям, В. Т. Шаламов посвятил всю свою послелагерную жизнь защите последнего права жертв Колымы — права не быть забытыми." [When I was working on this subject, I looked at the map and found that Kodiak Island and Kolyma are on the same latitude. It seems to me that there is some mysterious meaning in this. Just as the father gave himself to the service of the people, V. T. Shalamov devoted his life after the camp to protecting the last right of the victims of Kolyma – the right not to be forgotten.] Kline, Laura. "Novoe ob otse Shalamova" in *Shalamovskii sbornik*, вып. 2, Vologda: Grifon, 1997, 192.

<sup>348</sup> He expands on this act of metropolitan Aleksandr Vvedensky later in the narrative: "Подобно тому, как мой отец освятил рубенсовскую репродукцию головы Христа и перед ней молился дома, митрополит Введенский, пользуясь своим правом епископа, причислил к лику святых свою собственную мать. Любой епископ может выдвигать в святые любого человека, нужно только пропеть определенное количество или число молитв определенного чина в определенном порядке. Ничего неканонического в поступке Введенского не было. Его святительская уверенность производила сильное впечатление" (4:102). [Just as my father blessed the Rubens reproduction of the head of Christ and prayed in front of it as an icon at home, the Metropolitan Vvedensky, taking advantage of his right as a bishop, canonized his own mother as a saint. Any bishop can nominate any person to become a saint, you just need to sing a certain amount or a certain number of prayers rank in a certain order. There was nothing non-canonical Vvedensky's act. His episcopal confidence made a strong impression.]

<sup>349</sup> "Я не епископ и не священник. Но свою маму хотел бы причислить к лику святых. Тщеславие отца питали другие, вполне земные истоки" (4:25).

reflecting on his past in *The Fourth Vologda*, but rather the affirmative presence of her in his childhood becomes the source for a reevaluation of the same childhood and his own experiences as a child.

As a child, he did not understand his mother's role in his life in the same way as the late Shalamov who writes about them both; thus, his perception of her as a child is examined from the distance of time and post-factum maturation with the aim of overcoming her marginalized position in the family. He must analyze his own childhood in order to resurrect his mother's story within it and achieve a resurrection in literature for her. In his representation of his mother, it seems that he challenges one of the more dominant conventions in childhood narratives that show death only once, the death of the parents as often signifying the end of childhood, and death as having disastrous consequences for the structure of the autobiographical project.<sup>350</sup>

The deaths of Shalamov's parents, which occur neither during 'childhood' or 'boyhood' but rather when he is an adult (when his mother died in 1934, he was married and his wife was expecting their first child), destabilize the convention in childhood narratives to place emotional emphasis on death. It is not death but resurrection that is important for the emotions in *The Fourth Vologda*. The theme of resurrection through writing frames the work, yet it is not the cyclical and repetitive revival in *The Revival of the Larch*, but rather a final and singular resurrection. This ultimate resurrection is connected with the death of his family members, of his older brothers and sister as well as of his parents, who would not become his readers.

Three of the chapters describe his three older siblings who died before Shalamov wrote *The Fourth Vologda*. Each of these chapters ends with the death of a sibling together with a reflection upon how this death relates to his life. His oldest brother Valery dies at the end of chapter IX: "Valery died on the very day and hour on November 12 in 1953, when the long-distance train from Irkutsk to Moscow approached the platform and I got out after sixteen years of absence."<sup>351</sup> The fateful crossing of their fates in November 1953 can only be reconstructed through writing – Shalamov's return to the living and Valery's death did not intersect elsewhere. The death of his sister Natasha at the end of Chapter X is narrated without an explicit juxtaposition with an event in his own life: "As the attentive reader can easily guess, Natasha died at the age of thirty-seven of tuberculosis in the Kratovsky tuberculosis sanatorium."<sup>352</sup> However, there is an implicit connection between her death and his life: born in December 1899, she died at the age of 37 during the same year Shalamov was sent to Kolyma. Thus, he did not feel the absence of either Natasha or Valery, even though they died sixteen years apart, until his return to Moscow in 1953. Yet the first death of one of his siblings creates a much more immediate absence in his life as a young boy. At the end of chapter VIII, Sergei's severely mutilated body is

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<sup>350</sup> "In Russian gentry autobiography the death of a close relative is often described in detail, and it often plays a major structural role (placed at either the beginning or the end of the narrative). One might imagine that the death of a parent or loved one should make a natural and, consequently, a fairly common ending to childhood. Surprisingly enough, however, in her chapter on perceptions of death in French literature and autobiography, Chombart de Lauwe does not note a single case in which a novelist or autobiographer describes a death as marking the end of childhood. This may well indicate that, while death itself is not unusual, its frequent presence as a structural element in Russian gentry autobiography has a mythological basis. As with many other situations, I believe that gentry autobiographers projected their own memories of the death of a parent onto Irten'ev's depiction of his mother's death in *Childhood* [which marks the end of his childhood]." Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, 103.

<sup>351</sup> "Валерий умер в тот самый день и час 12 ноября 1953 года, когда иркутский поезд дальнего следования подошел к московскому перрону и я вылез после шестнадцатилетнего отсутствия" (4:38).

<sup>352</sup> "Как легко может догадаться внимательный читатель, Наташа умерла тридцати семи лет от туберкулеза в Кратовском тубсанатории" (4:43).

brought back home to Vologda from the Civil War and his father serves by the coffin of his favorite son throughout the night:

He himself stood beside the coffin in the first room, in the ballroom. All the beauties of publicity were removed from there and my father was left face to face with the death as his main hope. My father sat in his wrinkled and crumpled epitrachelion on a chair beside his son's body all night. The severed nose and ear of my brother gave grounds to believe that this wasn't my brother, that it was someone else who was dead, and when my father went out somewhere, I slipped into the room and removed the sheet for the most reliable verification. It will be I who will discover for the family what has happened and that this body is not Sergei at all. I'll resurrect the family; I'll return it to life. But the star-shaped scar in the right corner of the stomach was in its place, the rough, thick skin of my brother was dead, cold, and I slipped out of the room.<sup>353</sup>

The first encounter with a dead family member takes place when Shalamov is thirteen years old. He sneaks into the room where the distorted body is displayed with the hope of unveiling that this disfigured face without nose or ear does not belong to Sergei, and that his brother is not dead. With this revelation, the last child intends to “resurrect” his family and “return it to life.” Although Sergei's face is unrecognizable, the star-shaped scar in the lower right corner on his belly – the remains of a removed appendix mentioned previously in the narrative – becomes a symbol that confirms the frightening fact that Shalamov wants to circumvent: his brother is really dead and his hope of resurrecting the family gone. This realization seems sudden to the young Shalamov, but the death of Sergei is not a sudden event in *The Fourth Vologda*.

There are many deaths in Shalamov's childhood narrative but none of them are sudden: the reader is confronted with the death of Sergei, as well as with the deaths of his mother and father, several times. Unlike the deaths of Valery and Natasha, which are described only once, Shalamov feels a greater responsibility for representing the deaths of Sergei, his mother, and father. Sergei died young and Shalamov seems concerned that he would be forgotten if the youngest child did not narrate his fate for posterity: “Only I remember him. My brother (didn't have) neither a fiancé nor a wife when he died. Only in my precarious are his wound and destiny stored.”<sup>354</sup> The untold story of his brother, which is represented through the chapter about him and the many repetitions of his death, mirrors the untold story of his mother. While his father left a paper trace through his missionary observations about his time in Alaska, neither Sergei nor his mother provided similar written documents to prove their existence. Shalamov is the only living connection between their lives and the preservation of their individual stories. Therefore, in *The Fourth Vologda*, he strives not only to represent but also to resurrect them; it is somehow not enough that his writing testifies to their existence – his writing must return to them, to repeat the circumstances of their deaths, to extend the narrative itself to them.

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<sup>353</sup> “Сам он стоял около гроба в первой комнате, в зале. Оттуда были вынесены все красоты павлисины, и отец остался лицом к лицу со смертью своей главной надежды. В спитрахили, измятой, перекосившейся, отец сидел на стуле около тела сына всю ночь. Оторванный нос брата, ухо дали надежду поверить, что это не брат, что погиб кто-то чужой, и когда отец вышел куда-то, я проскользнул в комнату и отогнул простыню для самой надёжной проверки. Именно я открою семье, что произошло, что тело – совсем не Сергея. Я воскрешу семью, возвращу ее к жизни. Но звездчатый шрам в правом углу живота был на месте, грубая толстая кожа брата была мёртвой, холодной, и я выскользнул из комнаты” (4:35).

<sup>354</sup> “Только я о нем помню. У брата (не было) ни невесты, ни жены, когда он умер. Только в зыбкой памяти моей хранится его рана и судьба” (4:35).



The resurrection of his mother through writing is the greatest challenge to *The Fourth Vologda* as an autobiographical text. In chapter XI, dedicated to his mother, he explores her space in the family home through his emotional interpretation of the circumstances in which her life unfolded. The first image he presents of her is of a woman whose physical ailments distort her appearance and she is thus devoid of beauty:

I never saw my mother as beautiful, although I lived as many as seventeen years with my parents. I saw a working animal, bloated from heart disease and hideously fat, who rearranged her swollen feet with effort to move in one and the same distance of ten meters from the kitchen to the dining room: cooking food and placing the sourdough with her swollen hands and fingers disfigured in their bones.<sup>355</sup>

His mother's female beauty, together with her story, will be resurrected later in the narrative;<sup>356</sup> in this initial almost grotesque image of her, the space of the kitchen limits her access to the world beyond it. It seems strange that Shalamov, writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, after the atrocities of the camps, encounters an experience that is too difficult for him to even think about in his mother in the kitchen: "I'm even now afraid to think of what moral forces and nerves were spent there."<sup>357</sup> The story of his mother appears to be not only unknowable, but also unrepresentable for the late Shalamov. In this kitchen, where his sick mother struggles to provide meals for the family and bake fresh bread daily (an obsession of his father), he locates the beginning for his resistance against the legacy of his own childhood: "And I hated all of it from my very earliest childhood, since I remember myself. My opposition, my resistance is rooted in my very earliest childhood, when I was tossing the huge cubes – a toy alphabet – at the feet of my mother."<sup>358</sup> The alphabet blocks seem to anticipate his later play with candy wrappers, as objects that can also be rearranged. He gives the reader a rare glimpse of what might be interpreted as the perspective of himself as a child: he watches the kitchen, the confined space of his mother and her experiences, as if from a position below her on the floor and his perception of her is eclipsed by hatred toward her life. This emotional response is inseparable from his understanding of himself; his first memories are those of a child that hates the place of his mother. Her displacement in this kitchen, writing from a temporally removed perspective in the present, prompts him to not only state this hatred but sustain it further in his representation of her identity: "And I hated all of it. My mother didn't know how to bake bread and she didn't like the kitchen. My mother loved poetry, but not housework."<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> "Я никогда не видел маму красивой, хотя и прожил с родителями целых семнадцать лет. Я видел распухшее от сердечной болезни безобразно толстое рабочее животное, с усилием переставлявшее опухшие ноги и передвигающееся в одном и том же десятиметровом на правлении от кухни – до столовой, варящей пищу, ставящей опары, с опухшими руками, пальцами, обезображенными костными панарициями" (4:43).

<sup>356</sup> "Мама – способная, талантливая, энергичная, красивая, превосходящая отца именно своими духовными качествами. Мама прожила жизнь, мучаясь, и умерла, как самая обыкновенная попадья, не умея вырваться из цепей семьи и быта..." (4:47). [My mom was capable, talented, energetic, beautiful, and superior to my father in exactly her spiritual qualities. My mom lived a life of suffering and died as an ordinary priest's wife, unable to break out of the chains of family and everyday life...]

<sup>357</sup> "Какие тут потрачены нравственные силы, нервы я боюсь и сейчас подумать" (4:44).

<sup>358</sup> "И все это я ненавижу с самого раннего детства, как помню себя. Моя оппозиция, мое сопротивление уходит корнями в самое раннее детство, когда я ворочался с огромными кубиками – игрушечной азбукой – в ногах моей матери" (4:45).

<sup>359</sup> "И все это я ненавижу. Мама печь хлеб не умела и не любила кухни. Мама любила стихи, а не ухваты" (4:46).

The disparity between his image of his mother as a child, trapped in the kitchen and consumed by its mundane concerns, and the image of her which he shaped later in life, as an untapped source for poetic inspiration, is represented in the poem “Моя мать была дикарка” [“My mother was a savage”] that Shalamov composed in 1970 while writing *The Fourth Vologda*. The beginning of the poem finds her suspended in the kitchen: “My mother was a savage, / a dreamer and a cook.”<sup>360</sup> He juxtaposes her previous explorations of the world with her confinement in the home in Vologda that he knew as a child: “And after traveling halfway around the world, / Over the threshold of her apartment / My mom did not step – / The falsehood of people frightened her.”<sup>361</sup> The poem ends with a resurrection of her role for him as a poet: “I owe her my poems, / Their steep shores / The opening abyss, / The starry abyss, the agony of baptism.”<sup>362</sup> Through this poem about his mother, which is complimentary to his representation of her in *The Fourth Vologda*, he preserves an image of her as his immediate predecessor in a family lineage of poets. This image, like that of her in his childhood narrative, is fraught with a duality: she is both “кухарка” [“cook”], keeper of the domestic hearth, and “фантазерка” [“dreamer”], a source of creativity.

The poetic legacy of his mother, although the realization of it was belated, is an aspect of her personality with which he himself could also identify. Yet her domestic legacy is almost impenetrable for him both as a child and as an adult. Instead of supplementing his ignorance with an imaginary depiction of her experiences, he addresses his mother in the narrative and lets the absence of her response create a more intimate dimension within the text. For example, he acknowledges that he will never know how she managed her own survival and that of his father during the years of his disability and unemployment: “So how did my mom live these fourteen years? After all, it is necessary for two people to eat four – or at least – three times a day. What were the recipes? This is one of the secrets that I’ll never know.”<sup>363</sup>

There are many secrets that Shalamov will never know in *The Fourth Vologda*, and all of them appear to relate to the loss of his mother’s story. After the death of his father, in 1933, Shalamov asks her to relocate to Moscow and live with him:

- How can I leave the place where I’ve lived all my life with your father.
- I’m going to die soon, my mother said. There is an omen. If you’ve lived amicably for so many years...
- Yes, I said.
- Well, we didn’t live amicably. Our life together was difficult. It’s not about the last fourteen years when he was blind – all that is different and more clear and simple. It was difficult before. Oh, how I wish you’d get married in Vologda. You I could tell. I listened with bated breath. But my mother didn’t say anything more than that.<sup>364</sup>

<sup>360</sup> “Моя мать была дикарка, / Фантазерка и кухарка” (3:427).

<sup>361</sup> “И, проехавши полмира, / За порог своей квартиры / Моя мама не шагала – / Ложь людей ее пугала” (ibid.).

<sup>362</sup> “Ей обязан я стихами, / Их крутыми берегами, / Разверзающейся бездной, / Звездной бездной, мукой крестной” (3:428).

<sup>363</sup> “Так чем же жила мама эти четырнадцать лет? Ведь надо есть двоим четыре – или по крайней мере – три раза в день. Какие тут рецепты? Это одна из тайн, которую я никогда не узнаю” (4:46).

<sup>364</sup> “– Как я уеду из города, где я прожила всю жизнь вместе с отцом. – Я умру скоро, – сказала мама. – Есть примета. Если живут дружно столько лет... – Да, – сказал я. – Так вот, мы не жили дружно. Мы жили трудно. Дело не в последних четырнадцати годах, когда он был слепой, – это все другое, более ясное и простое. Трудно было раньше. Ах, как мне хотелось, чтобы ты женился в Вологде. Тебе я могла рассказать. Я слушал, затаив дыхание. Но больше мама ничего не сказала” (4:46-7).

Here the narrative seems to hold its breath together with Shalamov: although his mother states that she could tell him, she never does. Later he asks, as if wanting to renew their conversation, for her to expand her story but this time his words take place beyond their dialogue: “Difficult? But why? But why was it difficult?”<sup>365</sup> This dialogue and its interrupted opportunity for the late Shalamov to gain insight into his parents’ marriage frame a curious and significant statement about his mother’s understanding of the resurrection of the dead:

My mom had her own, eschatological, highly original doctrine about the end of the world. The advances of science, especially in chemistry, inspired my mom to consider the Last Judgement and the resurrection of the dead. Gradually, people will turn into the subtlest spirits, almost disembodied creatures. By the resurrection of the dead, all people will turn into spirits and simultaneously resurrected and there will be enough space on earth. I listened to all this with the utmost attentiveness, simply with pity and pain.<sup>366</sup>

It is unclear if she relates her understanding of the Judgment Day and its resurrection in the same dialogue in which she suggests that she could tell Shalamov the story of her difficult marriage. However, her interpretation of resurrection is imperative for the theme of resurrection through writing in *The Fourth Vologda*. After the resurrection, she contends, people will turn into spirits almost without bodies, and there will be enough space for all. The way in which Shalamov resurrects his mother in his childhood narrative is both different from and similar to her idea of resurrection: unlike the spirits of the dead, his dead family members retain their physical appearance, but the space recreated through his autobiographical text, unlike the family home and the provincial town of Vologda, is expansive and extensive enough to contain them all. In addition, his mother’s discussion of resurrection establishes an intimate connection between them: she contemplated resurrection and her last child writes it. In this text, he grants her the resurrection – and the extended space it comes with – that she had been waiting for.

In his final appeal to his mother in *The Fourth Vologda*, Shalamov does not ask her anything but provides her with a belated response of his own. After the revolutions of 1917, the family must share the house, which previously belonged to the diocese, with other families. In one of these families, domestic violence is a common occurrence and he and his mother become witnesses to how the husband, by the last name Rozhkov, habitually beats his wife when drunk:

Rozhkov’s heavy fist lashed across the face, the ribs, the back. It ended with the blacksmith knocking down his wife and trampling on her. The woman only groaned. None of the spectators ever intervene in such cases. They didn’t intervene in Vologda. I stood by the house, looking at the whole scene from the crack between the doors. My heart was pounding. Behind me I heard breathing of my mother. Rozhkov chased his wife chased somewhere down the street, caught up with her and began beating her again.

– Like that, my mom said, I wouldn’t want you to grow up to be.

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<sup>365</sup> “Трудно? Почему же? Почему же трудно?” (4:47).

<sup>366</sup> “У мамы было собственное, эсхатологическое, в высшей степени своеобразное учение о конце мира. Успехи науки, особенно химии, вдохновляли маму на соображения о Страшном Суде и воскресении мертвых. Постепенно люди превратятся в тончайших духов, существ почти бестелесных. К воскресению мертвых все люди превратятся в духов и одновременно воскреснут, и не будет на земле тесно. Я слушал все это с величайшей внимательностью, просто с жалостью и болью” (4:47).

And I didn't grow up to be like that, mom!<sup>367</sup>

Shalamov's exclamation at the end is thoroughly intimate: it justifies his mother's upbringing, which helped him to become a man with different moral standards. Yet it is also vulnerable through the absence to which it speaks: as his mother passes away before he can prove himself to her, there will never be a response. Although his mother would never become a reader of *The Fourth Vologda*, this and the other appeals of Shalamov in the text to her as a participant in his childhood make her also a belated witness to his childhood narrative. By overcoming the temporal distance between the death of his mother and the time of writing, one dimension of the resurrection he attempts to achieve is premised on the inclusion of her in the process of remembering, reconstructing, and returning the past that they shared. The absence of her response is perhaps not as important as the presence of his appeals to her.

*The Fourth Vologda* does not end with the deaths of his parents, which would be yet another absence, but with their resurrection, something of a restating of the presence of them both in his late work. This resurrection is not the eschatological resurrection that his mother had in mind, but a momentous event that brought his parents back to life during the years when his father was disabled and unable to find work. His mother, with her limited access to a life beyond the family home, tries in the 1920s to contact the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States: "From the beginning of NEP [New Economic Policy], my mother tried unsuccessfully to contact the United States, Alaska and Seattle, where my father served for twelve years in the last century."<sup>368</sup> Initially an unsuccessful endeavor, she finally establishes a correspondence with the monk Gerasim Shmal'ts who currently serves on Kodiak Island.<sup>369</sup> Shmal'ts sends her a check for five American dollars that he collected in the parish where Tikhon was a missionary:

My parents were resurrected. The monk Iosif Shmal'ts collected a few more times more, but too few times, alas, he soon died, having ensured my mother and father immortality. My mother even sent photos there and received some back.<sup>370</sup>

These five dollars, together with the subsequent small sums that the monk collected, resurrect his parents and affords them "immortality." Thus, *The Fourth Vologda* ends with a resurrection aided by Tikhon's former parishioners that saves them from a potential death from starvation. By this ending, Shalamov concludes the narrative with a renewed life for his parents and constructs a fourth life for his mother: if her first life took place in Alaska, before the last child was born, her second life after their return to Vologda, and her third life during her husband's disability, then her fourth life is the fragmented representation of her story – together with the space left in the text for her to respond – in *The Fourth Vologda*.

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<sup>367</sup> "Пудовый кулак Рожкова хлестал по лицу, по ребрам, по спине. Кончалось это тем, что кузнец сбивал жену с ног и топтал. Женщина только стонала. Никто из зрителей никогда в таких случаях не вступается. Не вступались и в Вологде. Я стоял у дома, глядя на всю эту сцену из щели дверей. Сердце мое билось. За спиной я услышал дыхание матери. Рожков погнал жену куда-то на улицу, догнал и поддал ей жару. – Вот таким, – сказала мама моя, – я не хотела бы, чтобы ты вырос. Я таким и не вырос, мама!" (4:131-2).

<sup>368</sup> "С самого начала нэпа мать безуспешно пыталась связаться с Америкой, Аляской и Сиэтлом, где двенадцать лет прослужил еще в прошлом веке отец" (4:147).

<sup>369</sup> Shalamov mistakenly refers to Gerasim Shmal'ts as Iosif Shmal'ts in *The Fourth Vologda*. See Agishev, Sergei. "Dva severa" in *Vologodskii lad*, 2013, Vol. 2, 200-3.

<sup>370</sup> "Родители мои воскресли. Монах Иосиф Шмальц собирал и еще несколько раз, но мало раз, увы, вскоре он умер, обеспечив моей матери и отцу бессмертие. Даже фотографии мать туда посылала и получала" (4:147).

Shalamov ends his childhood narrative with gratitude to the monk who resurrected his parents in the 1920s together with a paradoxical statement about his disbelief in any afterlife:

Why am I writing down the all this? I don't believe in miracles, not in good works, not in the next world. I'm writing this down just to thank the long-dead monk Iosif Shmal'ts and all the people from whom he collected this money. There were no donations, just cents from the church tray. I don't believe in the afterlife; I don't want to be indebted to this unknown monk. I could, perhaps, illuminate this story in more detail illuminate, but my archive, where everything that I had left from my mother and father was kept, was burnt during the war.<sup>371</sup>

Notwithstanding Shalamov's own disbelief in an afterlife, his childhood narrative is an afterlife in and of itself: the afterlife in literature that is only possible with resurrection through writing. By trying to answer his own question as to why he is writing, he shows that the autobiographical text is written for the literary life of his parents and for his own first life. With the archive of this life burned, and with it all that was left to him by his parents, this text becomes the only narrative and the only enduring document. In this way, the author of *The Fourth Vologda* remains true to the author of *Kolyma Tales*: writing is resurrection because both constitute proofs of continued existence and of continued resistance. It was perhaps in *The Fourth Vologda* that Shalamov came closest to his own imperative for the "resurrection of emotion" and "life" in the representation of experience that he stressed in his manifesto:

The prose should be simple and clear. A great semantic, and most importantly, a great emotional burden does not allow for patter, trifle, rattle to develop. It is important to resurrect emotion. Emotion should return and defeat the control of the time, the change in the evaluations. Only under this condition is it possible to resurrect life.<sup>372</sup>

Through a resurrection of his childhood, together with the emotions this childhood encouraged in him, Shalamov achieves a literary resurrection for his mother – and "mother" is its last word. This ending points to a potential convergence of the two intended readers of *The Fourth Vologda*, between Sirotinskaya who inspired him to write about his childhood and his mother who inspired its form, as Sirotinskaya states that Shalamov once told her: "I would've wanted you to be my mother."<sup>373</sup> Perhaps, when she became the first to read it, she was.

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<sup>371</sup> "Зачем я все это записываю? Я не верю ни в чудо, ни в добрые дела, ни в тот свет. Записываю просто так, чтобы поблагодарить давно умершего монаха Иосифа Шмальца и всех людей, с которых он собирал эти деньги. Там не было никаких пожертвований – просто центы из церковной кружки. Я, не верящий в загробную жизнь, не хочу оставаться в долгу перед этим неизвестным монахом. Я мог бы, наверно, и подробнее осветить эту историю, но в годы войны сожжен мой архив, где хранилось все, что осталось мне от отца и матери" (4:148).

<sup>372</sup> "Проза должна быть простой и ясной. Огромная смысловая, а главное, огромная нагрузка чувства не даст развиваться скороговорке, пустяку, погремущке. Важно воскресить чувство. Чувство должно вернуться, побеждая контроль времени, изменение оценок. Только при этом условии возможно воскресить жизнь" (5:152).

<sup>373</sup> "Я хотел бы, чтобы ты была моей матерью." Sirotinskaya, *Moi drug Varlam Shalamov*, 7. She suggests that Shalamov was too emotional in his memories of his mother: "Варлам Тихонович без слез не мог вспоминать о матери и сестре Наташе. Но кто из женщин не тащит этот воз – семейное хозяйство. И мать на кухне, и Наташа над корытом – это еще не трагедия. Но деньгами в семье распоряжалась мать, охотничьи трофеи делила мать... Не так уж задавлена была мать отцовской волей, если смогла потом удержать рухнувшие

### 3. *The Antinovel Vishera*: This Is Not a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Convict

*Vishera*, the antinovel, appears as Shalamov's response to one of the first proclamations in his manifesto: "The novel has died. And no force in the world can resurrect this literary form."<sup>374</sup> After burying the novel in "On Prose," *Vishera* becomes his most ambitious experiment with long-form prose. Whether or not this experiment is successful as a literary work remains debatable.<sup>375</sup> Nonetheless, the antinovel is a central text in Shalamov's late style that deserves attention beyond the binary of success versus failure. Set in the camps of the northern Urals during 1929-31, *Vishera* represents a turning point in his early biography as well as in his late aesthetics. 1929 was a turning point also for the Soviet penal system when 'перековка' ['re-forging'], the rehabilitation of prisoners through forced labor as re-education, was implemented. The antinovel traces these changes in the camps through an intricate narrative structure that challenges the form and content of a novel. The result is a fragmented text that strives to "cast off the appearance of art,"<sup>376</sup> to borrow an expression from Adorno, and to become a historical account informed by authenticity and immediacy. As a young convict, Shalamov was indeed present in the camps for its turning point and thus he would be able to create the type of objective narrative that complies with his own declaration in the manifesto of primary experience before secondary representation. However, the literary experiment complicates a reading of *Vishera* as a historical document. With this provocative work, he wanted not only to relate the rarely told tale of the introduction of re-forging in the camps during the first five-year plan, but also create a synthesis of his own artistic method: to kill, once again and once and for all, the Russian novel.

*Vishera* is indeed different from a conventional novel in many ways; instead of fiction, it is based on his personal experience and presents the events and people within it as "true."<sup>377</sup> Unlike most novels, this work lacks not only a definitive title – two titles are possible in Russian, either *Вишера*. *Антироман* or *Вишерский антироман* – but it is also unfinished.<sup>378</sup> This incompleteness

сводды вселенной над своей семьей." [Varlam Tikhonovich couldn't remember his mother and his sister Natasha without crying. But there are few women who don't drag this cart – the family household. His mother in the kitchen, and Natasha on the trough, that's not a tragedy. But his mother kept track of the money and it was she who divided up the hunting trophies... So she wasn't that stifled by his father will, if she could keep up the vaults over the family when the universe collapsed.] Ibid., 16.

<sup>374</sup> "Роман умер. И никакая сила в мире не воскресит эту литературную форму" (5:144).

<sup>375</sup> Elena Mikhailik considers *Vishera* a "failure:" "Говорить о шаламовской 'Вишере' – значит говорить о неудаче. В отличие от 'Колымских рассказов,' производящих безусловное впечатление даже на тех, кто не способен – или не желает – оценить художественную природу этого впечатления, в отличие от 'Очерков преступного мира,' до сих пор служащих аргументом в спорах о социальной истории страны, в отличие от стихов, произведение со странным названием 'Вишера. Антироман' существует на периферии творчества Шаламова. Довеском к 'Колымским рассказам.'" [To talk about Shalamov's *Vishera* is to talk about failure. Unlike *Kolyma Tales*, which produce an unconditional impression even on those who are unable – or unwilling – to evaluate the artistic nature of this impression, unlike *Sketches from the Criminal World*, which still serves as an argument in the debate about the social history of the country, unlike his poems, the work with the strange title *Vishera. Antinovel* exists on the periphery of Shalamov's creativity. As an appendage to *Kolyma Tales*.] Mikhailik, Elena. "Visherskii antiroman kak nepoznannyyi ob'ekt." *NLO* 2015, 3 (133), 295.

<sup>376</sup> Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 566.

<sup>377</sup> "Indeed, by calling his memoir of early Vishera concentration camps an 'antinovel,' Shalamov emphasized that the true/false distinction is of major and immediate importance to all segments of his material, since much of his text is meant to counterweigh falsifications of history and to stop at least some of what Orwell might have called 'memory holes.'" Toker, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose," 194.

<sup>378</sup> See the commentary by Sirotinskaya: "Книга так и не была окончательно составлена автором. Однако основной корпус рассказов и очерков был доведен до стадии белой рукописи. На папке с рукописью рукою автора написано название 'Вишера. Антироман.' В дневнике (тетрадь 1970 г., II) автор упоминает

can be explained by how Shalamov wrote it: the first two chapters, “Бутырская тюрьма (1929 год)” [“Butyrka Prison (1929)”] and “Вишера” [“Vishera”], were composed in 1961, whereas the remaining chapters were added during 1970 and 1971. My analysis of *Vishera* considers the aesthetics of the unfinished as an important aspect of the antinovel as a genre for Shalamov, even though the work may have been abandoned after 1971. *Vishera* presents an assemblage of chapters that he referred to as ‘очерки’ [‘sketches’] in Russian, in which personal memories of his first experience in the camps constitute the backdrop for a representation of collective history as well as for the construction of a young transitory hero; it is his perspective that unites the separate narrative units. Unlike *The Fourth Vologda*, which does not imitate the perception of the child, the antinovel strives to recreate his earlier impressions with the purpose of constructing the kind of narrative he could have written upon his return in the early 1930s.<sup>379</sup> However, knowledge of Kolyma, and the aesthetic legacy of *Kolyma Tales*, frequently interrupts his younger perception. His late style literary experiment contains a dual perspective on this distant past: one belongs to the young convict before Kolyma and the other to the late author. This duality of vision in the antinovel is expressed in some of the intertextual references that are coded twice: first for the earlier perception and secondly for the belated representation.

Never completed and in many ways fragmented, *Vishera* is a difficult work for which different readings and possibly contradictory interpretations can be valid. My focus here is on the duality of cultural and literary markers in the text, which I consider to be one of the features of Shalamov’s late style. The antinovel is an almost programmatic text for his late style. Created from, within, and *around* literary tradition, *Vishera* abounds in intertextual references that are sometimes challenging to fixate. Through allusions to previous literary works, both written around the time when the antinovel is set (1920s and 1930s) and around the time of Shalamov’s work on the antinovel (1960s and 1970s), this belated work fuses an explicit study in history with an implicit examination of literature. The young transitory hero is a product of the texts he read prior to his first arrest – many of these were accounts of incarceration and exile written by Russian revolutionaries or fictionalized works informed by such experiences – a romanticized background with which he is forced to part in both the camps of the northern Urals and in *Vishera*. The antinovel attempts to eradicate this literary baggage by creating a different narrative in which the familiar devices of the novel are destabilized by an unprecedented experience and

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название ‘Вишерский антироман’” (5:294). [The book was never conclusively compiled by the author. However, the main body of short stories and sketches was brought to the stage of a draft. On the folder with the manuscript the title *Vishera. Antinovel* was written by the hand of the author. In his diary (notebook 1970, II, the author mentions the title *The Antinovel Vishera*.]

<sup>379</sup> “[‘Вишерский антироман’] – хронологически и тематически организованная цепочка воспоминаний, рассказов и скетчей – был объединен еще одним дополнительным параметром: личностью рассказчика. Шаламов попытался написать “Вишеру” такой, какой увидел ее тогда, в тридцатые – превратить текст в артефакт, свидетельство юной мухи об окружающем ее янтаре времени. И естественным образом вынужден был воспроизвести и вписать составной частью антиромана – точку зрения себя тогдашнего. Ракурс, угол обзора. Способ видения – предельно конкретный, принадлежащий одному молодому, разумному и честному, но местами невероятно невежественному, завзятому и предвзятому политическому радикалу образца 1929 года.” [(*The Antinovel Vishera*) is a chronologically and thematically organized chain of memories, stories, and sketches that is kept together by yet another additional parameter: the personality of the narrator. Shalamov tried to write *Vishera* such as he saw it then, in the 1930s, to transform the text into an artifact, into the testimony of a young fly about the surrounding time. And, naturally, he had to reproduce and write the main part of antinovel from the point of view of himself then. Perspective, a viewing angle. The method of vision is very specific, belonging to a young, intelligent and honest, but sometimes incredibly ignorant, prejudiced and inveterate political radical as were common in 1929.] Mikhailik, Elena. “Proza, perezhitaia kak dokument: ‘Sagu nadobno rasskazivat’ tak, kak ona sluchilas’” in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, Moskva, 2013, 95.

an innovative mode of representation that transcend what previous literary tradition knew and usually depicted.

The final chapter, “Эккерман” [“Eckermann”],<sup>380</sup> provides a paradoxical conclusion to the antinovel as well as an appropriate starting point from which to illuminate it as a literary experiment whose intertextual references can be interpreted in at least two different ways. All chapters except the last are set in the Northern Urals 1929-31 and focus on the late Shalamov’s representation of himself as a young convict in this region. The concluding chapter reframes the antinovel through a contemplation of the historical accuracy in Johan Peter Eckermann’s *Gespräche mit Goethe* [*Conversations with Goethe*] (vol. 1 & 2 1836; vol. 3 1848). This reflection on the writing of history threatens to cancel the authenticity in the preceding chapters:

What is historical accuracy? Obviously, a record of fresh traces...

Eckermann’s conversations with Goethe – is that accuracy? It is highly conditional to believe them to be accurate, although Goethe intentionally spoke so that Eckermann had time to write it down. <...>

Those are simply the thoughts of Goethe, and even so his open, not secret, thoughts. The very process of thinking becomes distorted if there is a witness, a secretary, a stenographer. I adapt myself to the role of secretary, I produce the selection of feelings and thoughts. Letters are easier, more precise, but even in them there is a selection, and quite a big one. Goethe himself is inevitably artificial, inevitably false in the recording of this conversation.

The second distorting force is Eckermann himself. Despite all his conscientiousness, Eckermann is nevertheless not a tape recorder. So, which account should be given an advantage? Or what accounts give an advantage? Or again it is all reduced to the only truth of art – the truth of talent?<sup>381</sup>

*Vishera* is anything but an immediate record of events – Shalamov wrote it forty years later. The first interpretation of this intertext shows his critical approach to his own innovative project: he problematizes Eckermann’s technique since it preserves only Goethe’s evident thoughts and because Eckermann, as a witness to and a stenographer of these conversations, would not have been able to give a complete account of the late Goethe’s narration. Eckermann thus contributes to the misrepresentation of Goethe. Shalamov places himself in the role of Eckermann, yet acknowledges that even when writing his own story, there must be a similar erosion of both emotions and thoughts. Such a conclusion to *Vishera*, an attempt at representing in detail his first experiences in the camps, seems anticlimactic. However, the second interpretation of this intertext reveals a connection not with Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe*, but with the space where these conversations took place: the Ettersberg, near Weimar in Germany. In 1937, the

<sup>380</sup> My analysis does not consider the short story “Бутырская тюрьма (1937 год)” [“Butyrka Prison (1937)”] to be the final chapter or even to be a part of the antinovel since it is not concerned with his first sentence in the Urals.

<sup>381</sup> “Что такое историческая достоверность? Очевидно, запись по свежим следам... Разговоры с Гете Эккермана – это достоверность? В высшей степени условно можно это считать достоверностью, хотя Гете нарочно говорил для Эккермана, чтобы тот успел записать. <...> Тут просто мысли Гете, да еще его явные, а не тайные мысли. Сам процесс мышления искажается, если есть свидетель, секретарь, стенографист. Я приспособляюсь к секретарю, произвожу отсев чувств и мыслей. Письма проще, точнее, но и там есть отсев, и немалый. Сам Гете неизбежно искусственен, неизбежно фальшив в записи такой беседы. Вторая искажающая – сам Эккерман. При всей его добросовестности Эккерман не магнитофон все же. Так каким же записям отдать преимущество? Или все опять сводится к единственной правде искусства – правде таланта?” (4:263).



Buchenwald concentration camp was built there and the tree, on the trunk of which Goethe and Eckermann supposedly carved their initials in the nineteenth century, was spared by the SS “for its historical significance.”<sup>382</sup> Whereas the first interpretation of the intertext in “Eckermann” is available to the young convict, who read *Conversations with Goethe*, the second interpretation is not – it belongs to the late author who can access historical events beyond the antinovel’s time frame that ends in the early 1930s.

The historically significant space of Ettersberg, once the site for conversations about literature and later encircled by a concentration camp in the twentieth century, reflects the contested space of *Vishera* as a site for both Russian literature and the Gulag. Indeed, Shalamov explicitly challenges another work about the same time and place with his antinovel: the ‘immediate account’ by Konstantin Paustovsky, *Гигант на Каме: на стройке Березниковского комбината* [*The Giant on Kama River: At the Building of the Berezniki Factory*] (1934).<sup>383</sup> Not only working against the novel as form, he also wrote to deliberately invalidate this earlier account in Soviet literature by Paustovsky. In the short story “Галина Павловна Зыбалова” [“Galina Pavlovna Zybalova”] from the last cycle of *Kolyma Tales, KT-2 or The Glove*, which was written at the same time as *Vishera* (1970-1), he questions the ‘immediacy’ of Paustovsky’s work: “This construction still awaits its representation. The hopes on Paustovsky were not justified. There Paustovsky wrote and finished *Kara Bugaz* while hiding from the turbulent and seething crowd in the hotel in Berezniki and not sticking his nose out onto the street.”<sup>384</sup> It was not Paustovsky’s reluctance to become an active participant in the construction site in Berezniki, but rather his omission of forced labor that caused Shalamov to deem his work invalid. Thirty years later, in

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<sup>382</sup> “[*What a Beautiful Sunday!*] not only documents Semprun’s own experience in the camp, but also imaginatively exploits the implications of the particular tree standing in a ‘beech forest on the hill known as the Ettersberg, and which gives its name to the place in question, Buchenwald ... a few kilometres from Weimar.’ For since the Ettersberg, the site of Goethe’s *Conversations with Eckermann* as recorded on September 26, 1827, could hardly in the light of its association with the life and works of Goethe and its proximity to Weimar, home of those other illustrious names in German culture, Cranach, Bach, Wieland, Herder, Schiller and Liszt, lend its name to the euphemistically called ‘re-education camp’ (Umschulungslager) in which the dregs of the earth would be assembled,’ Himmler had decided to call the camp K. L. Buchenwald/Weimar – home also at one stage of that unspeakable name in German culture, Ilse Koch. The tree in whose shade Goethe was so fond of resting on the Ettersberg and on whose trunk, it was said, had once been the carved initials of Goethe and Eckermann, had been spared for its cultural historical significance by the SS when they built Buchenwald. Set fire to by an American phosphorous bomb in August 1944, its charred remains are recalled by the narrator ‘between the clothing stores and the showers.’ In *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, his book of conversations with a host of others, Semprun’s beech merges with Goethe’s tree in a forest of texts about the universe of the concentration camp.” Jacobs, J. U. “Totalitarianism and the Voices of Authority: Narrative Aliases in Jorge Semprun’s *What A Beautiful Sunday!*” in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*. No. 75, Human Rights, May 1990, 57.

<sup>383</sup> This year refers to the journal publication of *Соль земли (Рассказ на протяжении четырехсот километров)* [*The Salt of the Earth (A Short Story during 400 kilometers)*], see: Paustovskii, Konstantin. *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*. Moskva: Khudozh. lit-ra, 1967, Vol. 6, 258-308. These sketches were subsequently included in *Великан на Каме. На стройке Березниковского комбината* and published as a book in 1934.

<sup>384</sup> “Стройка эта еще ждет своего описания. Надежды на Паустовского не оправдались. Паустовский там писал и написал ‘Кара-Бугаз,’ прячась от бурливой, кипящей толпы в березниковской гостинице и не высывывая носа на улицу” (2:314). Paustovsky confirms both of Shalamov’s opinions: first, that the construction in Berezniki was still waiting for its proper depiction: “Необходимо, – говорил заведующий, – написать книгу об этих местах. Я давно ее задумал, но, видите, нет времени, да и языком я владею не так уж блестяще” (ibid., 296-7) [It is necessary, said the boss, to write a book about these places. I’ve long thought of it, but, you see, there is no time, and my language is not so brilliant.] and, secondly, that he did indeed write his first big literary success there: “В Березниках я ходил по вечерам в редакцию маленькой газеты, выпускавшейся на строительстве, и писал там ‘Кара-Бугаз’” (ibid., Vol. 5, 537) [In Berezniki I went in the evenings to the editorial board of the small newspaper published at the construction site, and there I wrote *Kara Bugaz*.]

the sixth and last part of Paustovsky's memoir *Повесть о жизни* [*Story of a Life*] entitled *Кнуза сжараный* [*The Restless Years*] (written in 1963 and published 1966), he admits to having witnessed the convicts in Berezniki: "Prisoners were working on the construction,"<sup>385</sup> a fact he omitted from his work thirty years prior.<sup>386</sup> Sent to the northern Urals as a writer, Paustovsky's meeting with the region was accompanied by the previous works in Russian literature associated with it: "I knew that the action of the short stories by Mamin-Sibiriyak<sup>387</sup> takes place here, and as far as I know, the action of Boris Pasternak's novella *The Childhood of Liuvvers*."<sup>388</sup> The same is true for the young transitory hero in *Vishera* who also first approaches the camps through the lens of literature: "It seemed to me all the time that I was reading a very familiar book."<sup>389</sup>

We cannot know which book Shalamov had in mind – probably a fusion of works rather than one specific text – but the gap between his knowledge gathered from representations of the Urals in previous Russian literature and his experiences in the region appears much greater in his antinovel than in Paustovsky's work. Although they wrote about the same geographic space within one time frame, the literary distance between Shalamov and Paustovsky appears far greater than the literary distance between Paustovsky and Mamin-Sibiriyak. It seems that Shalamov's antinovel echoes the German post-war sentiment "Between us and Weimar lies Buchenwald"<sup>390</sup> and that this emphasis on a massive cultural divide despite a short geographic distance could be paraphrased for his work as 'Between me and the Urals lies Vishera.' By naming his antinovel after the smaller river Vishera, although a large portion of it takes place by the river Kama, Shalamov both refers to the camp system "Вишлар" ["Vishlag"] and separates his text from other works about this region: Paustovsky opted for the river Kama in the 1934 title for his depiction of Berezniki and the miniature poetic cycle that Mandel'shtam produced about his exile in the small town of Cherdyn' in the same year also bears the title "Кама" ["Kama"]. Shalamov's title *Vishera* is thus a geographic provocation, much like the antinovel is a generic

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<sup>385</sup> "На строительстве работали заключенные." Ibid., 532.

<sup>386</sup> In accordance with the author's wishes, this collection of sketches from the 1930s was never included in any collection of Paustovsky's works published during his lifetime: "Почему [Паустовский] отказался от своего произведения, которым, если судить по письмам 1931 года, был доволен? <...> ...и вдруг через тридцать пять лет – 'снимайте без зазрения совести.' Почему? Ответ для себя я нашел в книге Варлама Шаламова 'Вишера.' Автор был в Березниках в те же годы, только доставили его сюда под конвоем. Десять тысяч заключенных не видеть Константин Паустовский не мог. И вероятно, поэтому последовало – 'снимайте.'" [Why did (Paustovsky) renounce his work, which, judging by the letters of 1931, he was satisfied with? <...> ...And then suddenly thirty-five years later: "remove without compunction." Why? The answer I found for myself in Shalamov's book *Vishera*. The author was in Berezniki during the same period, only brought there by guards. Paustovsky could not have not seen ten thousand prisoners. And probably therefore he later said: "remove."] Verevkin, G. "Knigi K. G. Paustovskogo o Bereznikakh" in *K. G. Paustovskii. Materialy i soobshcheniia: sbornik*. M.: Mir Paustovskogo, 2007, 428. Emphasis in original.

<sup>387</sup> There are no indications in Shalamov's literary heritage that he was familiar with Mamin-Sibiriyak.

<sup>388</sup> "Я знал, что здесь происходило действие некоторых рассказов Мамина-Сибиряка, насколько я знаю, действие повести Бориса Пастернака 'Детство Люверс.'" Paustovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 5, 535.

<sup>389</sup> "Все казалось, что я читаю хорошо знакомую книгу" (4:162).

<sup>390</sup> "'Between us and Weimar lies Buchenwald' is a sentence that acquires its special significance from the fact that the Buchenwald camp is in close physical proximity to Weimar, lying a mere eight kilometres from Goethe's house and the National Theatre, where the first democratic constitution of Germany was passed into law in 1919, and only two kilometres from the Ettersburg castle. <...> 'Between us and Weimar lies Buchenwald' was also a realization that resonated with a whole generation of students in West Germany in the 1960s." Pinkert, Ernst-Ullrich. "'Between Us and Weimar Lies Buchenwald' – Places in European Holocaust Literature" in *Non-Place: Representing Placelessness in Literature, Media and Culture*. Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2015, 171-2.

provocation; if the antinovel exists on the periphery of the novel's universe, this small river traces along the periphery of even such a marker of Russian provincial space as Кама.

Unlike Kolyma (a region named after another river), which had been sparingly if at all represented in previous Russian literature, the Urals is a transitory point between European Russia and Siberia that was traveled by several authors on their way to distant locations of forced labor and exile: Avvakum, Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, Vladimir Korolenko, to name a few of the Russian writers whose travels were associated with this region. The Urals were also crossed by the Decembrists and Russian revolutionaries, whose memoirs were read and emulated by the young Shalamov. His journey to the camp thus happens both in space and through literature, as Shalamov notes about this prison dispatch in the short story “Сергей Есенин и воровской мир” [“Sergei Esenin and the Criminal World”] (1959) from the fourth cycle *Sketches from the Criminal World*: “The prison dispatch going north through the countryside in the Urals, was a prison dispatch from the books – everything was just like what I’d read before by Korolenko, Tolstoy, Figner, Morozov... It was the spring of 1929.”<sup>391</sup> This romanticized lens resurfaces in “Первый зуб” [“The First Tooth”] (1964), in *An Artist of the Spade*, which reframes the same first journey of Shalamov as a convict: “The dispatch of convicts was the same of which I’d dreamed for many years in my boyhood.”<sup>392</sup> In the second chapter of the antinovel, also entitled “Vishera,” the literary allusion to similar literary prison dispatches is no longer as obvious:

April in the Urals – there were streams everywhere, thawed patches, the hot burning sun transformed the pale prison skin of our faces into brown in a few hours, and the mouths were turned blue. “And the blue mouths twist in the blackened faces,” said the Siberian from the Urals about a prison dispatch in spring.<sup>393</sup>

In another version of *Vishera*, this “Siberian from the Urals” is deciphered in the text as Sergei Esenin, a poet who was neither a Siberian nor from the Urals. The quotation comes from Esenin’s poem “В том краю, где желтая трава...” [“In the Land Where the Grass is Yellow...”] (1915) which imagines the lyric hero following a prison dispatch of murderers and thieves on their way to Siberia. The antinovel disguises this poem’s author, which might be an ironic remark by the late Shalamov, yet retains a potential intertextual framework for the young transitory hero who is also forced to travel with criminals. In the first chapter, “Butyrka Prison (1929),” he notes that although he was interrogated as a political prisoner in accordance with article 58, he was sentenced as ‘СОЭ,’ ‘социально опасный элемент’ [‘socially dangerous element’]: “I was equated with the thieves, who were then judged under this article. In the same cars as thieves I went to the camp in the Urals.”<sup>394</sup> With his identity as a political prisoner erased, he attempts to establish himself in the camps through poetry and literature but neither proves capable of interpreting the unknown situation for him and thus the plot of the antinovel focuses on the shattering of previous illusions and expectations.

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<sup>391</sup> “Этап, который шел на север по уральским деревням, был этапом из книжек – так все было похоже на читанное раньше у Короленко, у Толстого, у Фигнер, у Морозова... Была весна двадцать девятого года” (2:88).

<sup>392</sup> “Арестантский этап был тот самый, о котором я мечтал долгие свои мальчишеские годы” (1:617).

<sup>393</sup> “Уральский апрель – везде ручейки, проталины, горячее жгучее солнце бледную тюремную кожу наших лиц превращало за несколько часов в коричневую, а рты делало синими. ‘И кривятся в почернелых лицах голубые рты’ – это сказал про весенний этап уральский сибиряк” (4:158).

<sup>394</sup> “Я приравнялся к вора, которых тогда судили по этой статье. С ворами в одном вагоне отправился в лагерь на Урал” (4:155)

The plot of *Vishera* is as a matter of fact that simple, although its fragmented structure and many historical digressions often obscure it. The young transitory hero experiences his first time in prison, his first prison dispatch, his first meeting with the camp and then encounters the arrival of the new camp boss, Eduard Berzin, in Krasnovishersk, after which he is assigned as a supervisor at the construction site of the new chemical plant in Berezniki and where he is later arrested together with others as a part of a case against another camp supervisor, Mikhail Stukov. He is eventually released, but spends the majority of his first camp sentence performing administrative tasks and is spared forced physical labor. His experience in the northern Urals is thus very different from that in Kolyma. The antinovel is about moral, not physical, survival. The main moral difficulty that he faces in *Vishera* is loneliness: he lacks someone to guide him and provide an interpretation of the often shocking and appalling events taking place around him:

Of course, I was still a blind puppy back then. But I wasn't afraid of life, and I boldly entered the struggle with it in the same way, in which the heroes of my childhood and boyhood had struggled with life and for life – all the Russian revolutionaries. I considered myself attached to their legacy and was ready to prove it. But in my heart, I longed for someone, for a person, for someone like-minded who I'd meet on the road of life, in the most remote corners of life, the example of whom I'd follow. A person from whom I'd learn how to live.<sup>395</sup>

Literature could provide this young successor of the Russian revolutionaries with one guide of this kind, but in the antinovel this aesthetic and intellectual heritage proves an unreliable frame through which to view a Soviet camp. The genre of this work signals a farewell to literature both for the young convict and for *Vishera*. Yet he is not alone in the antinovel: the belated representation lends him a companion. This companion is the late Shalamov, who survived Kolyma and can therefore lead his young self through the narrative. It seems that Shalamov's "understanding of life" that he wanted *Vishera* to express ("Or to finish *The Antinovel Vishera* – an important chapter in my creative method and in my understanding of life?") is related to the interaction between the late Shalamov and the young convict in the text. By including a belated perspective on the narrative beyond both its time and space, the "understanding of life" that crystallizes is one without any sense of completion. Life is somehow always incomplete in this late style antinovel, although it supposedly delimits one subjective experience within one historical moment, and thus both intertextual references to previous literature and the young transitory hero must conform to this type of incompleteness.

### 3.a. This is Not a Novel

The final chapter "Eckermann" is a peculiar and sudden conclusion to *Vishera* that is not without precedence in Russian literature: the appeal to another authoritative text that threatens to alter the previous narrative is reminiscent of the ending in Tolstoy's last novel *Воскресение* [*Resurrection*] (1899). The final chapter of *Resurrection* becomes engulfed by quotations from the New

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<sup>395</sup> "Конечно, я был еще слепым щенком тогда. Но я не боялся жизни и смело вступил с ней в борьбу в той форме, в какой боролись с жизнью и за жизнь герои моих детских и юношеских лет – все русские революционеры. Я считал себя приобщенным к их наследию, готов был доказать это. Но в глубине души я тосковал по товарищу, по человеку, по единомышленнику, которого я обязательно встречу на жизненной дороге, в самых глухих углах жизни, примеру которого буду следовать. Человек, у которого я буду учиться жить" (4:181-2).

Testament, an authoritative text that reframes the spiritual journey of the hero, Dmitry Nekhluidov. The last chapter in Shalamov's antinovel alludes to the strategy in Tolstoy's novel, but replaces religious musings with a contemplation of historical accuracy. However, the challenge in *Vishera* to Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, as well as Tolstoy's status as a writer of Russian novels goes beyond both "Eckermann" and the genre of the antinovel; it permeates the entire text. *Resurrection* is implied as a text about imprisonment read prior to his first sentence ("The prison dispatch going north through the countryside in the Urals, was a prison dispatch from the books – everything was just like what I'd read before by Korolenko, Tolstoy, Figner, Morozov... [emphasis added]).<sup>396</sup> In Tolstoy's novel, the hero Nekhluidov follows his former and future love interest the prostitute Katya Maslova during the dispatch of convicts to Siberia. The novel also contains scenes set in prison, where Nekhluidov visits Maslova, but it seems that their journey to Siberia, which passes through Perm in the Urals, would have been especially remembered by the young Shalamov when he traveled through the same region in 1929.<sup>397</sup>

In 1956, in a letter to Arkady Dobrovolsky, Shalamov revisits his youthful impressions of *Resurrection* and produces a paradoxical statement about it: "Look at *Resurrection* – this is after all an imaginary, cold novel, and Tolstoy spent all his artistic genius to make the people not appear dead. He was a great genius and he succeeded."<sup>398</sup> Although he deems the novel both "imaginary" and "cold," he still recognizes Tolstoy's literary genius. This statement echoes the report written on April 10 the same year by an anonymous informer, whose task apparently was to relate potentially subversive statements made by Shalamov. This informer notes that Shalamov did not agree with Tolstoy's approach to the representation of incarceration, which Tolstoy had to verify by visiting Butyrka prison:<sup>399</sup> "Shalamov says <...> L. Tolstoy wrote the chapters about prison for the novel *Resurrection* in his head, and went to prison to get acquainted with some of the details and not make a mistake."<sup>400</sup> This comment gestures to the main difference between Shalamov's antinovel about incarceration and Tolstoy's novel about incarceration: whereas Tolstoy's literary imagination of prison occurred before his encounter

<sup>396</sup> Dariusz Tołczyk notes that Evgeniia Ginzburg also read *Resurrection* prior to her first imprisonment, but for her such a literary heritage as this novel appears to be a less problematic lens than for Shalamov's antinovel: "A crucial force enabling Zhenia to transcend her moral identity constructed in the ideological language of the party, and develop a new sense of self, comes from her attachment to literature. Romantic literary images of imprisonment as spiritual ascent play a dual role in Ginzburg's memoir. They provide the author with a paradigm around which the 'material' of memory is turned into a narrative, but they also provide the protagonist with a prism through which she confronts and tries to shape her experience. Zhenia's own ordeal becomes for her a reenactment of literary models from Nekrasov's *Russian Women*, Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, and many other classical works." Tołczyk, Dariusz. "Politics of Resurrection: Evgeniia Ginzburg, the Romantic Prison, and the Soviet Rhetoric of the Gulag" in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, Volume 39, Issue 1 (2005), 67-8.

<sup>397</sup> "Партия, с которой шла Маслова, прошла около пяти тысяч верст. До Перми Маслова шла по железной дороге и на пароходе с уголовными, и только в этом городе Нехлюдову удалось выхлопотать перемещение ее к политическим, как это советовала ему Богодуховская, шедшая с этой же партией." [The convoy, with which Maslova had gone, had passed about five thousand versts. Before Perm, Maslova went along the railway and by steamship with the criminal prisoners, and only in this city could Nekhluidov procure her transfer to the political prisoner, as Bogodukhovskaya had advised him, that was going with the same dispatch.] Tolstoy, L. N. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*. Moskva: Khudozhenstvennaia literatura, 1964. Vol. 13, 404.

<sup>398</sup> "Вот 'Воскресенье' – это ведь выдуманный, холодный роман, и весь свой гений художественный Толстой обратил на то, чтобы люди не были мертвы. Гений был велик – ему это удалось" (6:137).

<sup>399</sup> "Butyrka prison, in central Moscow, is one of the most famous of [Russia's remand prisons]. It was built in 1771. It was where Tolstoy collected his material for the novel *Resurrection*." Stern, Vivien. "Mass Incarceration: 'a Sin Against the Future?'" in *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, September 1996, Vol. 4, Issue 3, 7.

<sup>400</sup> "Шаламов говорит <...> Л. Толстой прежде писал в голове главы о тюрьме к роману 'Воскресенье,' а в тюрьму поехал, чтобы познакомиться с некоторыми подробностями и не сделать ошибку" (7:468).

with this space, Shalamov experienced Butyrka prison and the camps before writing about them. Representation, Shalamov repeated in his manifesto, must be secondary to experience – an experience that includes both personal and immediate participation by the author. *Resurrection*, seen from this perspective, is an aesthetically and ethically flawed work.

The late Shalamov found Tolstoy to be a troubling presence in Russian literature. In “On Prose,” Tolstoy is no longer considered a “genius” but rather deflated as a writer (for example: “The so-called camp theme – this is a very big theme, which will hold a hundred writers such as Solzhenitsyn and five such writers as Leo Tolstoy”<sup>401</sup>), and his literary technique in *Resurrection* is critiqued in Shalamov’s programmatic letter to Sirotinskaya from 1971 in which he defends his own preference for composing without drafts:

Drafts – if they exist – are deep in the brain and in there my consciousness does not go through options, like the eye color of Katyusha Maslova – this is, in my understanding of art, the absolute anti-art. Does any hero in *Kolyma Tales* – if they exist there – have eye color? In *Kolyma*, there were no people who would’ve had eye color, and this is not an aberration of my memory, but the essence of life then.<sup>402</sup>

The heroes of *Kolyma*, if they can be called “heroes” in the literary sense of the word, do not have any eye color. Tolstoy’s fixation on the color of Maslova’s eyes is, according to Shalamov, incorrect for the context of incarceration as well as an unrepresentable category for those who lived and died in the camps of *Kolyma*. However, the camp experience in the northern Urals is different from that in *Kolyma* and some of those represented in the antinovel retain their eye color.<sup>403</sup> *Vishera* straddles a liminal space between ‘before’ and ‘after’ with dual connotations: ‘before’ refers both to the time without knowledge of his second imprisonment in *Kolyma* and to the type of novels, such as Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, that informed his first interpretations of life as a convict. ‘After’ denotes the pending experiences of *Kolyma*, which are beyond *Vishera* yet part of its frame of reference, as well as what must come ‘after’ such a novel as *Resurrection* according to the aesthetic principles of Shalamov: an antinovel.

<sup>401</sup> “Так называемая лагерная тема – это очень большая тема, где разместится сто таких писателей, как Солженицын, пять таких писателей, как Лев Толстой” (5:153).

<sup>402</sup> “Черновики – если они есть – глубоко в мозгу, и сознание не перебирает там варианты, вроде цвета глаз Катюши Масловой – в моем понимании искусства – абсолютная антихудожественность. Разве для любого героя ‘Колымских рассказов’ – если они там есть – существует цвет глаз? На Колыме не было людей, у которых был бы цвет глаз, и это не aberrация моей памяти, а существо жизни тогдашней” (6:493).

<sup>403</sup> There are at least four individuals with a specific eye color in *Vishera* (and two with one eye): “Со второй полки глядели на меня добрые серые глаза, крестьянские глаза молодого парня. Терешкин была его фамилия” (4:156) [Kind gray eyes looked at me from the upper bunk, the eyes of a young peasant guy. Tereshkin was his name]; “Первым же утром под матерщину, окрики проволокли перед строем чье-то тело: огромного роста человек лет тридцати пяти, кареглазый, небритый, черноволосый, в домотканой одежде” (4:159) [On the very first morning, they dragged somebody’s body with swearing and shouting before the formation: a huge man of thirty-five, brown-eyed, unshaven, dark-haired, in homespun clothing]; “С огромной лысиной, остриженными длинными поповскими волосами, голубоглазый, Карлов носил кличку ‘подрядчик,’ и можно только поражаться точности этой клички” (4:173) [With a huge bald spot, long cropped hair in the style of a priest, blue eyes, Karlov had the nickname “contractor” and one can only marvel at the accuracy of this nickname]; and “Николай Иванович [Жидков] был красавец, – молодой, высокий, черноглазый, давний поклонник Маяковского” (4:223). [Nikolai Ivanovich (Zhidkov) was a handsome man – young, tall, dark-eyed, a long-time admirer of Mayakovsky.]

*Resurrection* is not mentioned in *Vishera* – as a matter of fact, the antinovel references no major Russian novels by their titles or through the names of their heroes<sup>404</sup> – but this last novel by Tolstoy appears as an implicit representative of the type of novelistic structure that is rejected by Shalamov. The provocative genre of antinovel signifies both a conscious reference point in literary tradition and a powerful break from it, a warning sign as it were: *This is not a novel*. The reasons for this generic decision are manifold. In part, his antinovel can be viewed as his contribution to the twentieth century's proclamation of 'the death of the novel.'<sup>405</sup> *Vishera* also shows his attention to the *Nouveau Roman* (sometimes called antinovel), which emerged in French literature during the second half of the twentieth century. Although it is unclear how much Shalamov knew about the French *Nouveau Roman* and where he might have encountered the term 'антироман,' its influence is palpable on his antinovel's young transitory hero, who through his lack of personal history and individual traits evokes "...the many New Novel characters who appear vague, imprecise, empty, without social 'dossier,' even without a known past..."<sup>406</sup> However, he did not recognize in the *Nouveau Roman* an ally for his 'new prose': "The experiments of the French 'new novel' are interesting, but victory is not along this path."<sup>407</sup>

His young transitory hero lacks physical traits, such as eye color, and a biography – in addition, he is given his name, Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov, in dialogues with others. All that a reader can be certain of is that he is a member of the political opposition and well versed in Russian poetry and literature. Instead of representing himself as a young convict, Shalamov strives to place his earlier perception in the center for a recreation of a historical period that incorporates the fragmented biographies of those who were in the camps with him. In this regard, Osip Mandel'shtam's essay "Конец романа" ["The End of the Novel"] (1922) and its proclamation of the death of biography in the twentieth century can illuminate *Vishera*. Mandel'shtam argues for the displacement of a conventional novelistic worldview in the twentieth century and connects the demise of the novel with the fragmentation of biography in this century: "The measure of the novel is human biography or a system of biographies."<sup>408</sup> If there is no longer any place for human biography in life as in literature,<sup>409</sup> then the novel is also

<sup>404</sup> The exception that proves this rule is Rakhmetov from Chernyshevsky's *Что делать?* [*What is to be Done?*] (1863): "Я и сейчас могу заставить себя пройти по горячему железу, и не в рахметовском плане – как раз этот герой меня никогда не увлекал" (4:153). [I can still force myself to walk on a hot iron, and not like Rakhmetov did – exactly this hero never fascinated me.]

<sup>405</sup> "...Шаламов дал ['Вишере'] вызывающее жанровое определение 'антироман', являющееся откликом на дискуссию о 'конце романа' (фактически это хроника первого лагерного срока, свидетельство о ситуации 20-х годов с бескомпромиссным анализом собственного поведения; здесь также отчетливо присутствует полемизм)." [...Shalamov gave (*Vishera*) the challenging generic definition "antinovel," which is a response to the discussion about "the end of the novel" (in fact, it is a chronicle about his first camp sentence, a testimony to the situation in the 1920s with an uncompromising analysis of his own behavior; here polemics are also clearly present.) Esipov, "Razveiat' etot tuman," 174.

<sup>406</sup> Morrisette, Bruce. "International Aspects of the 'Nouveau Roman'" in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring, 1970, 159.

<sup>407</sup> "Опыты французского 'нового романа' интересны, но победа не на этом пути" (5:158).

<sup>408</sup> "Мера романа – человеческая биография или система биографий." Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 2, 123.

<sup>409</sup> "Если 'Архипелаг ГУЛАГ' Солженицына был едва ли не буквальным ответом на идеи Мандельштама, высказанные в 'Конце романа,' – в новом мире люди потеряли свои биографии, зато биографии, пригодные для создания романа, появились у поглотивших их вещей и организаций, – то 'Колымские рассказы' существуют в среде, где биографии не может быть даже у вещи: ибо в описываемой вселенной отсутствует столь необходимое для биографического повествования понятие линейного времени." [If Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was almost a literal response to Mandel'shtam's ideas expressed in "The End of the Novel," – in the new

doomed: “The further fate of the novel will be nothing else than the history of the volatilization of biography as a form of personal existence, even more than the volatilization – the catastrophic death of biography.”<sup>410</sup>

Examples of such a “catastrophic death of biography” abound in *Vishera*. Although eleven of the nineteen chapters are named after real-life individuals (“Лазарсон” [“Lazarson”], “Ушаков” [“Ushakov”], “Миллер, вредитель” [“Miller, the Wrecker”], etc.), the antinovel shows the disastrous dimension of their biographies in a century permeated by geographic and social displacement. These chapters, notwithstanding their details about the lives and personalities of those after which they are named, fail as biographies because of their incompleteness. Several chapters end with phrases that indicate that they are incomplete because they are beyond the knowledge of the young transitory hero: for example, “I didn’t see Kuznetsov more in my life,”<sup>411</sup> “I don’t know the subsequent fate of Shtof,”<sup>412</sup> and “His subsequent fate I don’t know.”<sup>413</sup> When the “subsequent fate” of a person is known, it is the late author that furnishes the narrative with this information; many were shot during the years of the great terror in 1937. This is a different incompleteness of human fate, one in which Mandel’shtam’s metaphor of the death of biography becomes a real death through execution: for example, “I present the invariable reference: the executive editor of the journal ‘The Struggle for Technique’ Dobrovsky was executed in 1937,”<sup>414</sup> “There was only Bereznikhimstroi, where Granovsky was the chief, and later executed, and Shakhgil’din was the first secretary of the district committee, and later executed,”<sup>415</sup> and “Maisuradze was the head of the control department, and later was the chief of accounting in Kolyma and executed together with Berzin in 1937 or 1938.”<sup>416</sup>

Such a scattering of human fate permeates *Vishera* that either gives incomplete accounts of lives or completes these lives them ahead of narrative time with executions. The antinovel fragments biographies to make them conform to its destabilizing ‘understanding of life.’ For example, one and the same arrest of the camp supervisor Nikolai Glukharev is repeated three times in the second chapter – all notifications of this save the first surprise the young transitory hero.<sup>417</sup> A similar recurrence of announcements concerns Berzin, the new camp director with

world, people have lost their biography while, on the other hand, the biographies that are suitable for the creation of a novel have appeared by the things and organizations that have absorbed these people – then *Kolyma Tales* exist in an environment where even things may not have a biography: because in the universe described the concept of linear time that is necessary for a biographical narrative is absent.] Mikhailik, Elena, “Nezamechennaia revoliutsiia” in *Shalamovskii sbornik*, вып. 4. Yaroslavl’: Litera, 2011, 123.

<sup>410</sup> “Дальнейшая судьба романа будет не чем иным, как историей распыления биографии, как формы личного существования, даже больше чем распыления – катастрофической гибели биографии.” Mandel’shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 123.

<sup>411</sup> “Больше в жизни я Кузнецова не видел” (4:222).

<sup>412</sup> “Не знаю дальнейшей судьбы Штофа” (4:224).

<sup>413</sup> “Дальнейшей судьбы его я не знаю” (4:225).

<sup>414</sup> “Даю всегдашнюю справку: ответственный редактор журнала ‘Борьба за технику’ Добровский расстрелян в 1937 году” (4:207).

<sup>415</sup> “Был лишь Березникхимстрой, где начальником был Грановский, позднее расстрелянный, и первым секретарем райкома – Шахильдин, позднее расстрелянный” (4:227).

<sup>416</sup> “Начальником контрольного отдела был Майсурадзе, который позднее был начальником УРО на Колыме и расстрелян вместе с Берзиным в 1937 или 1938 году” (4:238).

<sup>417</sup> “Николай Иванович Глухарев, начальник отдела труда (в будущем этот отдел был реорганизован в УРС), был черноморский матрос, участник революции, потом чекист московский, попавший по служебному преступлению не то за взятку, не то за превышение власти” (4:167) [Nikolai Ivanovich Glukharev, the head of the department of labor (in the future, this department was reorganized), a Black Sea sailor, a participant in the



whom ‘re-forging’ arrives to the camp in Krasnovishersk during the fall of 1929. Berzin – up until the penultimate page of the second chapter – keeps arriving.<sup>418</sup> With every mention of Berzin, time in the narrative reverses. This results in a conflict of ‘fabula versus syuzhet,’ in which the subjective plot fights, as it were, objective history. By challenging the impossibility of rescuing individuals from their involvement with time in the twentieth century, *Vishera* sets out to conquer narrative time. In its attempt to stop time from passing, it employs people to indicate periods of time. In the antinovel, Berzin has no biography of his own;<sup>419</sup> he becomes not a person, but a moment time. Even the young transitory hero is not an individual but rather defines a period of personal time. Like Berzin, he represents a boundary in this time. However, this boundary reflects not the formation of a new system within the camp, but the formation of an individual, a different kind of passage from ‘before’ to ‘after.’

The way in which *Vishera* fragments biographies and displaces narrative time can be connected with the type of prose that Shalamov considered the twentieth-century response to the nineteenth-century novel. In his manifesto, he proclaims memoirs to be the “voice of time”: “There is an enormous interest around the world in memoirs – they are the voice of the time, the sign of the times.”<sup>420</sup> He singles out Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoirs as the only contemporary Russian work in alignment with his ‘new prose.’ While the content of her memoirs constitutes an important twentieth-century document for Shalamov and his contemporaries,<sup>421</sup> it was her narrative form that caught his attention as a writer:

This a new form of a memoir, very comprehensive, very convenient. The chronology of O. M[andel’shtam’s] life is interspersed with everyday depictions, with portraits of people, with philosophical digressions, with observations on the psychology of creativity. And

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Revolution, then a Chekist in Moscow, got caught committing a professional crime, either he took a bribe or abused his authority.]; “Арестован был, к моему величайшему удивлению, Николай Иванович Глухарев – за взятки, за связь с блатарями. Пять лет получил он ‘довесок’ и ушел работать монтером на строительство. И по зачетам освобожден” (4:170; emphasis added) [Nikolai Ivanovich Glukharev was arrested, to my great surprise, for bribes and liaisons with the criminal prisoners. He got an “additional” five years and went to work as a mechanic for the construction. And he was freed according to the accumulation of work days.]; and “Неожиданно был арестован Николай Иванович Глухарев, начальник отдела труда, мой прямой начальник. Он получил пять лет за взятки, за пьянство. Все проститутки лагеря, все блатные дружно утопили Николая Ивановича” (4:180; emphasis added) [*Suddenly*, Nikolai Ivanovich Glukharev was arrested, the head of the labor department, my immediate boss. He got five years for bribery, for drunkenness. All the prostitutes of the camp and all the criminals drowned Nikolai Ivanovich (in alcohol) together.]

<sup>418</sup> For example: “Приехал новый директор строительства Вишхимза Эдуард Петрович Берзин, бывший командир латышской дивизии, герой дела Локкарта” (4:170) [The new director of the Vishkhimza construction Eduard Berzin arrived, a former commander in the Latvian division and the hero of the Lockhart affair] and “Новая жизнь входила в лагерные двери. <...> Лагерь подчиняется директору Вишхимза – Вишерских химических заводов. Директор – Эдуард Петрович Берзин” (4:181) [New life entered through the camp doors. <...> The camp is now accountable to the director of Vishkhimza – the Vishera chemical plants. The director is Eduard Berzin.]

<sup>419</sup> See, for example, the biography of Eduard Petrovich Berzin (1894-1938) in Bondarenko, N. A. “*Krasnoe koleso*” *Vishery: vospominaniia, dokumenty*. Perm’: Pushka, 2008, 70-6.

<sup>420</sup> “Огромный интерес во всем мире к мемуарной литературе – это голос времени, знамение времени” (5:144).

<sup>421</sup> Toker suggests Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoir to be “...a companion piece both to her husband’s poetry and to the Gulag corpus.” Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 83.

from this aspect the memories N. Ya. M[andel'shtam] are of great interest. A new large figure enters the history of the Russian intelligentsia, the history of Russian literature.<sup>422</sup>

For Shalamov, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoirs express the narrative structure demanded by the 'new prose' that he strives to construct in his late works. It is this form that *Vishera* emulates and in many ways does so successfully: his antinovel about the construction of forced labor camps to aid industrialization in the northern Urals combines a subjective experience with digressions about criminals, historical commentaries, small portraits of individuals whom he met in the camps, and philosophical, literary, and ethical statements concerning the representation of camp experience in twentieth-century literature. In *Vishera* as in Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoir, the intersection of personal memory with collective history is the focal point. Narrating history through personal perspectives, Shalamov and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam position themselves as active participants in the dynamic events of collectively experienced epochs. In their retrospective narratives, individual lives become inseparable from historical circumstances. In the antinovel and in Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoirs, the representation of an individual experience is concerned with the recuperation of a past that could not be publicly discussed at the time of writing. He shapes the form of his antinovel after her memoirs, but relates what he perceived as the introduction of inhumane elements in the Soviet penitentiary system, the 'reforging' of prisoners, without the overarching authority of a conventional memoirist.

Against this diverse background – Shalamov's rejection of the Tolstoyan novel and the novel in general, his brief engagement with the French *Nouveau Roman*, and his inspiration from Osip Mandel'shtam's "The End of the Novel" and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoirs – it seems that his antinovel was an integral part of a much larger literary ambition. He wanted not only to kill the novel, but also to create a replacement for it that would render conventional novelistic representation outdated as well as unnecessary. The result is an incomplete but still impressive text: for example, in the second chapter "Vishera," 42 individuals are mentioned by name; their authenticity can be confirmed in other sources.<sup>423</sup> These real events and accurate locations are reminiscent of Shalamov's conscious choice in the manifesto to exclude anything and everything "made up" from his 'new prose': "...everything fictional, everything 'invented' – people, characters – everything is rejected."<sup>424</sup> Behind his refusal of fictionalized accounts lies a wish to document what otherwise might be lost – both his own youth and the youth of the Soviet Union. Unlike Belomorkanal, another monumental construction project conducted in the same time frame, in which forced labor became akin to murder, industrial expansion in the northern Urals left little in the form of literary legacy.<sup>425</sup> No brigade of renowned Soviet writers was sent to witness the successful 're-forging' of prisoners at the chemical plant in Berezniki – only Paustovsky who did not write about what he saw. Perhaps Shalamov considered *Vishera* the representation that socialist industrialization in the northern Urals was waiting for? However, the ambition of his antinovel was not only to represent the contested space of literature and camps

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<sup>422</sup> "Это новая форма мемуара, очень емкая, очень удобная. Хронология жизни О. М[андельштама] перемежается с бытовыми картинками, с портретами людей, с философскими отступлениями, с наблюдениями по психологии творчества. И с этой стороны воспоминания Н. Я. М[андельштам] представляют огромный интерес. В историю русской интеллигенции, в историю русской литературы входит новая крупная фигура" (5:147).

<sup>423</sup> See, for example, the biographies in Bondarenko, "Krasnoe koleso."

<sup>424</sup> "...все выдуманное, все 'сочиненное' – люди, характеры – все отвергается" (5:157).

<sup>425</sup> For a detailed study of Belomorkanal and its literary legacy, see Ruder, Cynthia Ann. *Making History for Stalin: the Story of the Belomor Canal*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998.

produced in the Urals but also to problematize any similar endeavor in literature: he declared neither the collective work about Belomorkanal nor the play *Аристократы* [*Aristocrats*] (1934) by Nikolai Pogodin (as well as the later prohibited movie *Заключенные* [*Prisoners*] (1936) based on it) to have done justice to the mechanisms behind the Soviet Union's camps. The antinovel's second chapter affirms this ambition: "Перековка и все, что стоит за словом 'Беломорканал,' еще не нашло себе правильной оценки ни со стороны юристов, ни со стороны писателей" (4:177). To relate this eruption of penal abuse in the youth of the Soviet Union and in his own youth is an ambitious project for a writer without a novel, but even more so for an antinovel without a hero.

### 3.b. This is Not a Hero

With a sentence between April 1929 and October 1931, the young transitory hero does not yet know about the construction of Belomorkanal, which began in November 1931; in addition, only in 1934 will he be able to read the collective work by the brigade of Soviet writers sent to narrate this ruthless and violent project. Neither did he watch Pogodin's play *Aristocrats*, although the intertextual reference to it makes it sound as if he had.<sup>426</sup> The antinovel's intertextuality, which takes the form of both obvious references and obscure allusions, makes him an unstable focal point for the narrative. In *Vishera*, such belated information as Belomorkanal is not bracketed through the distinctive voice of an outside narrator. His earlier perception is not consistently differentiated in language from that of the late author; instead, their two differing perspectives and frames of reference become fused in the text and this fusion undermines the conventional notion of a literary hero. One and the same observation can belong to both, and often does; this conflation of knowledge becomes evident in the dual interpretations that are possible for several of the cultural and historical markers in the antinovel. The late author has access to another layer of meaning and undermines his earlier perception as the center of the narrative.

The young transitory hero, much like Eckermann for Goethe in *Conversations with Goethe*, seems to contribute to a misrepresentation of his own experience. His voice, without commentary from the late author, is distinct only in dialogues and sometimes with a comical effect. For example, in a dialogue with the camp supervisor Stukov, who complains about his behavior, he counters with a reply that would have been lethal a few years later in the camps of Kolyma: "But I found the magic word. I told him: – Shalamov's a Trotskyist, what can you do with him. We laughed."<sup>427</sup> In the same conversation, he responds to the request by Berzin, who wanted to bring him to Kolyma already in the early 1930s as a free laborer, with a similarly humoristic remark: "– I, Comrade Chief, will go to Kolyma only with under police escort. – Don't make a bad joke, said Filippov."<sup>428</sup> These and analogous statements throughout the antinovel reveal him to be both young and naïve. His understanding of his position in the camps is immediate and authentic, although simultaneously precarious, but the representation of his voice is also a device

<sup>426</sup> "Воровские кадры были не только сохранены, но небывалым образом укреплены перековкой. Каждый блатарь был готов перековаться и явиться 'Коськой-капитаном' из погодинских 'Аристократов.' Блатари очень живо чувствуют 'слабину,' дырку в том неводе, который власть пытается на них набросить" (4:177). [The criminal staff was not only maintained, but strengthened in an unprecedented way by "reforging." Each criminal was ready to be reformed and to appear in the role of "captain Kos'ka" from Pogodin's *Aristocrats*. Criminals vividly sense any "slack," the hole in the net, which the government is trying to throw over them.]

<sup>427</sup> "Но я нашел заговорное слово. Я ему сказал: – Шаламов – троцкист, что с него взять. Мы посмеялись" (4:252).

<sup>428</sup> "– Я, товарищ начальник, на Колыму – только с конвоем. – Не шути плохую шутку, – сказал Филиппов" (ibid.).

that creates a stark contrast with the more nuanced perspective of the late author. Yet even though the young transitory hero complicates *Vishera* as a historical account, he is indispensable to it as a literary experiment. Thoroughly incomplete, both in his physical portrait and personal biography, he mirrors the incomplete worldview produced in the antinovel and becomes an imperative feature of its fragmented and unfinished narrative structure.

Shalamov's idea for *Vishera* seems connected with an attempt at accessing his earlier, more immediate and thus also more precarious, self. In 1970, the antinovel came suddenly to him – its title is written in all capital letters as “ВИШЕРСКИЙ АНТИРОМАН” [“THE ANTINOVEL VISHERA”] in one of his notebooks.<sup>429</sup> This title is preceded by an exercise in memory, in which he explains what he remembered from Esenin's “Поэма о 36” [“Poem about the 36”] (1924) after his first three years in the camps:

What did I remember from the “Poem about the Thirty-Six” after the first three years in the camps?

The stupid Siberian  
Chaldon,  
He's stingy like a hundred devils  
For a penny he'll sell.

That's what I knew. And I confirm the veracity of Esenin's portrait, its psychological characteristics.<sup>430</sup>

This is a correct citation from Esenin's poem, but *Vishera* abounds in more vague citations from the previous literary tradition. Shalamov's mnemonic exercise in 1970 retains even the dialectal word “чалдон” [“chaldon”] that signifies a Russian who is a native Siberian, as opposed to those brought to this region through displacements such as exile or incarceration. Esenin's “Poem about the 36” was originally entitled “26. Баллада” [“26. A Ballad”] and inspired by the twenty-six Baku commissars who were captured, imprisoned, and ultimately executed by a firing squad on their way through Uzbekistan in 1918. The poem adds ten to the number of those arrested and changes the geographical location for their route. Esenin's lyric hero follows the prison dispatch through the Urals to Siberia along a path marked by graves: “Many in Russia / Trails. / No matter which trail – / There's a coffin. / No matter which verst – / There's a cross. / Before the places of Yenisei / Six thousand and one / Snowdrifts. / The blue Ural / elevation / laid down as stone / as a bag, / Behind the elevation roars / the Taiga.”<sup>431</sup> It seems that the young Shalamov recalled the journey depicted in this poem during his first prison dispatch to the Urals; after three years in the camps, he only remembered the “psychological portrait” of the native inhabitants. Yet the late Shalamov might have recalled the inspiration behind this poem by Esenin – the fate of the twenty-six Baku commissars – more recently. In *Nadezhda*

<sup>429</sup> Although the first ‘chapter’ of *Vishera*, “Бутырская тюрьма (1929 год)” [“Butyrka Prison (1929)”] was written already in 1961, Shalamov seems to have stumbled upon the idea for an ‘antinovel’ suddenly as he writes its title – “ВИШЕРСКИЙ АНТИРОМАН” (5:308) [VISHERA THE ANTINOVEL] – in his notebook from late October or early November 1970. See Sirotinskaya's comment: “<крупно написано, как только что придуманное название. – И. С.>” (ibid.) [<written in big letters as if the title has just been thought up. – I. S.].

<sup>430</sup> “Что я запомнил из ‘Поэмы о тридцати шести’ после первых трех лет лагерей? Глупый сибирский / Чалдон, / Скуп, как сто дьяволов он, / За пятак продаст. Вот это я знал. И подтверждаю правдивость есенинского портрета, психологической характеристики” (5:308).

<sup>431</sup> “Много в России / Троп. / Что ни тропа – / То гроб. / Что ни верста – / То крест. / До енисейских мест / Шесть тысяч один / Сугроб. / Синий уральский / Ском / Каменным лег / Мешком, / За скомом шумит / Тайга.” Esenin, Sergei. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*. Moskva: Gos. Izd. Khud. Lit, 1962. Vol. 3, 165.

Mandel'shtam's memoirs, which he read in the late 1960s, she recalls the same twenty-six Baku commissars in a conversation with Osip Mandel'shtam during their journey through the Urals to exile in Cherdyn'.<sup>432</sup> It seems that this mnemonic exercise in Shalamov's notebook, which prompted the sudden idea for an antinovel about his first time in the camps, was an attempt at both accessing and recreating the perception of his earlier self. The construction of his young transitory hero echoes the stance of the lyric hero in Esenin's poem: "But those flowers I / hadn't seen / I was still stupid / And young / And hadn't yet read / Books. / But if I'd seen / Them / Would I silent / Remain?"<sup>433</sup> Like Esenin's lyric hero, who has not yet seen these "flowers in the snow" (probably a euphemism for prisoners in Siberia), the young transitory hero has not yet experienced everything about incarceration that his fate has in store for him. Despite his youth, he has read plenty of books (and even more poems) – but these cannot help him orient himself in the camps. Moreover, the antinovel's late author that has read the most books and therefore overshadows the literary knowledge of the young convict.

The belated author furnishes *Vishera* with references to Russian and Soviet literature that include both works that the young transitory hero could have been familiar with and works written later and thus only accessible to Shalamov as the late author. As far as the earlier works are concerned, their knowledge of this literature overlaps and their perspectives sometimes merge in the narrative. This merger is evident in the first chapter "Butyrka Prison (1929)" which introduces him to the space of the prison. In prison, he finds himself connected to previous figures in Russian culture and history; the realization that he had been incarcerated appears as an afterthought: "I felt no oppression, as if precisely all of this – both the cement floor and the bars – had been seen by me a long time ago, experienced in both my sleep and in my dreams. Everything was just as beautiful as in my secret dreams and I was simply happy."<sup>434</sup> This statement was perhaps true for Shalamov himself during his first time in prison, but the first chapter can also be read as an intertextual allusion to Prince Pyotr Kropotkin's chapter from *Записки революционера* [*Notes of a Revolutionary*] (1902) about his incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress in the late nineteenth century. Kropotkin approaches his imprisonment through the lens of previous Russian literature and history and concludes: "He [Bakunin] survived it all, I said to myself, and neither I will not give in to the prison."<sup>435</sup> It seems that the first chapter of the antinovel echoes this text and its interpretation of prison as both an influential space and a formative experience when the young transitory hero feels gratitude toward his incarceration: "In

<sup>432</sup> "Всю дорогу О. М. напряженно вслушивался и по временам, вздрогнув, сообщал мне, что катастрофа приближается, что надо быть начеку, чтобы не попасться врасплох и успеть... Я поняла, что он не только ждет конечной расправы – в ней и я не сомневалась, но думает, что она произойдет с минуты на минуту, сейчас, здесь, в пути... 'В дороге? – спрашивала я. – Ты, верно, про двадцать шесть комиссаров вспомнил...' 'Отчего ж нет? – отвечал О. М. – Ты думаешь, что наши на это неспособны?' Мы оба прекрасно знали, что наши способны на что угодно..." [All the way, O. M. listened intently and at times, startled, informed me that the catastrophe was approaching, that we must be vigilant so as not to be caught unawares and have time... I knew that he wasn't just waiting for the final punishment – even I had no doubt about that, but that he thinks it'll happen any minute, now, here, on the road... – On the way? I asked. You probably remembered the twenty-six commissioners... – Well, why not? O. M. answered. Do you think that ours are incapable of this? We both knew perfectly well that ours are capable of anything...] Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. *Vospominaniia*. Moskva: Soglasie, 1999, 67.

<sup>433</sup> "Но тех я цветов / Не видал, / Был еще глуп / И мал, / И не читал еще / Книг. / Но если бы видел / Их, / То разве молчать / Стал?" Esenin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 3, 171-2.

<sup>434</sup> "Никакой подавленности не было, точно все это – и цементный пол, и решетки – все это было давно видно мной, испытано в снах, в мечтах. Все оказывалось таким же прекрасным, как в моих затаенных сновидениях, и я только радовался" (4:152).

<sup>435</sup> "Он [Бакунин] выжил все это, – говорил я самому себе, – так и я не поддамся тюрьме." Kropotkin, P. A. *Zapiski revoliutsionera*. Peterburg: Golos truda, 1920, 267-8.

there were excellent conditions to reflect on life, and I thank Butyrka prison because in my search for the formula of my life I found myself alone in a prison cell.”<sup>436</sup> This romanticized representation of prison is soon contrasted with his forceful encounter with the camps in the next chapter. For that encounter, neither the young convict nor the late author of the antinovel can make use of Kropotkin as an interpretive strategy. Accentuating its repudiation of this past tradition, the second chapter presents him as a convict in search of new kind of moral revolutionary.<sup>437</sup> This search brings him to his first encounter with a potential mentor; yet, this mentor teaches him lessons that compromise his youthful perception and complicate the belated narrative.

In the second chapter, the young transitory hero explores the social dimensions of the camp before the arrival of re-forging and Berzin. He meets a sixty-year-old agronomist working in the hothouses on the river Vishera’s left bank, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Tamarin. In their conversations, it seems that Tamarin might become the mentor he was searching for already in prison. Indeed, Tamarin teaches him two lessons: the first concerns his life as a convict within the camp system and the second his role as an unstable focal point for the antinovel. The first lesson, which is explicitly articulated and of practical significance, is to learn a blue-collar profession by which to survive while forced to perform manual labor: “Look at how I developed a great interest for flowers since my youth – it came in handy.”<sup>438</sup> The second lesson is unspoken and theoretical and is therefore only decipherable to the late Shalamov and perhaps more so to the even later readers of *Vishera*. Through the obscurity of his own biography, Tamarin teaches him that not all is what it appears to be. Surrounded by books and journals in the hothouse, literature becomes an expected topic: “Earlier I wrote reviews for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the old man said. ‘Tamarin-Meretsky’ was my signature. Unlike just Tamarin... Tamarin is the alias of Alexei Okulov. Do you know such a writer?”<sup>439</sup> He answers affirmatively, “Yes, I’ve heard of him. A peasant writer,”<sup>440</sup> but is reprimanded by Tamarin: “Well, there’s nothing peasant about him.”<sup>441</sup> The commentary in “Vishera,” supplied by the late author, corrects the name of the old man Tamarin, who was neither Tamarin nor Meretsky: “His real last name was Shan-Girei. He was a Tartar prince from the entourage of Nicholas II.”<sup>442</sup> Omitted from commentary is the fact that Aleksei Okulov was no “peasant writer,” no more than Esenin was a “Siberian from the Urals” as the narrative claims after citing a line from his 1915 poem in the same chapter. Okulov was a revolutionary, present in Vologda during the revolution of 1905 and active in the literary group “Перевал” [“Passage”]<sup>443</sup> during the 1920s. As a Russian revolutionary, Okulov belongs to a

<sup>436</sup> “Там были прекрасные условия для обдумывания жизни, и я благодарю Бутырскую тюрьму за то, что в поисках нужной формулы моей жизни я очутился один в тюремной камере” (4:152).

<sup>437</sup> “Чрезвычайно важны лирические главы ‘Вишеры,’ где Шаламов открыто заявляет себя продолжателем святого для него дела русского освободительного движения – русского социализма, понимаемого им прежде всего этически и ценимого не за ‘программы,’ а за ‘моральный уровень.’ Таково его кредо...” [The lyrical chapters in *Vishera* are extremely important; Shalamov openly declares himself the successor to the holy mission of the Russian liberation movement – Russian socialism, understood by him foremost ethically and valued not for its “programs,” but for its “moral level.” Such is his credo...] Esipov, “‘Razveiat’ etot ruman,” 181-2.

<sup>438</sup> “А вот я увлекался с юности цветами – пригодились” (4:171).

<sup>439</sup> “Я писал раньше обзоры в ‘Комсомольской правде,’ – сказал старик. – ‘Тамарин-Мерецкий’ – такая подпись. В отличие от просто Тамарина... Тамарин – это псевдоним Окулова Алексея. Знаете такого писателя?” (4:171).

<sup>440</sup> “Да, слышал. Крестьянский писатель” (ibid.).

<sup>441</sup> “Ну, крестьянского в нем ничего нет” (ibid.).

<sup>442</sup> “Настоящая его фамилия была Шан-Гирей. Он был татарский князь из свиты Николая II” (ibid.).

<sup>443</sup> Shalamov writes about the various poetic movements in “Двадцатые годы” [“The 1920s”].

generation of heroes for him who should thus know that he was no “peasant writer.” However, in 1929, when the chapter is set, he has not yet have read Okulov’s novella *Камо* [*Kamo*].<sup>444</sup> Thus, this intertextual allusion gestures to a text beyond the young convict’s limited frame of reference. It is the late author who furnishes the antinovel with the additional context for this allusion and, by not deciphering it, adds to the unstable intertextuality in the antinovel.

Yet even the late Shalamov did not know everything about Tamarin-Meretsky or Shan-Girei, who appears as Khan-Girei in the eponymous short story written in 1967 and included in *The Resurrection of the Larch*. Although he attempted to gather more information about Shan-Girei through correspondence with acquaintances still in Kolyma,<sup>445</sup> he reproduced what he could remember of him both in *Vishera* and the short story “Khan-Girei.” His portrait is completed in the antinovel with one of the few positive conclusions to a biography: Shan-Girei followed Berzin to Kolyma, where he received the Order of Lenin in 1935 and died before the executions of 1937 and 1938.<sup>446</sup> However, none of this was true and Shan-Girei’s daughter, who read the short story, responded to Shalamov’s falsification in 1990 and demanded that future publications include her father’s real biography.<sup>447</sup> Sirotinskaya furnished subsequent publications of “Khan-Girei” with such a disclaimer;<sup>448</sup> but *Vishera* lacks a similar correction. Esipov argues that the case

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<sup>444</sup> Okulov’s novella was criticized by Gorky in his 1931 essay “О работе неумелой, небрежной, недобросовестной и т. д.” [“About Work that is Inept, Negligent, Dishonest, and Etc.”] for its impossible claim to historical accuracy: “...это пошлое сочинение компрометирует фигуру Камо, революционера <...> ‘Историческая точность’ Окулова – неправда: он не мог знать, как и что говорил Камо в Моабитской тюрьме Берлина <...> Люди типа Камо все еще не имеют истории их деяний, а люди, подобные Окулову, не с силах писать ее.” [...this vulgar work compromises the figure of Kamo, a revolutionary <...> Okulov’s “historical accuracy” is untrue: he could not know, what and how Kamo spoke in the Moabit prison in Berlin <...> People like Kamo still have a history of their deeds, and people like Okulov are not able to write it.] Gorky, Maxim. *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*. Moskva: Gos. Izdv. Khud. Lit, 1953. Vol. 25, 474-75.

<sup>445</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Boris Lesnyak from July 1967: “И еще просьба, выясни год и род смерти Александра Александровича Тамарина, б. заведующего Колымской опытной с/х станцией и вообще растениевода известного, награжденного вместе с Берзиным в 1935 году орденом Ленина. В 1937 году летом Александр Александрович был еще жив и работал не то на Дукче, не то в Магадане. Я знал его по Вишере” (7:326). [And, please, find out the year and type of death of Aleksander Aleksandrovich Tamarin, the former head of Kolyma’s experimental agricultural station and in general a famous plant breeder; he was awarded the Order of Lenin together with Berzin in 1935. In the summer of 1937, Aleksander Aleksandrovich was still alive and worked either in Dukche or in Magadan. I knew him in Vishera.]

<sup>446</sup> “В 1935 году, когда Дальстрой отмечал свое трехлетие, Александр Александрович Тамарин был награжден орденом Ленина. Судимость с него была снята. Тамарин умер на Колыме глубоким стариком, не дожив до ареста Эдуарда Берзина как японского шпиона. От всей свистопляски 37-38-х годов Тамарина избавила смерть. Все друзья последних лет жизни Александра Александровича – Берзин, Майсурадзе, Егоров, Лагин – расстреляны. До реабилитации их оставалось очень много лет. Александр Александрович, умерший раньше этих расстрелов, не нуждался в реабилитации” (4:173). [In 1935, when Dalstroj celebrated three years, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Tamarin was awarded the Order of Lenin. His criminal record was cleared. Tamarin died in Kolyma as a very old man and did not live to see the arrest of Eduard Berzin as a Japanese spy. Tamarin was spared by death from the pandemonium in 1937 and 1938. All the friends of Aleksandr Aleksandrovich’s last years in life – Berzin, Maisuradze, Egorov, Lagin – were executed. There were many years left until their rehabilitation. Aleksander Aleksandrovich, who died before these executions, needed no rehabilitation.]

<sup>447</sup> “Backing up her assertions with archival materials, M. Tamarina writes that her father was not, as Shalamov wrote, Хан-гирей, a Tatar prince, nor was he a high official in the court of Nicholas II, nor the head of staff of General Kornilov’s ‘wild division,’ nor did he aid and abet the escape of ‘Envir-pasha,’ nor was he an amateur of floriculture, nor was he awarded the Order of Lenin in 1935.” Kline, “*Novaja Proza*,” 224.

<sup>448</sup> “Тамарин Александр Александрович (псевд. Мерецкий; 1882-1938), служил в царской армии, с 1917 г. – в Красной гвардии, демобилизовался в 1925 г., в конце 20-х годов арестован и отбывал срок в Вишерском лагере. В 1932 г. вместе с Э. П. Берзиным уехал на Колыму. В 1938 г. арестован и расстрелян” (2:507). [Tamarin Aleksandr Aleksandrovich (pseudonym Meretsky; 1882-1938), served in the tsarist army, since 1917 – in

of Shan-Girei's incorrect biography is symptomatic of Shalamov's late style period during which he no longer circulated his manuscripts in *samizdat*, and was therefore unable to verify his claims with others who may have had different information.<sup>449</sup> Thus the intertextual references in this scene with Shan-Girei and the young convict in the hothouses along the river Vishera in 1929, although Shalamov was unaware of it himself at the time, are coded not twice, but three times. He does not yet know of Okulov's novella about the revolutionary Kamo, and the late author will never know Shan-Girei's true biography.

A comparable triple encoding of intertextual references occurs in the later chapter "Степанов" ["Stepanov"] about his encounter with the convict Mikhail Stepanov, who was imprisoned in the Shlüsselberg Fortress in the early twentieth century as a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. In prison, Stepanov tells him, he was shackled for two years together with Aleksandr Antonov, the future leader of the Tambov Rebellion in 1920-1. Shalamov included this adventurous tale of Stepanov, who in 1917 had become a Bolshevik and helped Antonov escape, in the short story "Эхо в горах" ["An Echo in the Mountains"] (1959) in *An Artist of the Spade*. This short story ends with him meeting Stepanov in 1933 on the streets of Moscow.<sup>450</sup> In the antinovel, their last meeting also takes place in Moscow in 1933 but it is not the conclusion to the chapter. Instead, it ends on a note of uncertainty as to whether any of what has been told happened:

It is unlikely that Stepanov survived 1937. I searched a lot in the libraries for even a small reminder of his past life before the revolution, about his fate in Shlüsselberg. And I didn't find any. Sometimes it seems to me that all of this was my dream: Antonov, Stepanov,

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the Red Guard, was demobilized in 1925, in the late 1920s, he was arrested and served time in the Vishera camp. In 1932, he went to Kolyma together with E. P. Berzin. Arrested and executed in 1938.]

<sup>449</sup> "Несомненно, дочь Тамарина обладала моральным основанием потребовать коррекций, обязательного уточнения к рассказу 'Хан-Гирей,' что и было сделано И. Сиротинской. Редкая литературно-историческая коллизия была разрешена единственно возможным способом. Надо заметить, что то же самое, без сомнения, было бы сделано и самим Шаламовым – будь он жив или получи он подобное письмо раньше, он бы просто ввел в рассказ соответствующие исправления. (Здесь мы сталкиваемся с серьезной проблемой – отсутствия прижизненной редакции или самиздатской апробации *поздней* прозы Шаламова: эта проза – в отличие от созданной в предыдущий (до 1966 г.) период, не выпускалась автором из стола, была подчас 'сырковой' в смысле некоторой невыверенности в фактологическом плане, и писатель был бы рад всякому знающему редактору, ученому или чуткому читателю – однако, несомненно, не пошел бы у него на поводу в принципиальных вопросах.)" [Undoubtedly, Tamarin's daughter had moral justification to demand corrections and mandatory updates to the short story of "Khan-Girei," which was done by I. Sirotinskaya. This rare literary and historical conflict was resolved in the only possible way. It should be noted that the same thing, without a doubt, would have been done by Shalamov – if he had been alive and received a letter like this, he would have just made the necessary corrections to the short story. (Here we face with a serious problem – the lack of editing or the contemporary corrections of Shalamov's *late* prose in *samizdat*: this prose – in contrast to the prose written during the previous (up to 1966) period, was not released by the author and was often "raw" in the sense of some unreconciled facts, and the writer would have been happy for any editor, scholar, or responsive reader – but certainly would not have changed his writing in principal questions.)] Emphasis in the original. Esipov, Valerii. "Ob istorizme 'Kolymskih rasskazakh.'" <http://shalamov.ru/research/217/>.

<sup>450</sup> "В 1933 году летом я шел по Страстной площади. Пушкин еще не перешагнул площадь и стоял в конце или, вернее, в начале Тверского бульвара – там, где его поставил Опекушин, понимавший, что за штука архитектурное согласие камня, металла и неба. Кто-то сзади ткнул меня палкой. Я оглянулся – Степанов! Он уже давно освободился, работал начальником аэропорта. Трость была все та же" (1:632). [In the summer of 1933, I was walking on Strastnaya Square. Pushkin had not yet crossed the square and stood at the end, or rather, at the beginning of Tverskoi Boulevard – where he'd been placed by Opekushin, who knew what the architectural concord of metal and sky is. Someone behind me poked with a stick. I looked around – Stepanov! He had long ago been released and worked as head of the airport. The cane was still the same.]



and the cane that the lame man in a gray overcoat hooked me with on Strastnaya Square.<sup>451</sup>

In the early 1970s, Shalamov searched for proof of Stepanov's existence. The antinovel retains this uncertain dimension unsuccessfully of their encounter as well as of Stepanov's tale, an uncertainty that the earlier short story omits. This ending to the chapter includes information that is only available to the late author – the failed verification of Stepanov's identity – and presents his earlier perception as potentially flawed: perhaps it was all a dream. Contemporary comments on the short story "An Echo in the Mountains" suggests that Shalamov's representation of Stepanov as well as Antonov lacks historical truth: prisoners were never shackled together in pairs in the Shlüsselberg Fortress and Antonov was never captured by the Red Army, making it impossible for Stepanov to aid his escape in 1917.<sup>452</sup> Thus, it seems that the young convict's interpretation of this encounter as something he saw in his dreams, rather than an actual event, corrects the late author and adds to the instability of historical and cultural markers in the antinovel.

There are many other intertextual references in *Vishera* that can provide examples of a similarly problematic relationship with history. However, one more example of allusions that are coded twice stands out as especially significant for the subversion of the young transitory hero as the center of the narrative. In the chapter "Осипенко" ["Osipenko"], the documentary novel *Адъютанты Господа Бога* [*The Adjutants of God*] (1924) by Lev Nikulin is referred to as a text that compromised the inmate Ivan Osipenko. For *Vishera* as a historical account, the remark about how this novel was written is imperative: "Nikulin's book was written with the help of documents provided him by the Cheka."<sup>453</sup> Composed forty years later without access to such documents, the antinovel implicitly juxtaposes its own narrative strategies with those of Nikulin. Yet this is not the only implication of the name of Nikulin. This documentary novel is a literary work with which the young convict was familiar; he has yet to find out that Nikulin will partake in the brigade of Soviet writers that depicted Belomorkanal in 1934. This belated information is only available to the late author who, once again, endows the intertextual reference with an added connotation and destabilizes the young transitory hero as a reliable focal point.

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<sup>451</sup> "Вряд ли Степанов пережил 1937 год. Я много искал в библиотеках хоть малого напоминания о его пусть прошлой, дореволюционной, шлиссельбургской судьбе. И не нашел. Иногда мне кажется, что все это мне приснилось: и Антонов, и Степанов, и клюшка, которой хромоногий человек в серой шинели зацепил меня на Страстной площади" (4:241).

<sup>452</sup> "Рассказ не доработан Варламом Шаламовым. Никак не обыграно название его, и концы с концами в этой романтической истории тоже не сведены воедино, ну, а главное: никогда ведь не сковывали в Шлиссельбурге каторжников попарно, никогда не попадал Александр Степанович Антонов в плен к красным... <...> Можно отметить и другие несоответствия в рассказе 'Эхо в горах,' но и упомянутых нами хватает, чтобы разрушить рассказ, поскольку именно на этих несоответствиях он и выстроен. И, тем не менее, если не сам рассказ, то, по крайней мере, его замысел, конечно же, глубже. Художественная правда вполне могла восторжествовать в этом рассказе над документальной точностью..." [The short story was not finished by Shalamov. He didn't do anything with its title and didn't make ends meet in this romantic story, but most importantly: convicts in Shlüsselberg were never shackled in pairs and Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Antonov was never captured by the red... <...> Also other inconsistencies may be noted in the short story "An Echo in the Mountain," but those mentioned by us are enough to break down the short story because it is exactly on these discrepancies that it was built. And yet, if not the short story itself, then at least its intention, is, of course, deeper. Artistic truth could well prevail over documentary accuracy in this short history...] Koniaev, Nikolai. *Shlüssel'burgskie psalmy: sem' vekov russkoi kreposti*. 2013, 455.

<sup>453</sup> "Книга Никулина написана по документам, которые ему предоставили в ЧК" (4:225).

Indeed, he remains unstable and incomplete to the end of the antinovel. He never learns the lessons of his potential mentor Shan-Girei: neither does he acquire a blue-collar profession while in the camps – he opts instead for administrative work – nor can he decipher the other interpretations of the cultural and historical texts that he encounters. In the penultimate chapter “В лагере нет виноватых” [“In the Camp There Are No Guilty People”], he contemplates what he has learned in the camps as he leaves the northern Urals by boat:

On a dark and windy autumn night in 1931, I stood on the bank of the river Vishera and thought about an important, and for me sensitive, subject: I’m twenty-four years old and I haven’t done anything for immortality. My boatman, a nine-hundred-year-old chaldon who had agreed for three kopecks to float me down the river Vishera a hundred kilometers to the management, raised the oar.<sup>454</sup>

Upon release, he incorrectly refers to the age of Carlos in Schiller’s eponymous play, who was concerned with not having done anything to achieve immortality at the age of twenty-three, not twenty-four. However, in accordance with Shalamov’s mnemonic exercise in the 1970 notebook, he recalls and uses the dialectal word “chaldon” from Esenin’s poem correctly. The lessons he learns during his first sentence are not only that there are no guilty people in the camps, as the title of the chapter indicates, but also that the camp is a replica of the society in which it exists: “And I realized something else too: the camp is not juxtaposition of hell to paradise, but an impression of our lives and can be nothing else.”<sup>455</sup> The turning point in the camps through the introduction of re-forging in 1929 that he experienced was a turning point also in Soviet society: blood is just as bloody in the camps as in freedom.<sup>456</sup> In 1929, he arrived in a camp that was impeccably clean (“glistened with cleanness”<sup>457</sup> and in which there were no signs of starvation: “nobody was starving”).<sup>458</sup> Upon leaving in 1931, this camp had disappeared. Together with re-forging, any notion of a ‘before’ vanishes: the time when he first saw the corpses of those who had tried to escape and drew a vital conclusion for himself: “That means people run away from here.”<sup>459</sup> Viewed from inside the literary world of *Vishera*, he considers himself successfully educated morally upon the conclusion of his first camp sentence: “The main feeling after two and a half years in the camps, of hard labor – it that I’m stronger than others in a moral sense.”<sup>460</sup> However, seen from a perspective outside of literature, its late author rejects any such function in this penal institution as the first camp experience is overshadowed in the second chapter by an

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<sup>454</sup> “Темной осенней ветреной ночью 1931 года я стоял на берегу Вишеры и размышлял на важную, болезную для меня тему: мне уже двадцать четыре года, а я еще ни чего не сделал для бессмертия. Лодочник мой, девяностолетний чалдон, взявшийся за грешник сплавить меня вниз по течению Вишеры, за сто километров до управления, поднял кормовое весло” (4:254).

<sup>455</sup> “И еще я понял другое: лагерь не противопоставление ада раю, а слепок нашей жизни, и ничем другим быть не может” (4:262).

<sup>456</sup> “Лагерь – слепок еще и потому, что там все, как на воле: и кровь так же кровава, и работают на полный ход сексот и стукач, заводят новые дела, собираются характеристики, ведутся допросы, аресты, кого-то выпускают, кого-то ловят” (4:262). [The camp is an impression also because everything there is the same as in freedom: the blood is as bloody, both secret agents and stoolpigeons are working full time, new cases are started, detailed descriptions are collected, interrogations, arrests, someone is released, somebody gets caught.]

<sup>457</sup> “...блестел чистотой” (4:163).

<sup>458</sup> “...никто не голодал” (4:165).

<sup>459</sup> “Значит, отсюда бегут” (4:166).

<sup>460</sup> “Главное ощущение после двух с половиной лет лагеря, каторжных работ – это то, что я покрепче других в нравственном смысле” (4:255).

omnipresent frightening sequel:<sup>461</sup> “In 1937 in Moscow during the *second* arrest and investigation...”<sup>462</sup> It is this type of belated information, which creeps into the narrative through comments like this one and unstable intertextual allusions, that complicates not only reflections on the representation of the camp experience but also the status of the hero in the antinovel. For *Vishera* as a historical account, which is partial and sometimes flawed, the young transitory hero may well be allowed to retain his status as the center of the narrative. However, as a literary experiment, this reading appears insufficient: the true hero of the antinovel is the tension between the perception of the young convict and the knowledge of the late author. When these two perspectives merge, as they do most significantly in the first chapter set in Butyrka prison, the narrative appears complete and capable of generating a meaningful interpretation of events. Yet in the chapters set in the camps, they do not converge but rather become detached from each other and complicate the narrative with their polarized understandings of what this antinovel attempts to achieve. For the young convict, his time in the northern Urals is the greatest challenge of his life; the same is not true for the late Shalamov.

This tension between the young transitory hero and the late author appears neither successful nor comprehensive. Their language does not differentiate them and thus it is difficult to separate them from each other, although such a separation is imperative in several scenes. The replacement of a conventional hero with an experimental tension between two subjective perspectives may have contributed to a reading of *Vishera* as a literary failure. But perhaps the inquiry needs to be rephrased: if a success, would it not fail as an antinovel? The final verdict – whether it is the most successful work Shalamov ever produced or an exceptional example of artistic failure – depends on how we choose to read it, or better yet: for the antinovel not to fail but succeed we must learn how to read it *inclusively*. It seems that once again Adorno’s thoughts on late style are helpful for understanding the reading process demanded by *Vishera*:

The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves. It breaks their bonds, not in order to express itself, but in order, expressionless, to cast off the appearance of art. Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself.<sup>463</sup>

The antinovel demands a reader capable of performing a peculiar kind of intertextual patchwork: to fill in its blank spaces with all kinds of other cultural and historical texts. This experimental work is indeed reminiscent of a cipher: an innovative collage fraught with elusive intertextual references and autobiographical allusions, it aims to both reveal and obscure. *Vishera* astounds the reader with its attention to historical detail supplied by the late author and explorations of the social dimensions of the camps by the young transitory hero, and yet beneath those subtle intertextual references that blend in with authentic names and real events, Shalamov disguises the clash with his powerful antagonist well: literary tradition.

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<sup>461</sup> Speaking in terms of literature, it would be more accurate to claim the antinovel prepares for its ‘prequel.’

<sup>462</sup> “В 1937 году в Москве во время *второго* ареста и следствия...” (4:156; emphasis added).

<sup>463</sup> Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 566.

## Chapter IV. *The Glove or KT-2: Kolyma Tales Redux*

### 1. Introduction

The title of *Kolyma Tales* made a sudden appearance in an official Soviet journal in 1972. It was on February 23 that *Literaturnaia Gazeta* published Shalamov's letter denouncing the publication of his prose abroad. This letter was to have catastrophic effects on his reputation as a writer; those who had previously held him in high esteem read the last paragraph as a deliberate and definitive renunciation of his *magnum opus*: "The problematic of *Kolyma Tales* has long been removed by life, and the gentlemen from *Posev* and *Novy zhurnal* and their owners will not succeed in presenting me to the world in the role of an underground anti-Soviet, as an 'internal émigré'!"<sup>464</sup> This daunting statement seemed to suggest that he had lost his integrity as both a writer and a witness of the camps. In the act of signing this public denunciation of his own text, his name became, as Toker notes, "a mask, a sign of a toppled idol."<sup>465</sup> However, "the problematic of *Kolyma Tales*" had not been "removed by" his own life as a writer in 1972, far from it: the same year he wrote "Перчатка" ["The Glove"] (1972), "Тачка II" ["Wheelbarrow II"] (1972), and "Riva-Rocci," three short stories that would come to form the aesthetic core in the sixth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, *The Glove or KT-2*.

The disparity between this public statement and Shalamov's private creative process is stark and perplexing, and might never be fully understood. In 1972, *The Glove or KT-2* was not yet finished and he might have doubted he could complete another cycle given the progression of his disabilities at this time: his eyesight was beginning to fail and his body shaking due to Ménière's disease made writing longer prose narratives difficult if not almost impossible.<sup>466</sup> We can also speculate that he did not want his writing of the sixth cycle to become known for fear that it would also be circulated against his will in *tamizdat* and cause more difficulties for him to officially publish his poetry in the Soviet Union. Although the letter mentions only the unauthorized publications of *Kolyma Tales* abroad, there was another work at stake that prompted him to speak out at this moment. The publishing company *Sovetskii pisatel'*, which had published his previous three poetry collections, was stalling his fourth, *Moscow Clouds*, and he assumed the reason was the appearance of *Kolyma Tales* in *tamizdat*.<sup>467</sup> In this regard, the letter to *Literaturnaia Gazeta* was

<sup>464</sup> "Проблематика 'Колымских рассказов' давно снята жизнью, и представлять меня миру в роли подпольного антисоветчика, 'внутреннего эмигранта' господам из 'Посева' и 'Нового журнала' и их хозяевам не удастся!" (7:366).

<sup>465</sup> "In February 1972 his own name became a mask, a sign of a toppled idol, when he wrote what I believe to be his coded letter to *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, condemning journal publications of his stories abroad." Leona Toker, "Name Change and Author Avatars in Varlam Shalamov and Primo Levi," in *Narrative, Interrupted: The Plotless, the Disturbing and the Trivial in Literature*. Eds. Lehtimäki, Markku, Laura Karttunen, and Maria Mäkelä. Boston: De Gruyter, 2012, 228.

<sup>466</sup> He mentions the limitations imposed on him by his disability in the letter: "Инвалидность моя не даёт мне возможности принимать активное участие в общественной деятельности" (7:365). [My disability does not allow me to participate actively in social activities.]

<sup>467</sup> "Книжку 'Московские облака' никак не сдавали в печать. Варлам Тихонович бегал и советовался в 'Юность' – к Б. Полевому и Н. Злотникову, в 'Литгазету' к Н. Мармерштейну, в 'Советский писатель' – к В. Фогельсону. Приходил издерганный, злой и отчаявшийся. 'Я в списках. Надо писать письмо.' Я сказала: 'Не надо. Это – потерять лицо. Не надо. Я чувствую всей душой – не надо.'" [They were stalling the publication of the book *Moscow Clouds*. Varlam Tikhonovich ran to (the journal) *Iunost'* and consulted with B. Polevoy and N. Zlotnikov, to (*Literaturnaia gazeta*) with N. Marmershtein, to (the publishing company) *Sovetskii pisatel'* with V. Fogel'son. He came back angered, angry, and desperate. 'I'm on the lists. I've got to write a letter.' I said: 'Don't. You'll lose face. Don't. I feel it with all my heart – don't.'" Sirotinskaia, *Moi drug Varlam Shalamov*, 42.

effective: his poetry collection was published later the same year and he soon gained coveted membership into the Union of Writers.<sup>468</sup>

However, Shalamov's public letter is more than an open denunciation of his own texts; it fills also another important function for him as a professional writer. In her analysis of the letter's rhetorical strategies, Toker observes that its usage of clichés from Soviet discourse of the 1920s not found elsewhere in his writing is meant to distract "...from what the letter really accomplishes – smuggling the one and only public reference, by name, to his 'Kolyma Tales' into the official Soviet media."<sup>469</sup> In the eyes of his contemporaries, he lost his status as a survivor-author of subversive camp narratives when he published this letter. Yet, in the same letter, he linked this title to himself as a writer for posterity. What was read at the time as a public recantation can now be seen as an act of unspoken defiance.

Quite fittingly, the sixth cycle is a defiant work that "tear[s] apart" *Kolyma Tales* at its seams, "tampers irrevocably with the possibility of closure, and leave[s] the [readers] more perplexed and unsettled than before."<sup>470</sup> Shalamov appears to have become both unsatisfied and disillusioned with *Kolyma Tales* while working on *The Glove or KT-2*: "Not everything has been described – and even the best *Kolyma Tales* are only the surface, precisely because they are described in an accessible manner."<sup>471</sup> The sixth cycle may be his attempt to reach deeper, beyond an accessible and representable surface, into the material and to fill lacuna in his writing.<sup>472</sup> Had he never written it but stopped after *The Revival of the Larch*, his late style would have been more uniform in its expression and considerably less voluminous – not to mention devoid of the enigmatic lure that nevertheless hovers over *The Glove or KT-2* as an unfinished final cycle that does not conclude but rather gestures toward the impossibility of an end.

Since *The Glove or KT-2* undoes the attempt at closure in *The Revival of the Larch*, it seems almost appropriate that Shalamov never finished it. The last cycle is rough, in its fragmentary form as well as in its harsh content, coming closer to the harrowing perspective of the goner than ever before in its mode of narration. This, as Volkova so succinctly put it, expresses Shalamov's

<sup>468</sup> "[T]he poetry collection *Moscow Clouds* indeed went to the typesetter two months later and that Shalamov was accepted into the Writers' Union and (grudgingly, it seems) granted some of its benefits, such as rest cures at the Black Sea." Toker, "Samizdat and the Problem of Authorial Control," 751-2.

<sup>469</sup> "I believe that Shalamov's February letter had an undertext. On the one hand, it bears traces of his style, such as incantatory repetitions and asyndetic modifying constructions. On the other hand, it uses the typical Bolshevik-invective epithet 'foul-smelling' (*zlovonnye*) for the émigré journals: a striking feature, since olfactory imagery, literal or metaphoric, is rare in Shalamov's prose (he had chronic rhinitis). To the readers of Shalamov's prose, this word is strikingly 'alien' – an unassimilable lexical body, a 'piece of meat' thrown to the hurdle audience of the letter (the newspaper editors, the censors) – in order to distract its attention from what the letter really accomplishes – smuggling the one and only public reference, by the actual title, to his 'Kolyma Tales' into the official Soviet media. The target audience of the letter is thus informed that such a work exists, a record is left, questions about accessibility are encouraged; the readers of the letter, who would know what the toponym Kolyma stands for, would hardly avoid asking "Kolyma Tales"? Where?" Ibid., 752.

<sup>470</sup> "This is the case with Ibsen, whose final works, especially *When We Dead Awaken*, tear apart the career and the artists' craft and reopen the questions of meaning, success, and progress that the artist's late period is supposed to move beyond. Far from resolution, then, Ibsen's last plays suggest an angry and disturbed artist for whom the medium of drama provides an occasion to stir up more anxiety, tamper irrevocably with the possibility of closure, and leave the audience more perplexed and unsettled than before." Said, *On Late Style*, 7.

<sup>471</sup> "Все не описано – да и самые лучшие колымские рассказы – все это лишь поверхность, именно потому, что доступно описано" (5:323).

<sup>472</sup> "The cycle *The Glove or KR-2* includes a significant amount of directly autobiographical material that fills the blanks between the jigsaw-puzzle pieces of the earlier cycles. It was written when Shalamov's health was speedily deteriorating; nevertheless, it rises to new artistic and intellectual challenges." Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 179.

need to say the very last truth about himself and the world.<sup>473</sup> Despite being left unfinished, the sixth cycle contains an opening in “The Glove”<sup>474</sup> and an exit from the camps for the transitory hero in the final “Riva-Rocci.” Yet neither this beginning nor this ending are what they at first appear to be, or what a reader familiar with this structure from previous cycles might expect them to be. The autobiographical, or rather confessional, tone in “The Glove” is destabilized by a doubling of the writer in the lost skin glove of the past goner that cannot write its own story but remains identical to the now writing hand. The exit route implied in the last sentence of “Riva-Rocci” – “Three months later, I was in Moscow”<sup>475</sup> – eclipses the fact that the same short story constructs a renewal, even an expansion, of the camp left by the transitory hero: “The camp wasn’t closing, as it turns out, but expanded and grew. Our Baragon got a new space, a new zone where barracks were built, and therefore, a guard station and watchtowers too, an isolation and an area to line up before work as well.”<sup>476</sup> Instead of taking leave of his reader by providing a sense of if not closure then at least resolution – emotional or thematic – as in the earlier cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, the conclusion to the sixth cycle emphasizes that a personal ending does not end the camps in general: “The ‘release date’ of the camp approached.”<sup>477</sup> Since he leaves before the start of the new camp, this last cycle pauses, rather than finishes, the larger narrative about the Kolyma camps in Russian literature and Soviet history.

*The Glove* or *KT-2* is both less and more than previous *Kolyma Tales*: less fiction and less ‘literary’ in that it contains less conscious aesthetic form and encompasses more overtly historical and autobiographical content. The transitory hero speaks more often than not as “I” or is identified as “Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov.” The jagged contours of an arduous personal past appear to have replaced the sophisticated literary maneuvers practiced to great success in the earlier cycles. Yet Shalamov was not able to completely rid his late short stories of artistic dimensions, although they seem to be either more personal or more documentary in their mode of representation. Six of the cycle’s twenty-one short stories are entitled after the person on whom they center and recall the structure of *Vishera* in which the majority of chapters are named in this way: “Galina Pavlovna Zybalova,” “Доктор Ямпольский” [“Doctor Yampol’skiy”] (1970-1), “Подполковник Фрагин” [“Lieutenant Colonel Fragin”] (1973), “Иван Богданов” [“Ivan Bogdanov”] (1970-1), “Яков Овсеевич Заводник” [“Yakov Ovseevich Zavodnik”] (1970-1), and “Александр Гогоберидзе” [“Aleksandr Gogoberidze”] (1970-1). However, unlike Shalamov’s usage of the stories of others in the fifth cycle, the individuals named in these titles were unlikely to become readers of his late prose as they were deceased (Gogoberidze) or their

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<sup>473</sup> “Теперь возникла необходимость сказать самую последнюю правду о себе и о мире, впустить в свою прозу психологический анализ и самоанализ, впустить ужас и абсурд, как таковой, встретившись с ними на страницах прямо, без всякой, как говорят, ‘литературной маски.’” [Now it became necessary to tell the very last truth about himself and about the world, to allow psychological analysis and introspection into his prose, to allow horror and absurdity, as such, and encounter them directly on the page, without any ‘literary mask.’] Volkova, *Tragicheskii paradoks*, 152.

<sup>474</sup> See Shalamov’s notebook from 1971: “‘Перчатка’ может открывать сборник – это правильно заметила И[рина Сиротинская]. В этом рассказе есть действительно черты вступления” (5:325). [“The Glove” can open the collection – this was correctly noticed by I[rina Sirovinskaya]. There are really features of an introduction in this short story.]

<sup>475</sup> “Через три месяца я был в Москве” (2:450).

<sup>476</sup> “Лагерь не закрывался, оказывается, увеличивался и рос. Нашему Барагону отводилось новое помещение, новая зона, где возводились бараки, а стало быть, и вахта, и караульные вышки, и изолятор, и площадка для разводов на работу” (2:449).

<sup>477</sup> “День ‘пуска’ лагеря приближался” (*ibid.*).

fates uncertain (Zybalova, Yampol'sky, Fragin, Bogdanov); the exception is *Zavodnik*, with whom Shalamov remained friends.

Unlike the other cycles of *Kolyma Tales*, the sixth cycle was unknown for a long time as it circulated neither in *samizdat* nor *tamizdat*. *The Glove or KT-2* has since been redeemed from this previous negligence; for example, a fragment from the first page of “The Glove” became famous and intrinsically linked with Shalamov’s life and works when it was used in the opening credits of the Russian twelve-episode TV series *Завещание Ленина [Lenin’s Testament]* (2007; director Nikolai Dostal’): “Did we exist? I answer: ‘we existed’ – with all the poignancy of a protocol, with the responsibility, the lucidity of a document.”<sup>478</sup> In the opening of the TV series, as in the opening of “The Glove,” this affirmation of the existence of former political prisoners frames Shalamov’s counternarrative to inaccessible official records and enforced oblivion. In “The Glove,” this challenge to the extinction of collective memory instigates a search into what can be retrieved from these lost spaces of the past at the time of writing in the early 1970s:

The documents of our past have been destroyed, the watchtowers taken down, the barracks razed to the ground, the rusty barbed wire wound up and taken away somewhere else. On the ruins of Serpantinka, the willow-herb blossoms – the flower of fire, of oblivion, an enemy of archives and of human memory. Did we exist? I answer: “we existed” – with all the poignancy of a judicial transcript, with the responsibility, the lucidity of a document.<sup>479</sup>

The now well-known final part of this confrontation with contemporary forgetting has a late style context that is perhaps neither as prominent nor as convenient. In one of his notebooks from 1971, Shalamov continued the last phrase with a perplexing perspective that unravels the beginning of “The Glove” and complicates the imperative of a “prose suffered through like a document”<sup>480</sup> at the end of his literary manifesto: “With all the responsibility of a document. But documents are not objective at all – every document is someone’s pain, someone’s passion.”<sup>481</sup> This statement provides a problematic context for not only “The Glove” as a short story and *The Glove or KT-2* as a cycle, but also for Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales* and his late style. Whereas the document should be a vehicle for an objective truth, he here upholds its subjective aspects: “someone’s pain, someone’s passion.” In his last cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, the objective and the subjective must inhabit the same textual space and the union between them is often challenging and sometimes disorienting. In the light of this, I would suggest that we must approach *The Glove or KT-2* as an experimental text in which the unfinished whole and the disparate threads implicating the personal in “the more than personal” do not always reach a harmonious cohabitation. It seems that this troubling perspective from his notebook on the well-known affirmation of existence in “The Glove,” and the friction caused when they are read against one

<sup>478</sup> “Были ли мы? Отвечаю: ‘были’ – со всей выразительностью протокола, ответственностью, отчетливостью документа.”

<sup>479</sup> “Документы нашего прошлого уничтожены, караульные вышки спилены, бараки сравнены с землей, ржавая колючая проволока смотана и увезена куда-то в другое место. На развалинах Серпантинки процвел иван-чай – цветок пожара, забвения, враг архивов и человеческой памяти. Были ли мы? Отвечаю: ‘были’ – со всей выразительностью протокола, ответственностью, отчетливостью документа” (2:283).

<sup>480</sup> The last sentence in “On Prose”: “Не проза документов, а проза, выстраданная, как документ” (5:157). [Not the prose of documents, but a prose suffered out as a document.]

<sup>481</sup> “Со всей ответственностью документа. Но документы вовсе не объективны – всякий документ это чья-то боль, чья-то страсть” (5:330).

another, provides one clue to the “2” in the title of the sixth cycle: rather than filling lacuna in his own writing, Shalamov is juxtaposing these late narratives with earlier. This “KT-2” could mean an improved version of the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, but it might also signify a re-imagination and re-framing of all literary documents that tell us of “his pain, his passion.”<sup>482</sup>

An elusive search for the “document” – preferably without quotation marks but rarely found without them – reverberates throughout *The Glove or KT-2*. In “The Glove,” the absence of official written documents (“There are no personal files, no archives, no medical histories...”<sup>483</sup>) prompts the transitory hero to imagine a lost part of his body, the gloves of skin shed from his hands due to pellagra, as the ultimate document that proves his existence and testifies to the truth of his experience. Yet this physical and personal document proves an unreachable source of truth: “Where are you now, my challenge to time, my knight’s glove thrown on the snow, in the face of the Kolyma ice in 1943?”<sup>484</sup> His appeal to this glove as “you” will remain without a response; unlike the still living hand of the writer, the dead skin glove of the person who spoke of himself as “я доходяга” [“I the goner”]<sup>485</sup> can neither reply nor compose a representation of its experience: “That glove wouldn’t have written this short story. Those fingers cannot straighten themselves out to take a pen and write about itself.”<sup>486</sup> Although the glove cannot write its own story, it must be addressed as the double of the writing hand because they were once one and remain inseparable through their finger prints: “Even the fingerprint is one and the same on that dead glove and on this present living glove now holding the pencil.”<sup>487</sup> Their identical traits notwithstanding, the writing hand’s double in the “you” of the glove and the transitory hero’s double in “I the goner” never meet, neither in the lived experience nor in its textual representation: the new skin replaced the dead without intersection and the writer composes a testimony for a “true witness”<sup>488</sup> who cannot speak. Although Shalamov himself was “a goner”<sup>489</sup> as a prisoner, the present writer seems to strip himself of the weight of this past witness: “I, like a

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<sup>482</sup> “В названии присутствует и некая документальность, протокольность (‘КР-2’): не только отсылка к первой серии ‘КР,’ но и новый, еще не пройденный читателем путь, указанный цифрой ‘2.’” In the title there is a certain documentary character, of protocol keeping (‘KT-2’): not only a reference to the first series of ‘KT’ but also a new path not yet traversed, as indicated by the number ‘2.’] Volkova, *Tragicheskii paradoks*, 152.

<sup>483</sup> “Нет личных дел, нет архивов, нет историй болезни...” (2:283).

<sup>484</sup> “Где ты сейчас, мой вызов времени, рыцарская моя перчатка, брошенная на снег, в лицо колымского льда в 1943 году?” (ibid.).

<sup>485</sup> The transitory hero signifies his earlier double with “I the goner” throughout “The Glove,” see, for example, the first instance: “Я – доходяга, кадровый инвалид прибольничной судьбы, спасенный, даже вырванный врачами из лап смерти. Но я не вижу блага в моем бессмертии ни для себя, ни для государства. Понятия наши изменили масштабы, перешли границы добра и зла. Спасение может быть благо, а может быть и нет: этот вопрос я не решил для себя и сейчас” (2:283-4). [I’m a goner, a professional invalid with a disastrous fate, rescued, even torn out from the clutches of death by the doctors. But I don’t see the good in my immortality neither for myself nor for the state. Our concepts have changed their dimensions, crossed the boundaries of good and evil. Salvation can be good, but maybe not: even now I haven’t decided this question for myself.]

<sup>486</sup> “Уж та перчатка рассказ этот не написала бы. Те пальцы не могут разогнуться, чтоб взять перо и написать о себе” (2:284).

<sup>487</sup> “Даже дактилоскопический отпечаток один и тот же на той, мертвой перчатке и на нынешней, живой, держащей сейчас карандаш” (2:284).

<sup>488</sup> “The ‘true’ witnesses, the ‘complete witnesses,’ are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness. They are those who ‘touched bottom’: the Muslims, the drowned. The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony.” Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York, Zone Books: 2002, 34.

<sup>489</sup> “The Glove” is based on the same event, in which the transitory hero is submitted to the hospital in the state of a goner, narrated for the first time in “Домино” [“Dominoes”] (1959) in the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*.



snake, left my old skin in the snow.”<sup>490</sup> By addressing the doubles in anticipation of a response yet knowing none will ever come, “The Glove” articulates a situation in which “one [cannot] bear witness to oneself.”<sup>491</sup> The hand of the goner cannot testify; nonetheless, it is a document in and of itself:

Good poetry or prose couldn’t be written with the dead glove. The glove itself was prose, an accusation, a document, a protocol. But the glove died on the Kolyma – that’s why this short story is written. The author guarantees that the fingerprint on both gloves is one.<sup>492</sup>

The assurance offered by the author, that the fingerprints remain the same, appears to obscure the experience rather than to reinforce it. The writer has, as it were, overwritten this death with his life. Moreover, he questions the value of not only testimony but also of survival, the cause as well as the condition for this impossible speech act: “Salvation can be good, but maybe not: even now I haven’t decided this question for myself.”<sup>493</sup> *The Glove or KT-2* does not resolve this problem and the absence of a resolution in favor of life mars its short stories like the holes in the ground where a fence with barbed wire and watchtowers once stood.

The goner who did not want to survive – “By this time, I envied only those people who found the courage to commit suicide as our prison dispatch for Kolyma was gathered in July 1937 in the transfer building at Butyrka prison”<sup>494</sup> – became the writer who strives to replicate the words of the goner’s hand: “And if I’m really going to write – then the very words that the Kolyma glove could’ve expressed...”<sup>495</sup> Yet it becomes a different short story (“That glove wouldn’t have written this short story”<sup>496</sup>) and appears therefore to bear witness to “the impossibility of bearing witness.”<sup>497</sup> This skin glove, whether it remains in a museum in Magadan or has already decayed, is the “complete witness” because it contains both the impossibility of speech and the obligation of inscription in and of itself: “Is not only the history of my body, my fate, soul, but also the history of the state, time, the world written in that glove attached to my medical history. In that glove, history could be written.”<sup>498</sup> The history of “the state, time, the world” that this glove could write will never be written, but “The Glove” continues as a narrative

<sup>490</sup> “Я, как змей, сбросил в снегу свою старую кожу” (2:284-5).

<sup>491</sup> This observation comes from narratives of the Holocaust, in which the annihilation of the witness was an integral part; however, it seems that a similar erasure of the witness of the Gulag emerges in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and that Shalomov’s prose during this decade engages with this process of erasure and enforced forgetting. “But one cannot turn to a ‘you’ one cannot say ‘thou’ even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one could not bear witness to oneself...” Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 82.

<sup>492</sup> “Мертвой перчаткой нельзя было написать хорошие стихи или прозу. Сама перчатка была прозой, обвинением, документом, протоколом. Но перчатка погибла на Колыме – потому-то и пишется этот рассказ. Автор ручается, что дактилоскопический узор на обеих перчатках один” (2:310).

<sup>493</sup> “Спасение может быть благо, а может быть и нет: этот вопрос я не решил для себя и сейчас” (2:284).

<sup>494</sup> “К этому времени я завидовал только тем людям, которые нашли мужество покончить с собой во время сбора нашего этапа на Колыму в июле тридцать седьмого года в этапном корпусе Бутырской тюрьмы” (2:310).

<sup>495</sup> “А если уж писать – то те самые слова, которые могла бы вывести та, колымская перчатка...” (2:284).

<sup>496</sup> “Уж та перчатка рассказ этот не написала бы” (*ibid.*)

<sup>497</sup> “Whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their [the ‘complete witnesses’] name knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of an impossibility of bearing witness.” Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 34.

<sup>498</sup> “Разве в перчатке, которая приложена к истории болезни, не пишется история не только моего тела, моей судьбы, души, но история государства, времени, мира. В той перчатке можно было писать историю” (*ibid.*).

after the declaration of its own impossibility and becomes one of the longest short stories in *Kolyma Tales* (around 30 pages). In writing, the present writer cannot find the past goner – “And yet my hand is not that hand of the Kolyma goner”<sup>499</sup> – yet he continues to pursue their communication as well as communion within the text.

Unlike the goner in the earlier “Сентенция” [“Sententia”] (1965) who screams the Latin word “sententia!” without being understood or seeking understanding,<sup>500</sup> “The Glove” reaches out to a reader who will understand yet anticipates the impossibility of address as well as of an addressee.<sup>501</sup> After his revival, this transitory hero yearns to communicate his experiences and composes poetry with one of the euphemisms for starvation used by the camp authorities (“полиавитаминозник” is a mix of Latin terms roughly translated as “without many vitamins”):

I was already writing poems: “The Dream of The One Lacking Many Vitamins” – I didn’t dare to call myself a pellagra patient even in verse. Anyway, I didn’t really know what pellagra was. I only felt that my fingers were writing – rhymed and unrhymed poetry – that my fingers hadn’t said their last word yet.<sup>502</sup>

By neither calling his past ordeal by its name nor understanding what happened to him, Shalamov’s poem is bound to remain without a reader: who could fathom what the poet himself has yet to fathom? Like the skin glove, this poem perishes and the only evidence of its existence is the short story “The Glove.” This opening calls out to the lost narratives of the past, to the unattainable reader, and continues to echo the enigmatic question at its beginning: “Where are you now, my challenge to time, my knight’s glove thrown on the snow, in the face of the Kolyma ice in 1943?” This mysterious “you” is evoked again in “Wheelbarrow II” and “Афинские ночи” [“Athenian Nights”] (1973), that together with “The Glove” constitute three of the main four short stories in the final cycle – each a masterpiece and part of a haunting search for an addressee that can not only read but also understand.

<sup>499</sup> “И все же моя рука не та рука колымского доходяги” (2:285).

<sup>500</sup> “– Сентенция! – орал я прямо в северное небо, в двойную зарю, орал, еще не понимая значения этого родившегося во мне слова. А если это слово возвратилось, обретено вновь тем лучше, – тем лучше! Великая радость переполняла все мое существо. – Сентенция! – Вот псих! – Псих и есть! Ты – иностранец, что ли? – язвительно спрашивал горный инженер Вронский, тот самый Вронский” (1:404). [– Sententia! I shouted straight into the northern sky, into the dual dawn, yelling and not yet understanding the meaning of this word born in me. And if this word has returned, has been acquired again, then all the better – all the better! A great joy overflowed my whole being. – Sententia! – You’re crazy! – Yeah, he’s crazy! Are you a foreigner, or what? asked the mining engineer Vronsky squeamishly, that very same Vronsky.]

<sup>501</sup> Shalamov’s situation as an internally exiled writer without access to publication and, by extension, to public testimony, was, undoubtedly, different than those narrating their experiences of the Holocaust in the west; yet their attempt to find an address resounds with the search for an addressee in Shalamov’s late style: “...many of these Holocaust survivors in fact narrate their story *in its entirety* for the first time in their lives, awoken to their memories and to their past by both the public purpose of the enterprise (the collection and the preservation of first-hand, live testimonial evidence about the Holocaust), and, more concretely, by the presence and involvement of the interviewers, who enable them for the first time to believe that it is possible, indeed, against all odds and against their past experience, to tell the story and *be heard*, to in fact *address* the significance of their biography – to *address*, that is, the suffering, the truth, and the necessity of this impossible narration – to a hearing ‘you,’ and to a listening community. <...> [T]he Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale is thus, in turn, the endeavor of *creating* (recreating) an *address*, specifically, for a historical experience which annihilated the very possibility of address.” Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 41. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>502</sup> “Я уже сочинял стихи: ‘Мечта полиавитаминозника’ – пеллагрозником назвать себя не решался даже в стихах. Впрочем, я толком и не знал, что такое пеллагра. Я только чувствовал, что пальцы мои пишут – рифмованное и нерифмованное, что пальцы мои не сказали еще своего последнего слова” (2:309).

Yet the “you” addressed in these short stories did not exist then and does not exist now; Shalamov’s contemporary reader of *The Glove or KT-2* is an absence both within the text and beyond it. Since the sixth cycle was not circulated in the 1970s, it was never read by someone who shared his experiences and could relate to or verify their representations. When we read the last cycle of *Kolyma Tales* today, outside of its immediate historical and cultural context with which it wanted to communicate, we must inevitably expose our inadequacy as the “you” to which it addresses its narratives. We can never know or understand this experience and, because of our inadequacy as “you,” we perpetuate both its impossibility of address and of an addressee. To read the sixth cycle is not only to be left without closure, but also to be without the status of “the reader.” “We” are not the “you” that “I” needed. The impossible communication that the last cycle nonetheless provokes seems to mirror the consequences of Shalamov’s deafness and his increasingly limited access to a dialogue beyond the text during the 1970s: even if “you” would have responded, he might not have been able to hear it.

## 2. Private Lessons in Love

Shalamov began “Уроки любви” [“Love Lessons”] (1963) during his middle period, *Urgent Embodiment*. He never finished it even though he later wrote what appears to be its ending, the fragmentary chapter “[На 23-м километре]” [“On the 23<sup>rd</sup> kilometer”] included in his autobiographical work *About Kolyma*.<sup>503</sup> However, “Love Lessons” was not intended to be left incomplete, as a disheveled digression in *Kolyma Tales*, but to be a central narrative in the second cycle as well as for it to give it its title: *Love Lessons*. He changed his mind in 1965 – the second cycle became *The Left Bank* instead<sup>504</sup> – and the unfinished text appears to have resurfaced during his creative process in the 1970s when he also changed the order of the cycles (*The Left Bank* was previously third and *An Artist of the Spade* second).<sup>505</sup> His choice to include “Love Lessons” in *The Glove or KT-2* unfinished seems both a conscious move and symptomatic of the incompleteness that shapes several of the texts written during his late style. It is neither the only text in the sixth cycle that ends in an ellipsis nor the only one written a decade earlier. Two other

<sup>503</sup> See Esipov’s comment: “Рассказ, начатый в 1963 г., не закончен. Возможно, один из вариантов его продолжения (или концовки) представляет маленькая глава воспоминаний Шаламова, названная ‘На 23-м километре.’ Она свидетельствует о том, что в период учебы Шаламова на фельдшерских курсах, возвративших его к жизни, у него вспыхнуло острое любовное чувство к санитарке Стефе, бывшей узнице Освенцима, оказавшейся на Колыме (документальных данных о ее судьбе не имеется).” [The short story was begun in 1963 and is not finished. Perhaps one of the variants of its continuation (or ending) is the small chapter in Shalamov’s memoirs, with the title ‘On the 23rd kilometer.’ It shows that while Shalamov was pursuing the medical assistant’s courses that brought him back to life, he felt a sharp romantic feeling toward the aide Stefa, a former prisoner of Auschwitz who ended up in Kolyma (there is no documentary evidence of her fate).] Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazy*, cited from the electronic version: <http://shalamov.ru/research/249/>.

<sup>504</sup> See Shalamov’s letter to Nadezhda Mandel’shtam from July 21 1965: “‘Академик’ перешел в другой сборник, который будет называться не ‘Уроки любви’ (это будет название одного из рассказов), а ‘Левый берег,’ официальное географическое название колымского поселка, где я прожил 6 лет” (6:412). [“The Academic” moved to another collection, which will not be called “Love Lessons” (this will be the name of one of the short stories), but “The Left Bank,” the official geographical name of the Kolyma settlement where I lived for 6 years.]

<sup>505</sup> “In Sirotinskaia’s editions, except for the first journal publications of the early years of glasnost, ‘The Left Bank’ precedes ‘The Artist of the Spade,’ the suggestion being that Shalamov rethought the sequence in the seventies. The new sequence makes better sense biographically, because ‘The Artist of the Spade’ ends with two stories of a released prisoner leaving Kolyma and traveling back to Moscow. Artistically, however, the older sequence is the more impressive, since it ends with the story ‘Sententia,’ one of Shalamov’s masterpieces...” Toker, “Samizdat and the Problem of Authorial Control,” 747.

finish with a similar ellipsis: “Тачка I” [“Wheelbarrow I”] (undated) and “Подполковник медицинской службы” [“Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Service”] (1963). The latter short story was written in the early 1960s, as was “Человек с парохода” [“The Man from the Steamship”] (1962). Shalamov probably considered “Wheelbarrow II” to be the completion of “Wheelbarrow I.” However, this does not explain why he included an unfinished fragment as a kind of preface to the following complete short story. It seems to me that he decided in this way to bare the device at work in his late style – in which more and more narratives achieve less and less form – to suggest a self-conscious rejection of the elaborate form observed in earlier *Kolyma Tales*. In a similar move, the transitory hero in “The Man from the Steamship” is called Krist and thus recalls earlier short stories with this alter ego. Yet the fragmentary quality of this short story – perhaps also unfinished – matches the incompleteness of *The Glove or KT-2*. By contrast, “Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Service” is an aesthetically and ethically complete narrative unit despite the absence of a definitive ending. Shalamov might have incorporated this polished short story toward the end of the cycle (as number 19 of 21) to remind his readers of a past literary representation that had now become both impossible and undesirable.

In twelve fragments linked by the “I” of the transitory hero, who functions as the narrator, “Love Lessons” presents something of an overview of *Kolyma Tales*. Through twelve brief depictions of romantic or sexual relationships between people in Kolyma, it captures an essential aspect of life there – love – that has often been neglected in Shalamov’s prose. In this regard, we might remember his argument with Demidov, and how he objected to Demidov’s desire to narrate how people loved each other in the camps.<sup>506</sup> Shalamov maintained that the camps should be represented from a more general and collective point of view before personal and possibly atypical events could be depicted. Thus, he consciously omitted what he considered to be of primarily private significance from the short stories included in *Kolyma Tales*. Some of these events were later described in his unfinished autobiographical text *About Kolyma* that he worked on in the early 1970s. Two such events narrated in *About Kolyma* are relevant for “Love Lessons” and *The Glove or KT-2* as they provide them with missing private contexts. In the case of “Love Lessons,” the intimate event narrated in *About Kolyma* could be its missing ending.

Many other parts of this text seem rather to be borrowed from earlier *Kolyma Tales*, save a few that are either absent from the previous cycles or new insertions. The text begins with a positive assessment of the transitory hero’s character: “You’re a good person, said our trawler to me recently. <...> You never speak badly and dirty about women.”<sup>507</sup> The person responsible for this opinion is Isai Rabinovich, who also appears in “Любовь капитана Толли” [“Captain Tolti’s Love”] (1965) in *An Artist of the Spade*. The first of twelve fragments about relationships between people summarizes the plot of this short story: Rabinovich receives a letter from an American Naval attaché asking for permission to marry his daughter. Despite attempts by the Soviet government to separate the lovers after the wedding, they remain true to each other until they are finally reunited: “It took two whole years of war, and Rabinovich’s daughter received a

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<sup>506</sup> Valentina Demidova, Demidov’s daughter, recalls: “И я помню, как мы шли с папой пешком, а он весь кипел: ‘Ну ты пойми, мы там жили. Это страшная, невозможная каторга. Там немногие выживали после общих работ, и всё равно – там жили люди. Эти люди любили, дружили... И не писать об этом я не могу.’” [And I remember how I was walking with dad and he was seething: “Well, you understand, we lived there. This was a terrible, impossible penal servitude. There were few who survived the forced labor, but still – people lived there. These people loved, they were friends... And I cannot not write about that.”] “‘Budushchemu na proklyatое proshloe...’ *Shalamovskii sbornik*, вып. 4, 64.

<sup>507</sup> “Вы – хороший человек, – сказал мне недавно наш траповщик <...> – Вы никогда не говорите плохо и грязно о женщинах” (2:402).

short-term business trip to Stockholm. In Stockholm, a special plane was waiting for her and Captain Tolli's wife was brought to her husband..."<sup>508</sup> The happy ending of the first story promises an emphasis on 'love' in the "Love Lessons" that follow; however, the other fragments lean more toward 'lessons.'

The second fragment is far from as sentimental; it relates the astonished remark by thirty-year-old Vas'ka Shvetsov who thus far never laid in bed with a woman: "Always in a hurry, on some boxes, heaps, like a tongue-twister... I've been in prison since I was a boy..."<sup>509</sup> He complains about the same unfortunate aspect of his sexual history in "Курсы" ["Courses"] in *An Artist of the Spade*.<sup>510</sup> His amorous adventures anticipate the crueler practices of the criminal prisoner Lyubov who would freeze the payment – six hundred grams of bread – before a liaison with a starving prostitute: "Well, I'm slyer than them. It's winter. I get up in the morning, go out of the barrack and put a bread ration in the snow. I'll freeze it and bring it to her – let her gnaw the frozen piece, she won't gnaw off a lot. This is advantageous to live... Can a person think of that?"<sup>511</sup> The comment added by the transitory hero – "can a person think of that?" – conveys surprise as well as disgust and suggests that these 'love lessons' might teach their reader a lesson in morality.

The fourth fragment concerns the young lesbian Nadia Gromova who grew up around other likeminded women in the camp. Probably seen by the transitory hero when she tried to get into the hospital, she tries fruitlessly to evade her truth: "– The doctor on duty won't admit me because he thinks that I... but I, by my honor, never, never. Just look at my hands – do you see how long my nails are, is it really possible?"<sup>512</sup> She appears as Valya Gromova with the same excuse in the ending of the short story "В приемном покое" ["In the Waiting Room"] (1965) in *The Left Bank*.<sup>513</sup> Gromova's concealment of her sexual orientation antedates the fifth fragment about the prisoner Khardzhiev who contracted syphilis after being raped in a prison in Paris. Yet his sexual mishap turns into an unexpected advantage in the camps of Kolyma: "It was

<sup>508</sup> "Прошло целых два года войны, и дочь Рабиновича получила кратковременную командировку в Стокгольм. В Стокгольме ее ждал специальный самолет, и жена капитана Толли была доставлена к мужу..." (2:403).

<sup>509</sup> "Все второпях, на каких-то ящиках, мешках, скороговоркой... Я ведь с мальчиков в тюрьме-то..." (2:403-4).

<sup>510</sup> "Сколько я их, этих баб, имел – веришь ли, и счесть нельзя. И знаешь что? Ведь ни с одной ни часу не спал я на кровати. А все как-то – то в сенях, то в сарае, чуть ли не на ходу. Веришь? – Так рассказывал Вася Швецов, первый больничный красавец" (1:510). [How many have I had of these females – believe it or not, but it's impossible to count. And you know what? After all, I haven't slept even one hour with one of them in a bed. But with all of them somehow – in the hallway, in the shed, almost on the move. Do you believe me? – said Vasya Shvetsov, the first hospital beauty.]

<sup>511</sup> "Ну, я похитрей их. Зима. Я утром встаю, выхожу из барака – пайку в снег. Заморожу и несу ей – пусть грызет замороженную – много не угрызет. Вот выгодно жили... Может ли придумать такое человек?" (2:404).

<sup>512</sup> "– Дежурный врач не кладет меня потому, что думает, что я... а я, клянусь честью, никогда, никогда. Да посмотрите мои руки – видите, ногти какие длинные, – разве можно?" (ibid.).

<sup>513</sup> "– Здравствуйте, Валя Громова. – Ну вот, хоть теперь человека увидела. – Что тут за шум? – Меня в больницу не кладут. – А почему ее в самом деле не кладут? У ней с туберкулезом неблагоприятно. – Да ведь это кобель, – грубо вмешивается нарядчик. – О ней постановление было. Запрещено принимать. Да ведь спала же без мужа... – Врут они все, – кричит Валя Громова бесстыдно. – Видите, какие у меня пальцы. Какие пяти..." (1:233). [– Hello, Valya Gromova. – Well, at least now I've seen a person. – What's that noise? – They're not admitting me to the hospital. – And why are they not admitting her? She's got a hard time with tuberculosis. – Well, she's a dyke, the orderly roughly interrupts. – There was an ordinance about her. We're forbidden to admit. Well, she's slept without me. Or without a husband... – Those are all lies, Valya Gromova shouts shamelessly. You see what fingers I have. What finger nails...]

convenient that he had syphilis – he was given all the medication while working on the assembly of a steam heating system absolutely for free, while lying on a hospital bed.”<sup>514</sup>

After a short interlude about the shortage of stories told about women in prison (“In the investigative prison, in Butyrka, we almost didn’t speak about women”<sup>515</sup>), the following four fragments confound the narrator as to their pertinence to the theme of ‘love.’ The sixth fragment seems informed by this emotion yet exempt from its meaning: “Does the defilement of a bitch-dog by a criminal prisoner, who lived with her as with a wife blatantly before the eyes of the whole camp, belong to love?”<sup>516</sup> He was neither tried nor sentenced for his bestiality, and the same applies to another questionable couple: “They didn’t try Dr. Penelopov, an old pedophile, whose wife was the paramedic Volodarsky.”<sup>517</sup> Yet the wavering of the transitory hero is not entirely understandable in relation to the eighth fragment: “Does the fate of a short woman, who had never been imprisoned and who came here with her husband and two children a few years ago, pertain to this subject?”<sup>518</sup> This fragment relates the sad story of a woman whose husband later died and she then married another man, moved with him deep into the taiga, and there gave birth to two more children by herself. Yet her second husband also died: “She went back into the woods without crying – what help are tears?”<sup>519</sup> Although this unnamed woman and her harsh fate do not resound with other short stories in *Kolyma Tales*, her selfless actions are reminiscent of point 23 on Shalamov’s list “What I Saw and Understood in the Camps”: “I saw that women are more decent, more self-sacrificing than men – in Kolyma there were no cases in which the husband came there because of his wife. But many wives came.”<sup>520</sup>

The last fragment to confound the narrator, number nine, concerns a man who forgot the name and patronymic of his wife: “Does the horror of Igor Vasilyevich Glebov, who forgot the name and patronymic of his own wife, have anything to do with this subject?”<sup>521</sup> The same Glebov is known for forgetting his wife’s name in “Надгробное слово” [“Eulogy”] (1960) from *An Artist of the Spade*: “– It would be nice for us, brothers, to return home. After all, miracles happen... said Glebov, a former professor of philosophy, known in our barracks for forgetting the name of his wife a month ago.”<sup>522</sup> He cries in the fragment included in “Love Lessons” until he eventually, two weeks later, remembers her name – Anna Vasil’evna – and wakes the transitory hero to share his revelation. In this narrative, he adds his own form of post-factum remembrance to this love story: “And I didn’t scold him and tried to fall asleep again. Glebov died in the spring of 1938...”<sup>523</sup>

<sup>514</sup> “Удобно, что у него был сифилис, – целый курс ему провели, пока он работал на сборке парового отопления совершенно бесплатно, числясь на больничной койке” (2:405).

<sup>515</sup> “В следственной тюрьме, в Бутырках, о женщинах почти не говорили” (ibid.).

<sup>516</sup> “К любви ли относится растление блатарем суки-собаки, с которой блатарь жил на глазах всего лагеря, как с женой” (ibid.).

<sup>517</sup> “Не судили доктора Пенелопова, старика педераста, женой которого был фельдшер Володарский” (ibid.).

<sup>518</sup> “Относится ли к теме судьба невысокой женщины, никогда не бывшей в заключении, приехавшей сюда с мужем и двумя детьми несколько лет назад” (ibid.).

<sup>519</sup> “Она вернулась в лес, не плача – чему помогут слезы?” (2:406).

<sup>520</sup> “Видал, что женщины порядочнее, самоотверженнее мужчин – на Колыме нет случаев, чтобы муж приехал за женой. А жены приезжали, многие” (4:626).

<sup>521</sup> “Имеет ли отношение к теме ужас Игоря Васильевича Глебова, который забыл имя и отчество своей собственной жены?” (ibid.).

<sup>522</sup> “– Хорошо бы, братцы, вернуться нам домой. Ведь бывает же чудо... – сказал коногон Глебов, бывший профессор философии, известный в нашем бараке тем, что месяц назад забыл имя своей жены” (1:421-2).

<sup>523</sup> “И я не ругал его и постарался заснуть снова. Глебов умер весной тридцать восьмого года...” (ibid.).

Glebov dies, as does the male bear in the tenth fragment. The story of how this male bear saved his female companion by sacrificing himself to the hunters comes from “Медведи” [“Bears”] (1956) in *The Left Bank*. The animal theme is continued in the eleventh fragment that recalls the killing of the weasel by Makhmutov in “Brave Eyes” in *The Revival of the Larch*:

Her bright eyes were fearless and spiteful. And the geologist got scared and ran away on the path from the weasel. And I think he can pray to his god, that I didn't stab him immediately on that bear trail. There was something in my eyes that made Makhmutov not bring me along on his next geological expedition...<sup>524</sup>

Although this fragment may at first appear far from some of the previous ‘love’ stories, love for animals is equal to, if not more important than, love between humans in Shalamov's works. In “Sententia,” written the year before “Brave Eyes,” pity toward animals precedes the same sentiment toward humans among the emotions that return to the goner after his revival:

Love didn't return to me. Oh, how far love is from envy, from fear, from anger. How little people need love. Love comes when all human feelings have already returned. Love comes last, returns last, and does it really return? But not only indifference, envy, and fear were the witnesses of my return to life. Pity for animals returned before pity for people.<sup>525</sup>

This paragraph would fit seamlessly into the storytelling mosaic of “Love Lessons;” moreover, it resounds with the problematic worldview of the previous witness turned present writer in *The Glove of KT-2*: a goner can return to life, but can love return to the goner? “Sententia” answers this question in the negative, and this answer might illuminate the twelfth, and final, ‘love lesson’ and why Shalamov never finished “Love Lessons.”

Stefa is the last person whose story is narrated and the fragment about her is prefaced by a digression about the impossibility to understand the emotions of others: “What do we know about someone else's sorrow? Nothing. About someone else's happiness? Even less. We're even trying to forget about our own sorrow, and our memory is conscientiously weak to retain sorrow and unhappiness.”<sup>526</sup> Stefa, the last woman in “Love Lessons” as well as the woman in its missing ending found in *About Kolyma*, did not testify to her own experiences. Her last name is not known and perhaps she did not survive Kolyma; a search for her in databases and archives comes back blank. It seems that instead of a literary unknowability of her experiences for the transitory hero in this text, there is also a literal unknowability for author as well as reader of the life and fate of Stefa. A survivor of Auschwitz, she is the last person introduced yet something is missing from her story: unlike the previous eleven relationships, Stefa lacks a male or female counterpart – the transitory hero has, as it were, removed himself from her story. However, the missing

<sup>524</sup> “Блестящие глаза ее были бесстрашны и злобны. И геолог испугался и побежал по тропе от ласки. И я думаю, что он может молиться своему богу, что я не зарубил его тут же на медвежьей тропе. Было в моих глазах что-то такое, почему Махмутов не взял меня в следующий свой геологический поиск...” (2:408).

<sup>525</sup> “Любовь не вернулась ко мне. Ах, как далека любовь от зависти, от страха, от злости. Как мало нужна людям любовь. Любовь приходит тогда, когда все человеческие чувства уже вернулись. Любовь приходит последней, возвращается последней, да и возвращается ли она? Но не только равнодушные, зависть и страх были свидетелями моего возвращения к жизни. Жалость к животным вернулась раньше, чем жалость к людям” (1:402).

<sup>526</sup> “Что знаем мы о чужом горе? Ничего. О чужом счастье? Еще того меньше. Мы и о своем-то горе стремимся забыть, и память добросовестно слаба на горе и несчастье” (2:408).

relationship is not immediately apparent as another correlation masks its absence; her inclusion appears at first as an opportunity to juxtapose Auschwitz with Kolyma: “What is Auschwitz? Literature or... but after Auschwitz, Stefa had the rare joy of liberation, and then she, among tens of thousands of others, became a victim of the spy mania and got into something worse than Auschwitz, she was sent to Kolyma.”<sup>527</sup> The strange, and ultimately interrupted, response to the question “what is Auschwitz?” seems to suggest not only the unknowable aspect of this Nazi camp for a survivor of the Soviet camps, but also the literary transformation of Kolyma in *Kolyma Tales*. What is missing from this interrupted response might be ‘life’ and this question with the same answer could also apply to the “worse” camps of Kolyma: ‘What is Kolyma? Literature or... life?’

Bifunctionality is perhaps the perfect device with which to avoid answering this question. “Love Lessons” gives the impression of unmediated ‘life’ through an assortment of real-life events and individuals whose stories as well as emotions are presented as authentic, even if not always unproblematic. However, when this earlier text is included in the last cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, an attentive reader will undoubtedly remember many of its fragments as ‘literature’ because they function as intertextual references to previous short stories by the same author. In the 1970s, Shalamov was aware of these two types of reading and the potential dangers embedded in their polarized treatments of the text, in which testimony is interpreted as fiction or fiction is read as testimony. It seems that the omission of ‘life’ in the interrupted response indicates that something else is missing from the text as well, and that this ‘something else’ belongs to ‘life’ rather than ‘literature.’ By leaving out ‘life’ – Shalamov’s private lesson in love – he suggests the limits of literary representation for personal experience and simultaneously undermines the bifunctionality that many readers have come to expect from *Kolyma Tales*. The other function, testimony, appears to be missing together with the ending.

“Love Lessons” ends with a mundane description of Stefa’s work in the hospital: “Stefa was an aide and did the laundry; mountains of dirty coarse linen sheets and the pungent scent of soap, lixivium, human sweat, and stinky warm steam shrouded her ‘workplace’...”<sup>528</sup> What is left out from this unfinished text is the intimate relationship between her and Shalamov. The autobiographical chapter “On the 23<sup>rd</sup> kilometer,” which was first published in 2004 as a part of *About Kolyma* in the six-volume collection of his works, continues after the ellipsis in the short story and gives a rare glimpse into one of his private love lesson in the camps:

In the storeroom, despite the frightful frost and shaggy lumps of frost on the windows and the bottles, it smelled of Lysol and carbolic – it smelled like a train car, like a train station. We lay down in the dark on some cold cans, bottles, boxes, and burning hands. I lit the match carefully, hiding the flame in my hands so that the fire wouldn’t be seen from outside through the door cracks. I lit a match for a second to look at the beloved face. Stefa’s eyes with their huge black dilated pupils approached my face and I blew out the match. I laid her down... White steam came from our mouths and through the doorways we saw the starry sky. Stefa moved her sleeve for a minute and with the back of my hand I stroked her princess’s skin – my fingers were frost-bitten and had long ago lost their sensitivity. I stroked and kissed Stefa’s hands and it seemed that they were wearing gloves,

<sup>527</sup> “Что такое Освенцим? Литература или... а ведь за Освенцимом у Стефы была редкая радость освобождения, а затем она, в числе десятков тысяч других, жертва шпиономании, попала в нечто худшее, чем Освенцим, попала на Колыму” (ibid.).

<sup>528</sup> “Стефа была санитаркой и стирала, и горы грязного бязевого белья и едкий запах мыла, щелока, людского пота и вонючего теплого пара окутывали ее ‘рабочее место’...” (2:409).



leather gloves with cut-outs for the fingers; my lips were not frost-bitten and I kissed hard, scratching the skin of my hands and the thin hot skin of the tip of each finger. I wanted to light the match again, but Stefa didn't allow me to test fate again. I went out first...<sup>529</sup>

Esipov notes that this romantic relationship occurred while Shalamov was studying to become a paramedic in 1946, as these courses were located on the 23<sup>rd</sup> kilometer from Magadan.<sup>530</sup> Cited here in its entirety, this fragmentary and excluded sex scene echoes his removed “glove” from *The Glove* in the rough hands of Stefa that he caresses and kisses. Had it been included as the ending of “Love Lessons,” it would thus have resonated with another powerful image in the sixth cycle. This type of literary representation of one of his personal experiences would therefore fit well into its other depictions of human physicality. Moreover, in his 1971 letter to Sirotinskaya, Shalamov argued that the prohibiting of sex in literature separates art from ‘living life’: “The hypocritical exhortation to ban the admission of sex in literature only separates the artist of cuts an artist of the realistic school for living life.”<sup>531</sup> In other words, this sex scene would have upheld the programmatic aesthetics that Shalamov wanted to convey with his ‘new prose.’ Then why did he not complete “Love Lessons” by adding this little chapter?

Although we can never know for certain, it seems to me that the answer to this question is partially in the emphasis on a represented ‘literature’ rather than an omitted ‘life’ in the answer to ‘What is Auschwitz/Kolyma?’ and partially in the imperative distinction between the personal and the private in Shalamov’s late style. The experience of the camps of Kolyma was personal to Shalamov, even though it was simultaneously collective in many ways. His late prose becomes more autobiographical and the transitory hero speaks more as “I” or is even called “Shalamov;” however, this seemingly intimate and subjective mode of narration should not be confused with a representation of the private. “Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov” in *The Glove of KT-2* is no closer to his reader than “Andreev” in the first cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, “Glebov” in *The Left Bank* or “Krist” in *An Artist of the Spade*. The writer retains a distance between himself and his reader as well as between himself and the witness he once was.

The amorous encounter with Stefa was a private event for Shalamov as an individual, yet this may not be the only explanation for its exclusion from “Love Lessons.” Sex is unattainable for the goner – the “true witness” – whose coarse and narrow perspective shapes much of the form and content in the last cycle. Moreover, the location of this short story in the sixth cycle could also clarify why Stefa was left without a relationship. “Aleksandr Gogoberidze,” the short story that precedes it, is also set during Shalamov’s paramedic studies in 1946. In the beginning of it, professor Umansky refuses to teach his students about reproductive organs:

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<sup>529</sup> “В кладовке, несмотря на страшный мороз и мохнатые наросты инея на окнах, бутылках, пахло лизолом, карболкой – пахло вагоном, вокзалом. Мы легли в темноте на какие-то холодные банки, бутылки, ящики, обжигающие руки. Я зажег спичку бережно, пряча пламя ее в ладонях, чтоб не было видно огня снаружи, сквозь дверные щели. Я зажег спичку на секунду, чтобы рассмотреть любимое лицо. Глаза Стефы с огромными черными расширенными зрачками приблизились к моему лицу, и я потушил спичку. Я положил ее... Белый пар шел от наших ртов, и сквозь дверные щели мы видели звездное небо. Стефа на минуту завернула рукав, и тыльной стороной ладони я погладил ее кожу царевны – пальцы мои были отморожены и давно потеряли чувствительность. Я гладил, целовал руки Стефы, и казалось, что на них надеты перчатки, кожаные перчатки с обрезанными пальчиками, губы у меня не были отмороженными, я целовал жесткую, царапающую кожу рук и тонкую горячую кожу кончика каждого пальца. Я хотел еще раз зажечь спичку, но Стефа не велела испытывать лишний раз судьбу. Я вышел первым...” (4:534).

<sup>530</sup> See footnote No. 504.

<sup>531</sup> “Ханжеский призыв запретить доступ секса в литературу лишь отделяет, отсекает художника реалистического направления от живой жизни” (6:492).

Knowing the camp a little (Umansky was serving his third or fourth sentence, as all the Stalin cases of the 1930s), the professor from Brussels flatly refused to lecture his Kolyma students about the sexual organs – male and female. And it wasn't because of excessive shyness. In short, it was offered that the students acquire this knowledge independently.<sup>532</sup>

It seems almost ingenious that professor Umansky's directive, for the students to fill in this area of knowledge "independently," would culminate in an independent study in this field that is likewise left out on purpose – this time from readers rather than students. Similarly, "Athenian Nights," the short story that follows "Love Lessons," contains another vital evaluation of the problem of sexual relations in the camps that might explain why the moment of intimacy with Stefa never made it into the texture of *The Glove or KT-2*. The beginning of "Athenian Nights" is dedicated to the deprivation in the camp of four essential human functions – hunger, urination, defecation, and libido – and the consequences of this deprivation for the body of the goner: "To the bosses, love seemed to be a feeling that could be expelled, shackled, distorted ... 'All your life you won't see a living c...' this was a standard witticism of the camp bosses."<sup>533</sup> The obtuse cruelty of this one-liner and the censored obscene term for the female reproductive organ seems to anticipate a deeper problematic in the goner's return from death to life, one that affects a function that was previously perhaps taken for granted:

You're already meeting the eyes of women with some kind of vague and unearthly interest – not excitement, no, not knowing, however, what you've got left for them and whether the process of impotence is reversible, but it would be more correct to say – osculation. Impotence for men, amenorrhea for women is the constant expected consequence of alimentary dystrophy, or simply of hunger. This is the knife that destiny sticks in the back of all prisoners.<sup>534</sup>

Judging by this statement in "Athenian Nights," a goner has no access to a sexual intimacy, even if the opportunity should present itself to the elusive yet unresponsive "you" ("You're already meeting the eyes of women with some kind of vague and unearthly interest..." emphasis added) that haunts the final cycle. Placed between "Aleksandr Gogoberidze," in which the study of reproductive organs is omitted, and "Athenian Nights," in which impotence might not be reversible, "Love Lessons" could not end with a sex scene in a closet together with a survivor of Auschwitz. This encounter might have been possible and authentic for Shalamov's experiences in 1946, as the inclusion of it in his autobiographical *About Kolyma* indicates, but the goner who permeates *The Glove or KT-2* has no access to similar physical intimacy. The "true witness" can share a personal past with his writer but this does not give the goner the right to its private parts.

<sup>532</sup> "Немножко зная лагерь (Уманский сидел третий или четвертый срок, как все по сталинским делам тридцатых годов), брюссельский профессор наотрез отказался читать своим колымским студентам главу о половых органах – мужских и женских. И не от чрезмерной стыдливости. Словом – эту главу студентам было предложено освоить самостоятельно" (2:397).

<sup>533</sup> "Начальникам любовь казалась чувством, которое можно изгнать, заковать, исказить... 'Всю жизнь живой п... не увидишь' – вот стандартная острота лагерных начальников" (2:410).

<sup>534</sup> "Уже ты встречаешь глаза женщин с некоторым смутным и неземным интересом – не волнением, нет, не зная, впрочем, что у тебя для них осталось и обратим ли процесс импотенции, а правильнее было бы сказать – оскопления. Импотенция для мужчин, аменорея для женщин – постоянное законное следствие алиментарной дистрофии, а попросту голода. Это – тот нож, который судьба всем арестантам втыкает в спину" (2:412-3).

Stefa and “Love Lessons” are neither the only woman nor the only narrative in the final cycle in which Shalamov made a conscious choice to separate his personal experience as a former witness from his private experience as a former prisoner. In “The Glove,” Nina Savoeva, the head doctor of the camp hospital Belich’ia, is called by her nickname “черная мама” [“black mother”]<sup>535</sup> for the first time. The same nickname appears in the chapter “Черная мама” [“The Black Mother”] (undated) from *About Kolyma*. Few readers of *Kolyma Tales*, even those now familiar with the less known sixth cycle, know about this fragment and yet it suggests an important difference between ‘the private’ and ‘the personal’ for Shalamov’s late style. Whereas an authentic representation must be based on a personal experience, this representation must not necessarily contain private details for it to be considered an authentic representation.

Toward the end of “The Glove,” the transitory hero explains lacuna in his writing about his time in the camp hospital where he in 1943 met Boris Lesnyak and Savoeva (who would later marry each other):<sup>536</sup> “Not much I remember from this second hospitalization in ‘Belich’iu.’ Some new acquaintances, some faces, some spoons licked...”<sup>537</sup> Yet there appear to be plenty of memories from this time in “The Black Mother,” which begins with an orgy-like atmosphere: “The stars of Viennese brothels, who can shift the course of history, personages like Mata Hari, took turns to lay down with me on this throne of love.”<sup>538</sup> In this fragment, the camp hospital suddenly becomes reminiscent of a brothel and it is here that he encounters the woman in charge of them all, “the black mother” who continues his “exhumation”:

Then the landlady made a sign – everyone had to leave and she locked the door behind everyone. Under a full light, having connected even the side lighting of her numerous floor lamps, she approached me and began to continue the exhumation. My sprawling male body, which had returned in a new skin, straightened from the inside and increased each of its creases, each of its cell. My skin was all new and she knew it.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> “‘Беличья’ была больница коек на сто для заключенных, со скромным штатом obsługi – четыре врача, четыре фельдшера и санитаря – все из заключенных. Только главный врач была договорница, член партии, Нина Владимировна Савоева, осетинка, по прозвищу ‘Черная мама’” (2:292). [“Belich’ia was a hospital with a hundred beds for prisoners, with a modest service staff – four doctors, four paramedics, and a medical orderly – all prisoners. Only the head doctor was a contractor, a member of the party, Nina Vladimirovna Savoeva, from Ossetia, nicknamed the “Black Mama.”]

<sup>536</sup> “Моя болезнь называлась пеллагра. И вот в эту свою вторую госпитализацию я и познакомился с Лесняком и главврачом Ниной Владимировной Савоевой, Траутом, Пантюховым – всеми врачами ‘Беличьей.’ Состояние у меня было такое, что никакого добра было мне сделать уже нельзя. Мне было безразлично – делают ли мне добро или зло. Вкладывать в мое пеллагрозное тело колымского дохода даже каплю добра было напрасным поступком. Тепло было для меня важнее добра” (2:308). [My disease was called pellagra. It was during this second hospitalization that I got acquainted with Lesnyak and the head doctor Nina Vladimirovna Savoeva, with Traut and Pantyukhov – all the doctors of “Belich’ia.” My condition was such that it was no longer possible to do anything good to me. I didn’t care whether they did me any good or evil. Putting even a drop of good into my pellagra-infected body of a Kolyma goner was in vain. Heat was more important to me than good.]

<sup>537</sup> “Не много я запомнил из этой второй госпитализации в ‘Беличью.’ Какие-то знакомства новые, какие-то лица, какие-то ложки облизанные ...” (2:309).

<sup>538</sup> “Со мной поочередно ложились на этот трон любви звезды венских борделей, могущие сдвинуть ход мировой истории, особы вроде Маты Хари” (4:517).

<sup>539</sup> “Тогда хозяйка сделала знак – всем убраться и заперла за всеми дверь на ключ. При полном свете, подключив даже боковое освещение ее многочисленных торшеро́в, она подошла ко мне и принялась за продолжение эксгумации. Мое разрастающееся, возвращенное в новую кожу вялое мужское тело, которое изнутри расправляло и увеличивало каждую свою складку, каждую свою клетку. Кожа моя была вся новая, и это было ей известно” (ibid.).

Through intricate physical descriptions, the reader comes close to the renewed skin on his body as well as the act they attempt to perform but are unable to complete (“Искра не зажигалась” (ibid.)). Yet they are eventually successful, so successful that they repeat it in 1946 (note that this is the same year when his encounter with Stefa takes place). This intimate scene between Shalamov and Savoeva is missing from the detailed account of his new skin in “The Glove,” and perhaps we can guess why: Shalamov remained close friends with Lesnyak, Savoeva’s husband. The couple relocated to Moscow in 1972, the same year Shalamov wrote “The Glove,” and he likely offered it to them to read. In Lesnyak’s memoir about his time in Kolyma, he omits any details of such intimate relations between his wife and Shalamov – either due to unawareness or to discretion. Neither does Savoeva mention this aspect of their encounters in her memoirs.<sup>540</sup> In “The Black Mother,” Shalamov does not name Savoeva; instead, he refers to her as Anna Ivanovna (she was Nina Vladimirovna).<sup>541</sup> This appears to be a strange strategy in an autobiographical chapter probably not intended to be read by anyone. Moreover, a potential future reader familiar with “The Glove” and with Lesnyak would be able to easily uncover her identity:

Anna Ivanovna wasn’t used to wasting time and I lay down with her in the next room in full light and did the same procedures as three years ago at Belich’ia. Anna Ivanovna congratulated me on my <deliverance> from the general <physical labor>. A hoarse voice whispered into my ear that she was very glad that I was a paramedic, that my life was now saved. She herself was also doing alright. She married Lesnyak. All her enemies had been disgraced.<sup>542</sup>

“The black mother” is missing from “The Glove,” just as Stefa is missing from “Love Lessons”: *The Glove or KT-2* is thus not quite as autobiographical or confessional as it would first seem. Rather than moving toward “a cycle of autobiographical narratives,” as Volkova suggests in her interpretation of the final cycle,<sup>543</sup> I would suggest that Shalamov was working toward a form of autofiction: to become seemingly close to his reader as the goner, the “true witness,” while still remaining distant as a private individual and in control of the narrative as a professional writer. Thus, the lesson for the reader in “Love Lessons” might be stated already in the compliment directed at the transitory hero in its beginning: “Don’t talk dirty about women.”

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<sup>540</sup> See the publication of Lesnyak’s and Savoeva’s separate memoirs in one volume: Lesnyak, B. N. and N. V. Savoeva. *Ia k vam prishel / Ia vybrala Kolymu: (arkhiv pamiaty)*. Moskva: Vozvrashchenie, 2016.

<sup>541</sup> “Едва накинув халат, Анна Иванова вышла меня проводить – она жила в отдельной квартире, похлопала по щеке своей косматой рукой. Конечно, я не мог забыть это тело, воскресившее меня к жизни. Какой бы эта жизнь ни была” (4:519). [Having hardly thrown on a dressing gown, Anna Ivanova followed me out – she lived in a separate apartment – she patted me on the cheek with a hairy hand. Of course, I couldn’t forget this body that had resurrected me to life. Whatever life that may be.]

<sup>542</sup> “Анна Ивановна не привыкла терять время даром, и мы легли с ней в соседней комнате при полном свете и проделали те же процедуры, что и три года назад на Беличьей. Анна Ивановна поздравила с <избавлением> от общих <работ>. Хриплый голос шептал в мое ухо, что она очень рада, что я – фельдшер, что жизнь моя теперь спасена. У нее самой тоже все благополучно. Она вышла замуж за Лесняка. Все ее враги посрамлены” (4:520).

<sup>543</sup> “Сопоставляя ‘КР-2’ с другими мемуарными произведениями семидесятых годов, можно утверждать, что Шаламов шел к созданию цикла автобиографических повестей.” [Comparing *KT-2* with other memoiristic works of the 1970s, it can be argued that Shalamov was moving toward the creation of a cycle of autobiographical stories.] Volkova, *Tragicheskii paradoks*, 160.

### 3. “Athenian Nights”: Possible Miscommunication and Impossible Community

If *The Glove* or *KT-2* has a leitmotif, it might be summed up in one succinct and uncouth statement: “Покажи твое говно!” [“Show your shit!”].<sup>544</sup> Unlike in the first cycle, where the euphemism “оправиться!” [“relieve yourselves!”] is used in the infinitive, the sixth cycle commands bodily functions in the informal and without synonyms. This request comes from “Athenian Nights,” but similar appeals to validate one’s defecation can be found in “The Glove” as well as in “Wheelbarrow II.” Like these two earlier short stories in the cycle, “Athenian Nights” is concerned with the fragile physical state of the goner and devotes its first pages to how his physiological processes – hunger, libido, urination, and defecation – become distorted in the camp and thus subvert the perception of these sensations by Thomas Moore in his *Utopia* (1516). Yet the title of this short story refers to its middle part: the poetry readings organized by the transitory hero, a paramedic, in the camp hospital before their abrupt interruption by the authorities. The necessary link between the crude imperative to “show your shit!” directed at the disfigured body of the goner and the literally sophisticated gatherings in the camp hospital appears to be in Shalamov’s polemic with *Utopia* and his discovery of its missing fifth sensation: “Sharper than the thought about food, about meals is a new feeling, a new need, which was completely forgotten by Thomas Moore in his crude classification of the four feelings. The fifth feeling is the need for poetry.”<sup>545</sup> The goner, having satisfied his hunger, reclaimed his urination and defecation, (with sexual relations perhaps unfulfilled), yearns for poems and therefore the form of “Athenian Nights” seems explained through its content: Shalamov revisits the sudden foreign word spoken by the resurrected goner in “Sententia” and reinvents this problematic with a revision of Moore.

However, the fifth sensation is not missing in *Utopia*. As Elena Mikhailik has shown, instead of poetry, Moore suggests that music produces a similar physical pleasure.<sup>546</sup> She argues that Moore’s cultural context was perhaps even more centered on music than Shalamov’s was on poetry. But why would the transitory hero misremember *Utopia* and what does this incorrect intertext mean for “Athenian Nights”? Mikhailik suggests that this difficult to detect omission is

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<sup>544</sup> “Я сам был свидетелем весной 1938 года в золотом забое прииска ‘Партизан,’ как конвоир, потрясая винтовкой, требовал у моего товарища: – Покажи твое говно! Ты третий раз садишься. Где говно? – обвиняя полумертвого доходягу в симуляции. Говна не нашли” (2:411-2). [I myself was a witness in the spring of 1938 in the “Partisan” gold mine to how a guard, shaking a rifle, demanded from my comrade: – Show your shit! You’re sitting down for the third time. Where’s the shit? He was accusing a half-dead goner of simulation. The shit wasn’t found.]

<sup>545</sup> “Острее мысли о еде, о пище является новое чувство, новая потребность, вовсе забытая Томасом Мором в его грубой классификации четырех чувств. Пятым чувством является потребность в стихах” (2:413).

<sup>546</sup> “Здесь мы хотели бы опять остановиться и заметить, что пресловутое ‘новое’ чувство у Томаса Мора как раз учтено – и оно практически совпадает с шаламовским – с поправкой на культурный контекст (и, что характерно, тоже рассматривается как телесное, физическое удовольствие). Иногда же наслаждение возникает, не давая того, что желают наши члены, не избавляет их от страдания; однако это наслаждение щекочет и трогает наши чувства, привлекает к себе какой-то скрытой силой, но заметным действием. Такое наслаждение люди получают от музыки.” [Here we would like to stop again and note that the notorious “new” feeling was considered by Thomas Moore – and it practically coincides with Shalamov’s argument – with an adjustment to the cultural context (and, which is characteristic, it is also seen as bodily, physical pleasure). “Sometimes pleasure arises, not giving what our members want, without saving them from suffering; but this pleasure titillates and touches our senses, attracts us with some hidden power, but with noticeable action. People enjoy this pleasure from music.”] Elena Mikhailik, “‘Afinskie nochi’: poeziiia kak funktsiia organizma.” Manuscript version of unpublished article provided by the author.

directed at an essentially nonexistent contemporary reader<sup>547</sup> and that, by basing this short story on a conscious misreading of another text, this narrative evades the reader as a concept and communicates as a signal: “The name of the individual and the sign of its presence.”<sup>548</sup> Although this interpretation is convincing, it seems to me that “Athenian Nights” does invite a specific reader to potentially decipher its elusive “symbol of presence.” To decode its meaning and message, we need be in a position not only to correct his incorrect citation from *Utopia*, but also to uncover the multifaceted connotations implied in “Athenian nights.”

As Mikhailik reminds us, “Athenian nights” had become a “hopelessly outdated” term by 1973 when Shalamov used the phrase as a title for a short story.<sup>549</sup> Originally the name of the combined celebration of Demeter and Dionysus – gods of fertility and wine – in ancient Greece, the expression went through different meanings once it was transplanted into Russian society in the nineteenth century. In Dostoevsky’s novel *Бесы* [*Demons*] (1872), Stepan Verkhovensky explains in a letter his “Athenian evenings” abroad as a culturally refined exchange with the youth.<sup>550</sup> Yet the recipient of his explanation, Varvara Stavrogina, reads “Athenian evenings” with skepticism and concludes that he must have written this in a state of intoxication.<sup>551</sup> Her opinion echoes the ironic connotations the phrase received toward the end of the nineteenth

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<sup>547</sup> “Хотя оценить вольное обращение Шаламова с Мором как очередную приметку всеразъедающего воздействия лагеря могла, опять же, пренебрежимая часть аудитории – мало кто помнит ‘Утопию’ достаточно хорошо, чтобы заметить, что рассказчик упрощает и ошибается – и ошибается в критически важном пункте.” [Although only a negligent part of the audience could assess Shalamov’s liberal treatment of Moore as another sign of the all-corrosive impact of the camp – few remember *Utopia* well enough to notice that the narrator simplifies and makes mistakes – and is mistaken about a critical point.] Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> “Без оглядки на читателя, и вообще на другого, иного – ибо это не сообщение, не письмо в бутылке, а подпись радиолобителя, имя дельфина, набор сигналов, выделяющий конкретную неповторимую особь в мире шумов. Имя личности и знак ее присутствия. Таким образом, Варлам Шаламов, сделавший КР своего рода генератором распада, тщательно и изобретательно воспроизводивший и транслировавший лагерный опыт несуществования, прямым текстом утверждавший ‘Все умерли’ – одновременно с этим и, с вероятностью, не отдавая себе в том отчета, посылал в пространство сигнал, подтверждающий, что пока, еще, сейчас, умерли не все. ‘Красный-красный-зеленый. Я еще жив. Я еще здесь. Это я.’” [Without looking back at the reader, and in general at the other, at someone different – for this is not a message, not a letter in a bottle, but the signature of an amateur radio-transmitter, the name of a dolphin, a set of signals that identify a specific unique individual in a world of noise. The name of the individual and the sign of its presence. Thus, Varlam Shalamov, who made the *KT* a kind of generator of disintegration, who carefully and ingeniously reproduced and broadcasted the camp experience of non-existence, who openly claimed “Everyone died” – and, simultaneously, probably without realizing it, sent a signal to space that confirms that not everyone has died yet. “Red-red-green. I’m still alive. I’m still here. It’s me.”] Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> “Загадочно то, что Шаламову потребовался термин к 1973 году – когда и были написаны ‘Афинские ночи’ – безнадежно устаревший.” [It is a mystery that Shalamov needed the term in 1973 – when “Athenian Nights” were written – this term was hopelessly outdated.] Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> “По вечерам с молодежью беседуем до рассвета, и у нас чуть не афинские вечера, но единственно по тонкости и изяществу; всё благородное: много музыки, испанские мотивы, мечты всечеловеческого обновления, идея вечной красоты, Сикстинская Мадонна, свет с прорезами тьмы, но и в солнце пятна!” [In the evenings, I talk with the young people until dawn, and we almost have Athenian evenings, but only in their subtlety and grace; everything’s noble: a lot of music, Spanish motifs, dreams of universal renewal, the idea of eternal beauty, the Sistine Madonna, light with slits of darkness, but also the sun has spots!] Dostoevskii, F. M. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*. Leningrad: Nauka, Leningr. otd-nie, 1972–1990. Vol. 10, 25.

<sup>551</sup> “Ну, всё вздор! – решила Варвара Петровна, складывая и это письмо. – Коль до рассвета афинские вечера, так не сидит же по двенадцати часов за книгами. Спьяну, что ль, написал?” [Well, that’s nonsense! Varvara Petrovna decided, folding the letter. If the Athenian evenings last until dawn, then he can’t be sitting for twelve hours with his book. Did he write this drunk, or what?] Ibid.

century.<sup>552</sup> In the twentieth century, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, “Athenian nights” became synonymous with orgies.<sup>553</sup> Yet in the 1970s, few remembered or used the expression in any of these meanings. Shalamov’s belated usage engages the past interpretations of it, as it should be noted that “Athenian nights” was not what the participants themselves called these poetry readings but rather the hospital authorities: “We organized a few such poetry-nights, which later were called Athenian nights in the hospital.”<sup>554</sup> The authorities understood these gatherings as an orgy, thus activating the Soviet meaning of “Athenian nights.” In the title of the short story, both this misreading of their activities and the irony of “Athenian evenings” in Dostoevsky’s novel seem implied. The other potential name that appears in the segment cited above – “поэзоночи” [“poetry-nights”] – is reminiscent of the poetic neologisms favored by Igor Severyanin, Shalamov’s favorite poet in his youth and one of the twentieth-century poets read by him during these gatherings. If the participants had given them a name of their own, it might have been “poetry-nights.” Yet it is imperative that they did not.

The hospital authorities misinterpret their physiologically motivated poetry readings – and I will return to why they mistook them for orgies later – much like the transitory hero misremembers the number of human physical sensations in *Utopia*. However, one aspect of “Athenian Nights” must be exempt from misunderstanding and misrepresentation: the body of the goner. The goner, “the true witness” whose fragile yet ubiquitous presence haunts *The Glove or KT-2* since its opening short story “The Glove,” becomes the focus of Shalamov’s polemic with Moore. The goner’s body is deformed, and can neither defecate (only once in five days) nor urinate in a normal way (“You yourself are on the bottom bunk accidentally, but could be on top too and then it be you who’d urinate on the one below”),<sup>555</sup> not to speak of satisfying hunger or sexual urges. Quite in line with this polemic, yet quite out of line in what appears to be a literary text, a veiled attack on Solzhenitsyn emerges suddenly to protect the goner in Russian literature:

The goner doesn’t hope for the future – in all memoirs and in all novels, he is ridiculed as a loafer who hinders his comrades, the traitor of the brigade, of the shaft, of the gold mine’s plan. Some kind of writer-businessman will come along and portray the goner in a ridiculous way. He’s already made such attempts, this writer, and he believes that it’s no sin to laugh about the camp too. Everything, they say, has its time. The camp hasn’t closed the road for jokes.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> “В России, начиная с 19 века, это выражение часто употреблялось иронически, нередко речь шла о провинциальных ‘афинских ночах,’ учиняемых согласно представлениям провинциалов о разврате и разгуле (представлениям, заметим, нередко вполне невинным).” [In Russia, since the nineteenth century, this phrase was often used ironically, often talking about provincial “Athenian nights,” which were organized according to provincial ideas of debauchery and revelry (which were often quite innocent).] Mikhailik, “Afinskie nochi.”

<sup>553</sup> “Muskovites of the older generation well remember the rumors running around Moscow during the late 20’s and early 30’s about orgies patterned after the ‘Athenian Nights,’ staged amidst the greatest conspiracy by one or other of the new masters.” Rzhnevsky, L. “Pilate’s Sin: Cryptography in Bulgakov’s Novel *The Master and Margarita*” in *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 13, No. 1 Spring, 1971, 9-10.

<sup>554</sup> “Таких поэзоночей, которые позднее в больнице получили название афинских ночей, мы провели несколько” (2:414).

<sup>555</sup> “Ты сам лежишь на нижних нарах случайно, а мог бы лежать и наверху, мочился бы на того, кто внизу” (2:411).

<sup>556</sup> “Доходяга не надеется на будущее – во всех мемуарах, во всех романах доходягу высмеют как лодыря, мешающего товарищам, предателя бригады, забоя, золотого плана прииска. Придет какой-нибудь писатель-делец и изобразит доходягу в смешном виде. Он уже делал такие попытки, этот писатель, считает, что над лагерем не грех и посмеяться. Всему, дескать, свое время. Для шутки путь в лагерь не закрыт” (2:411).

Although it is clear who is implied as this “writer-businessman,” since Shalamov began to refer to Solzhenitsyn by this derogative term in his notebooks in the late 1960s,<sup>557</sup> it is unclear in which memoirs and novels the goner is ridiculed. In Solzhenitsyn’s works, especially *The Gulag Archipelago*, the goner is treated with respect.<sup>558</sup> Although we cannot know how much of *The Gulag Archipelago* Shalamov had read in 1973, we know that he discovered Solzhenitsyn’s footnote added in 1972: “...Shalamov’d died.”<sup>559</sup> This was his reaction to Shalamov’s letter in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* from the same year, and Shalamov retaliated in a letter that he never sent (Solzhenitsyn was living in exile in the USA by then): “I readily accept your funeral joke about my death. With an important feeling and with pride I consider myself the first victim of the Cold War that fell from your hand.”<sup>560</sup> It would be another three decades until Shalamov’s sarcastic reply reached its intended reader, but perhaps neither this reply nor the attack in “Athenian Nights” is limited to the troubled relationship between these two writers.

By the early 1970s, Shalamov had read also other books about Kolyma published officially and written by others affiliated in different ways with the camps. The implicit stab at Solzhenitsyn in “Athenian Nights” seems to speak to Shalamov’s specific representation of the goner here and elsewhere in his late style. Despite their shared experiences in the camps and common literary interests, Shalamov rejected co-authorship with Solzhenitsyn on *The Gulag Archipelago* and thus he also rejected the possibility of establishing a community – albeit of only two – with him. It should be noted that Solzhenitsyn did not reject Shalamov in the same way, and that his abundant references to Shalamov’s texts in *The Gulag Archipelago* can be seen as simulating an impossible yet indispensable communication, rather than an act of plagiarizing. The transitory hero searches for a similar communion with likeminded in “Athenian Nights” and this is what sets him apart from the autobiographically inspired goners in earlier cycles of *Kolyma*

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<sup>557</sup> See one of Shalamov’s notebooks from 1971: “Деятельность Солженицына – это деятельность дельца, направленная узко на личные успехи со всеми провокационными аксессуарами подобной деятельности” (5:322). [Solzhenitsyn’s activity is the work of a businessman, aimed narrowly at personal success with all the provocative accessories of such activities.]

<sup>558</sup> See, for example: “Как ничто, в чем держится жизнь, не может существовать, не извергая отработанного, так и Архипелаг не мог бы копошиться иначе, как отделяя на дно свой главный отброс – *доходяг*. И все, что построено Архипелагом – выжато из мускулов доходяг (перед тем, как им стать доходягами). А те уцелевшие, кто укоряет, что *доходяги виноваты сами* – принимает на себя позор за свою сохраненную жизнь. Из этих уцелевших ортодоксы шлют мне теперь возвышенные возражения: как низко чувствуют и думают герои ‘Одного дня!’ где ж их страдательные размышления о ходе истории, все пайка да баланда, а ведь есть гораздо более тяжкие муки, чем голод!” [As nothing, onto which life holds on, can exist without spewing out what’s been worked through, so the Archipelago couldn’t function differently than by leaving its main garbage – the goners – on the bottom. And everything that is built by the Archipelago is squeezed out of the muscles (before they become goners). And those survivors, who claim that *the goners are to blame themselves* – take on the shame of their saved lives. These surviving orthodox are now sending me sublime objections: how lowly the heroes of *One Day* feel and think! Where are their suffering reflections on the course of history, they go on and on about bread and soup, when there’s much more grievous torments than hunger!] Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*. Moskva: Vremia, 2006. Vol. 5, 165. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>559</sup> “Как бы из упрямства – продолжил этот спор... 23 февраля 1972 г. в ‘Лит. газете’ отрекся (зачем-то, когда уже все миновали угрозы): ‘Проблематика “Колымских рассказов” давно снята жизнью.’ Отречение было напечатано в траурной рамке, и так мы поняли все, что – умер Шаламов. (Примечание 1972 г.)” [As if out of stubbornness, I continued this dispute... February 23 1972 in Lit. Gazeta, he denied (for some reason, when all the threats were already gone): “The problematic of *Kolyma Tales* has long been removed by life.” This renunciation was printed within a mourning frame, and thus we all understood that Shalamov’d died.] (Note 1972).

<sup>560</sup> “Я охотно принимаю Вашу похоронную шутку насчет моей смерти. С важным чувством и с гордостью считаю себя первой жертвой холодной войны, павшей от Вашей руки” (5:365).



*Tales*: to scream a foreign, albeit historically and culturally significant, “sententia” is no longer enough. In this late style narrative, a word spoken but not understood remains without meaning.

The poetry gatherings that the transitory hero arranges in the camp hospital are the realization of a seemingly impossible community centered on poetry and the meaning of poetry. Together with the prisoners Arkady Dobrovolsky, previously a scriptwriter, and Valentin Portugalov, previously a translator, who also work as paramedics and are called by their real names in “Athenian Nights,” he creates a program for their evenings while simultaneously composing an improvised collection of what they consider the best of Russian poetry:

My contribution: Blok, Pasternak, Annensky, Khlebnikov, Severyanin, Kamensky, Bely, Esenin, Tikhonov, Khodasevich, Bunin. From the nineteenth century: Tyutchev, Baratynsky, Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, and Alexei Tolstoy.

Portugalov’s contribution: Gumilev, Mandel’shtam, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Tikhonov, Selvinsky. From the nineteenth century – Lermontov and Grigor’ev, who Dobrovolsky and I knew mostly by hearsay and only on Kolyma we experienced the extent of his amazing poems.

Dobrovolsky’s part: Marshak with translations of Burns and Shakespeare, Mayakovsky, Akhmatova, Pasternak – up until the latest novelties of our contemporary *samizdat*.

“Lilichka! (Instead of a Letter)” was read exactly by Dobrovolsky and we taught ourselves “Winter is Coming” at the same time. The first Tashkent version of the future “A Poem Without a Hero” was also read by Dobrovolsky.<sup>561</sup>

With a few exceptions (Pasternak, Tikhonov, Lermontov, Akhmatova), the selections by the three participants do not overlap, but rather complement each other. From Pushkin to the latest poems in *samizdat*, their readings manage to encompass the masterpieces of official as well as unofficial Russian poetry. The transitory hero, who contributes the most extensive list, begins to remember poetry as a physical process but that is not all – the bodily sensation of remembering happens in the present tense in a short story otherwise set in the past: “I strain my brain, which once upon a time gave so much time to poems, and, to my own surprise, I see how the words I’d forgotten long ago appear in my larynx against my will. I’m not remembering my poems, but the poems of my favorite poets...”<sup>562</sup> These “long forgotten words” do not, unlike “sententia,” appear in his throat without meaning but instead immediately become a part of a context that is both cultural and personal: the poems of his favorite poets, known and shared by others. Instead of displaced in a vacuum, these suddenly recalled poems are received by a nascent community of likeminded: “It was immediately revealed that we’re all fans of early twentieth-century Russian poetry.”<sup>563</sup>

<sup>561</sup> “Мой взнос: Блок, Пастернак, Анненский, Хлебников, Северянин, Каменский, Белый, Есенин, Тихонов, Ходасевич, Бунин. Из классиков: Тютчев, Баратынский, Пушкин, Лермонтов, Некрасов и Алексей Толстой. Взнос Португалова: Гумилев, Мандельштам, Ахматова, Цветаева, Тихонов, Сельвинский. Из классиков – Лермонтов и Григорьев, которого мы с Добровольским знали больше понаслышке и лишь на Колыме испытали меру его удивительных стихов. Доля Добровольского: Маршак с переводами Бернса и Шекспира, Маяковский, Ахматова, Пастернак – до последних новинок тогдашнего “Самиздата.” “Лилечке вместо письма” было прочитано именно Добровольским, да и “Зима приближается” мы заучили тогда же. Первый ташкентский вариант будущей “Поэмы без героя” был прочтен тоже Добровольским” (2:415).

<sup>562</sup> “Я напрягаю свой мозг, отдавший когда-то столько времени стихам, и, к собственному удивлению, вижу, как помимо моей воли в гортани появляются давно забытые мной слова. Я вспоминаю не свои стихи, а стихи любимых мной поэтов...” (2:414).

<sup>563</sup> “Выяснилось сразу, что все мы – поклонники русской лирики начала двадцатого века” (2:414).

Their mutual poetic preferences shape their communication and instigate a context in which the physically revived transitory hero can speak to be heard and hear the speech of others.

For this newfound community, the establishment of a ritual – poetry readings every third evening in the camp hospital – is not the only act that validates their union. The three participants share more than a love for Russian poetry; they are unanimous in their understanding of this craft: “We all understood that poems are poems, and not poems are not poems, and that that in poetry fame decides nothing. Each of us had his own score for poetry, I would call it a Hamburg score, if this term wasn’t so clichéd.”<sup>564</sup> Even though he wishes to avoid the term “Hamburg score,” the above-cited lists with contributions by each of the participants illustrate a selection for Russian poetry reminiscent of what Viktor Shklovsky thought was needed in Russian literature.<sup>565</sup> After more than a decade spent in the camps, these three men find more common ground in poetry with each other than they perhaps thought possible: “Our vote was the most secret of secrets – because we voted for the same names many years ago, each separately from one another, in the Kolyma. Our choices overlapped in names, in poems, in stanzas, and even in lines specially marked by each of us.”<sup>566</sup> These coincidences in the choices made by each seem almost too good to be true, right down to the same phrases preferred by each them on their own. As if survival was not enough of miracle, and on top of that the retaining of poems in their memory, this community seems to be the most miraculous of events: a community in which one speaks not only to be heard but also to hear one’s speech become more meaningful because it understood, shared, and sustained by others. Therefore, it seems that the reading of poetry is not all that is implied with this “return to a magical world”: “The hour of poetry reading. The hour of returning to a magical world. We’re all excited.”<sup>567</sup> Formed within the world of the camps – a world disfigured by the destruction and defilement of all cultural and historical values – this poetry circle is a little bit of magic. Yet, by being magical, their group is provocative and, additionally, dangerous.

Why are these “Athenian nights” suddenly cancelled: was it because of the intellectual threat this group posed to an otherwise debased (“show your shit”) social context? Although this interpretation is tempting, the reading aloud of poetry between three men is not enough for the hospital authorities to interpret these gatherings as orgies. Rather, it is the inclusion of a fourth

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<sup>564</sup> “Все мы понимали, что стихи – это стихи, а не стихи – не стихи, что в поэзии известность ничего не решает. У каждого из нас был свой счет к поэзии, я назвал бы его гамбургским, если бы этот термин не был так за таскан” (2:415).

<sup>565</sup> “Гамбургский счёт – чрезвычайно важное понятие. Все борцы, когда борются, жулят и ложатся на лопатки по приказанию антрепренёра. Раз в году в гамбургском трактире собираются борцы. Они борются при закрытых дверях и завешанных окнах. Долго, некрасиво и тяжело. Здесь устанавливаются истинные классы борцов, – чтобы не исхалтуриться. Гамбургский счёт необходим в литературе. По гамбургскому счёту – Серафимовича и Вересаева нет. Они не доезжают до города. В Гамбурге – Булгаков у ковра. Бабель – легковес. Горький – сомнителен (часто не в форме). Хлебников был чемпион.” [The Hamburg score is an extremely important concept. All wrestlers, when fighting, cheat and lay down on the shoulder blades at the order of the entrepreneur. Once a year, the wrestlers gather in a Hamburg restaurant. They fight behind closed doors and with the windows covered. They fight long, ugly, and hard. Here, the true classes of wrestlers are established, so as not to scorn anyone. A Hamburg score is needed in literature. Per the Hamburg score – there’s no Serafimovich and no Veresaev. They don’t reach the city. In Hamburg – Bulgakov lies by the carpet. Babel is a lightweight. Gor’ky is uncertain (often not in shape). Khlebnikov was a champion.] Shklovskii, Viktor. *Gamburgskii schet: Stat’i, vospominaniia, esse* (1914-1933). Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990, 152.

<sup>566</sup> “Наше голосование было тайным из тайных – ведь мы проголосовали за одни и те же имена много лет назад, каждый отдельно от другого, на Колыме. Выбор совпадал в именах, в стихотворениях, в строфах и даже в строчках, особо отмеченных каждым” (2:415).

<sup>567</sup> “Час чтения стихов. Час возвращения в волшебный мир. Мы все взволнованы” (ibid.).

participant – a young female patient – that causes this sexual misinterpretation. Never given a name in the short story, this woman appears in the text as if with the sole purpose to disappear afterword without a trace: “But medicine is medicine, and the girl had to stay for the prescribed quarantine period before she could cross the threshold of the hospital and disappear into the frosty abyss.”<sup>568</sup> The head doctor – called Doctor Doctor in Shalamov’s prose (his real name was Mikhail Doktor, and he appears in several places in *Kolyma Tales*, from “Шоковая терапия” [“Shock Therapy”] (1956) in the first cycle to this one in the last) – interrupts the third reading in her presence: “And one more evening passed then, at the beginning of the third, the door to the dressing room swung open and the head doctor of the hospital himself crossed the threshold. Doctor Doctor hated me. I didn’t doubt that he’d be informed about our evenings.”<sup>569</sup> With his resemblance to Pushkin, Doctor Doctor crosses the threshold as an ominous interference by the hospital’s as well as Russian literature’s ‘our everything’: “...even Doctor Doctor’s blonde Pushkin-esque sideburns – Doctor Doctor was proud of his resemblance to Pushkin – protruded from the tension of the pursuit.”<sup>570</sup> Despite the head doctor’s intrusion and the sudden disappearance of the transitory hero’s coconspirators (“Both Portugalov and Dobrovolsky had slipped out of the dressing room a long time ago”),<sup>571</sup> he predicts there will be no consequences for him personally:

- What’ll happen now? said the girl, but there was no alarm in her tone, only interest in the legal nature of the subsequent events. Interest, but not fright or fear for her own or someone else’s fate.
- To me, I said, I don’t think anything’ll happen. But they might discharge you from the hospital.
- Well, if he discharges me, said the girl, then I’ll give this Doctor Doctor a taste of the good life. If he so much as says one beep about this, I’ll introduce him to all the higher authorities in Kolyma.<sup>572</sup>

Unlike the unspoken threats by Doctor Doctor, the unnamed young woman fulfills her vocal threat and is allowed, also without consequences, to disappear as the introduction of her into the narrative intended: “The girl stayed the allotted time for the quarantine and left, disappeared into nothingness.”<sup>573</sup> Her affiliation with the group is short-lived but achieves a permanent result: due to the inclusion of a woman, their meeting was seen as sexual in nature and this community of three likeminded paramedics subsequently abolished. In the wake of its destruction, not only do the poetry readings cease but also any other production of meaningful communication in

<sup>568</sup> “Но медицина есть медицина, девушке нужно было вылежать положенный карантинный срок, чтобы шагнуть за больничный порог и исчезнуть в морозной бездне” (2:416).

<sup>569</sup> “И еще прошел один вечер, а при начале третьего в перевязочной распахнулась дверь, и порог перешагнул сам начальник больницы доктор Доктор. Доктор Доктор ненавидел меня. Что ему донесут о наших вечерах – я не сомневался” (ibid.).

<sup>570</sup> “...даже пушкинские белокурые баки доктора Доктора – доктор Доктор гордился своим сходством с Пушкиным – торчали от охотничьего напряжения” (2:417).

<sup>571</sup> “И Португалов и Добровольский выскользнули из перевязочной давно” (ibid.).

<sup>572</sup> “– Что теперь будет? – сказала девушка, но в тоне ее не чувствовалось испуга, а только интерес к юридической природе дальнейших событий. Интерес, а не боязнь или страх за свою или чью-то судьбу. – Мне, – сказал я, – ничего, я думаю, не будет. А вас могут выписать из больницы. – Ну, если он меня выпишет, – сказала девушка, – я этому доктору Доктору обеспечу хорошую жизнь. Пусть только пикнет, я его познакомлю со всем высшим начальством, какое на Колыме есть” (ibid.).

<sup>573</sup> “Девушка пролежала положенное для карантина время и уехала, растворилась в небытии” (ibid.).

relation to these misinterpreted “Athenian nights.” When Doctor Doctor later discloses the violation of this indecent group at a public meeting, he is confronted with the nothingness of its reverberations in terms of punishment:

–But what happened to this prisoner-paramedic for such an obvious violation, one that was even established personally by the boss?

– Well, nothing.

– And to her?

– Nothing too.

– But WHO is she?

– Nobody knows.

Someone advised Doctor Doctor to keep his administrative delight down this time.<sup>574</sup>

In the conclusion of “Athenian Nights,” this fragmentary and ambiguous dialogue is echoed in another dialogue, between the transitory hero and a new paramedic in the hospital:

– Is this the dressing room where your Athenian nights took place? They say it happened there...

– Yes, I said, that’s the one.<sup>575</sup>

Although the question, which refers to “your Athenian nights,” appears direct and simple, we must remember that the transitory hero did not call their poetry gatherings this. This question and its affirmative answer preserve an ambiguity of meaning; the other person might be asking if this is the room where the orgies took place, but we cannot be sure. The erosion of meaning in the ending seems to mirror the conscious incorrect quotation from Moore’s *Utopia* and the consciously misused expression “Athenian nights” that shape this short story. This late style narrative is constructed around experiences that cannot be fully known and as such are obscured in both the text and by others. The body of the goner – and the situation in which someone demands “show your shit!” – is unknowable to those outside of it. In a similar way, the poetry gatherings were never knowable to those not invited. Subsequently, they were misunderstood and misnamed as orgies; these evenings of a rare community were neither, but like the incorrect intertextual reference to *Utopia* – which is probably missed by most readers not familiar with *Utopia* – the deliberate concealing of a ‘true’ or ‘real’ meaning safeguards “Athenian Nights” against the wrong reader, against the wrong “you.”

On the one hand, this short story seems to relate an intimate event that happened: the transitory hero is not named Shalamov but other clues in the text suggest his identity to be “Shalamov.”<sup>576</sup> On the other hand, this is only a seeming intimacy. Rather than being

<sup>574</sup> “– А что этому фельдшеру из ээка было за столь явное нарушение, да еще установленное лично начальником? – А ничего. – А ей? – Тоже ничего. – А КТО она? – Никто не знает. Кто-то посоветовал доктору Доктору сдержаться на сей раз свой административный восторг” (2:418).

<sup>575</sup> “– Вот это и есть та самая перевязочная, где проходили ваши афинские ночи? Там, говорят, было... – Да, – сказал я, – та самая” (ibid.).

<sup>576</sup> See the recollection of these poetry evenings in the camp hospital by Elena Mamuchashvili: “Стихи я любила, и это стало, пожалуй, основной связующей нитью моих добрых отношений с В. Т. ‘Литературные вечера’ лагерной больницы описаны им в рассказе ‘Афинские ночи.’ Кроме упомянутых там Португалова, Добровольского и других я вспоминаю Чернопицкого, Логвинова, Диму Петрашкевича. Это были фельдшера и лаборанты-заключенные, жившие в одной комнате-общезитии. После работы, когда ‘вольные’ уходили домой, в эту комнату собирались все, кто желал пообщаться, поспорить, почитать стихи

traditionally bifunctional, as many earlier short stories in *Kolyma Tales* that can be read as both testimonies and works of art, “Athenian Nights” demonstrate a different, and perhaps new, type of bifunctionality. According to the first function, the short story can be read as an autobiographical and confessional text about a personal event from Shalamov’s past life (“testimony”). If we interpret it in this way, we must attribute his misreading of Thomas Moore to a flawed memory of *Utopia* and perhaps be a little perplexed with the physiological details in the beginning that seem to have little to do with poetry. Maybe, in accordance with this interpretation, we will wonder why there is no poetry recited in a short story concerned with remembering poetry. The second function is only available to the reader capable of reading beyond these flaws in content as well as in form, to the reader able to decipher this seemingly disconnected text with its strange beginning, middle, and end – not as a “work of art” but as a “signal of communication.” If we can penetrate this text, although penetration does not equal an understanding, the second function of “Athenian Nights” demonstrates the core of the experience it represents: the internal experience is not accessible to those outside or beyond it, those not invited. Those, like Solzhenitsyn and others who in their “novels, memoirs” laugh at the “true witness,” will never understand and must accept that to not understand is also a kind of understanding. The premise to understand by not understanding seems to capture a paradoxical, problematic, yet productive aspect of Shalamov’s late style: when we think we are finally close, we are distanced and displaced by confusing intertextual references and must succumb to the same misunderstanding as those who called these poetry evenings “Athenian nights.”

When the transitory hero affirms the ambiguous significance of this space – “Yes, I said, that’s the one” – this ambiguity might be the only way for anyone outside of this space to come close to the experience that unfolded within it. In that inside, into which no one can enter again because historical time has detached itself from historical space, remains an inaccessible realm of human history. As the transitory hero turned narrator refers to “you” throughout the beginning of the short story, the interchange between “you” and “I” does not constitute the community that will emerge in the “we” that creates a canon of Russian poetry. “You” suffers as does “I.” “We” is the redemption. But we as readers are not allowed into this community. We are allowed to look at the list of the poems and poets that were read, but we are not allowed any closer than that to this community. We never read the poems that were read out loud.

A short story about poetry but without poems, “Athenian Nights” appears at first to be shapeless, disconnected, troubled by its own content and form; yet this type of structure is meaningful although the meaning might be missed on a first reading as many other details in this text. Never circulated in the 1970s, it was not read by Shalamov’s contemporaries. However, this displacement from the cultural, historical, and social context seems to not have been enough: there is a withdrawal within the text itself. Shalamov’s disability at the time – deafness – that isolated him from communication in person and did not allow him to hear others is acted out through the multifaceted signals that make an understanding of this text difficult. The most

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– свои и чужие. Я заходила сюда во время ночных дежурств, слушала, затаив дыхание, как совершается таинство, позволяющее забыть обо всем на свете...” [I loved poetry, and it became, perhaps, the main connection for my good relationship with V. T. The “literary evenings” in the camp hospital that are described by him in the short story “Athenian Nights.” In addition to the Portugalov, Dobrovolsky, and others, I recall Chernopitsky, Logvinov, Dima Petrashkevich. They were paramedics and laboratory assistants, prisoners who lived in the same dormitory room. After work, when the “free laborers” went home, everyone who wanted to talk, argue, read poems – their own and those of others – gathered in this room. I came here while on night duty and listened, holding my breath, to how the sacrament is performed, that makes it possible to forget everything in the world...] Mamuchashvili, Elena. “V bol’nitse dlya zakliuchennykh” in *Shalamovskii sbornik*, vyp. 2, 82.

fascinating aspect of “Athenian Nights” is not that it can be read in two different ways, but that it can entertain two different readers. The first reader will enjoy this short story for its focus on poetry and might reenact Shalamov’s “Athenian Nights” with impromptu readings from Russian poetry together with their own community of likeminded. The second reader, who detects the deep and unknowable ruptures in this text, not only enjoys the references to poetry but also wants to linger on that final dialogue and to cast one last glance into the room – “that same room” – where it all happened. None of the two readers can go into this room and this impossibility is implied already in the imperative “show your shit!” directed at the goner Serezha Klivansky that the transitory hero witnessed in the winter of 1938:

I myself was a witness in the spring of 1938 in the “Partisan” gold mine to how a guard, shaking a rifle, demanded from my comrade:  
 – Show your shit! You’re sitting down for the third time. Where’s the shit? He was accusing a half-dead goner of simulation.  
 The shit wasn’t found.<sup>577</sup>

As this shit was not found, this room will never be found – or fully understood. Yet we shall not disregard the first reader in our conclusion, the reader who in “Athenian Nights” finds inspiration to create a poetic community of her own. And perhaps it is in this paradoxical realization that the power of Shalamov’s late style lays: even in his most alienating narrative strategies, he motivates unity. He still forces us to come together when he falls apart the most.

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<sup>577</sup> “Я сам был свидетелем весной 1938 года в золотом забое прииска “Партизан,” как конвоир, потрясая винтовкой, требовал у моего товарища: – Покажи твое говно! Ты третий раз садишься. Где говно? – обвиняя полумертвого доходягу в симуляции. Говна не нашли” (2:411-2).

## Chapter V. How Russian Literature Was Won: Confrontations with Catastrophe in *Evening Discourses*

### 1. Introduction

Like his sixth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, Shalamov never finished the play *Evening Discourses* (mid-1970s), his last longer work. It stages confrontations in Butyrka prison between his transitory hero and the four Russian Nobel laureates in literature at the time: Bunin, Pasternak, Mikhail Sholokhov, and Solzhenitsyn.<sup>578</sup> The famous writers are set to work in the central scene “Пилка дров” [“The Sawing of Firewood”]:

*Warden:* Here you have two two-handed saws and let’s get to sawing firewood. After all, you must set the hearts of men on fire. Take this one, Bunin together with Pasternak.

*Bunin:* I am not going to saw with a modernist.

*Pasternak:* I am not going to saw with an anti-Semite.

*Sholokhov:* I am not going to saw with an expelled member of the Writers’ Union.

*Solzhenitsyn:* I am not going to saw with a member of the Writers’ Union.

*Warden:* But why do you not want to saw together [?]. You are all similar writers after all. The use is the same and with the same method of socialist realism. Both of you are the flesh and the blood of this method with its predetermination and dogmatic. Both of you are Nobel laureates. Well then, saw off two blocks and go home, to get some grub.<sup>579</sup>

With its ironic nod to Pushkin’s poem “Пророк” [“The Prophet”] (1826) and combination of dead and living Russian writers in a dialogue centered on physical labor and cultural references, the scene is reminiscent of Daniil Kharm’s *Случаи* [*Incidences*] (1939).<sup>580</sup> *Evening Discourses* stands in stark contrast to Shalamov’s previous creative work and he called it “фантастическая пьеса” [“fantastical play”]. However, the two couples suggested by the warden seem based on ‘real,’ rather than ‘fantastical,’ considerations: the dead Bunin and Pasternak are to work together and so are the living Sholokhov and Solzhenitsyn. Unbothered by the boundaries between life and death, the writers reject their partners due to their status, three of which are factual (i.e., Solzhenitsyn had been excluded from the Writers’ Union) and one false (Bunin was not an anti-Semite). In the way that this dramatic fragment toys with the literary context and subverts its expectations, it seems to belong in the tradition of the twentieth-century theater of the absurd rather than in the oeuvre of the same author who wrote *Kolyma Tales*.

<sup>578</sup> Bunin in 1933, Pasternak in 1958, Sholokhov in 1965, and Solzhenitsyn in 1970; Joseph Brodsky won in 1987.

<sup>579</sup> “*Надзиратель:* Вот вам две пилы двуручные и будете пилить дрова. Ведь надо жечь сердца людей. Берите, Бунин с Пастернаком. *Бунин:* Я не буду пилить с модернистом. *Пастернак:* Я не буду пилить с антисемитом. *Шолохов:* Я не буду пилить с исключенным членом Союза Писателей. *Солженицын:* Я не буду пилить с членом Союза Писателей. *Надзиратель:* Да почему вы не хотите пилить вместе. Ведь вы же все одинаковые писатели. Польза одинаковая и тем же методом социалистического реализма. Оба вы – плоть от плоти этого метода с его заданностью, догматичностью. Оба вы Нобелевские лауреаты. Ну, отпилите чурки по две и ступайте домой, жрать” (7:383).

<sup>580</sup> Shalamov’s ‘fantastical’ play also brings to mind Tom Stoppard’s play *Travesties* (1974) in which James Joyce, Vladimir Lenin, and Tristan Tzara encounter each other in Zürich, Switzerland in 1917. Although based on a similar premise, there is an important difference between their use of historical persons: whereas Joyce, Lenin, and Tzara all lived in Zürich during 1917, none of the Russian writers in *Evening Discourses* – except Shalamov – spent time in Butyrka prison (Solzhenitsyn was incarcerated in Lubyanka prison).

Set in a metaphorical prison of Russian twentieth-century literature, and not in a camp, this play is neither autobiographical nor in any way factual. Moreover, the state in which Shalamov left its only handwritten manuscript suggests that he did not want it to be read.<sup>581</sup> He wrote the work while suffering from deafness and nascent blindness; the shaking of his body due to Meniere's disease made his handwriting near unreadable yet he made no typed copy. Consequently, his "fantastical play" is a textological catastrophe with incompatible fragments and impenetrable passages, making an understanding of it problematic at best. In this chapter, I interpret *Evening Discourses* as a competition for the title of the greatest writer in Russian twentieth-century literature. The textological catastrophe of the unfinished text appears to mirror the catastrophic state of contemporary literature it presents – in which every writer with a Nobel Prize is imprisoned. This unanticipated drama not only reflects the frustrating circumstances in which the late Shalamov was forced to create – suffering from disability and censorship – but also presents a meditation on Russian/Soviet literature that is as powerful as it is painful.

The strangeness of *Evening Discourses* is an artistic disaster that might only have been anticipated by Adorno: "In the history of art late works are the catastrophes."<sup>582</sup> For Shalamov's late style, *Evening Discourses* is both an overturning of his previous work (as the Greek *καταστροφή* suggests) and its shattering conclusion like in the final denouement of the plot in tragedy: this last text is an aesthetic thunderbolt that might change everything.

"The Sawing of Firewood" is a scene that readers familiar with *Kolyma Tales* would be surprised to find had also been written by Shalamov. It is the only scene where the laureates are gathered together on stage and although the "I" is absent, the name of Shalamov is not. When the physical task begins, Solzhenitsyn cites words of wisdom from his "former acquaintance": "As my former acquaintance, the writer Shalamov, used to say: 'Higher education is a sufficient guarantee for the ability to use a saw.'<sup>583</sup> This is the first and last time Shalamov is mentioned in the play. His name often appears in his late style works, but this mention reminds of the ironic self-reference to "Ionesco's plays" in Eugène Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* (1959);<sup>584</sup> which Shalamov called "the play of the century."<sup>585</sup> This scene thus exposes both the absurd and humoristic dimensions of *Evening Discourses*; something very different for readers familiar with *Kolyma Tales*. Both Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak appear as quite comical characters as they discuss the topic of education while performing physical labor. Solzhenitsyn proves himself to be well versed in "progressive" nineteenth-century literary theory, "That's why I keep all the covenants of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky like the apple of my eye, [in order to] understand parts of speech and differentiate an inserted novella from an ordinary one,"<sup>586</sup> but Pasternak is ignorant of similar terms: "See, I have a very approximate idea about these novellas and parts of speech. In Marburg, you know, they didn't teach us that. But this, of course, shouldn't serve as an obstacle

<sup>581</sup> A large part of the manuscript remains undeciphered and, due to Shalamov's difficult handwriting in the second half of the 1970s, inaccessible to both readers and scholars. The manuscript of the play is held in RGALI [Russian State Archive of Literature and Art]: Shalamov, V. T. *Vechernie besedy*, F. 2596, op. 2, ed. khr. 100.

<sup>582</sup> Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 567.

<sup>583</sup> "Как говорил мой бывший знакомый писатель Шаламов: высшее образование – достаточная гарантия для умения разводить пилу" (7:384).

<sup>584</sup> "JEAN: <...> Do you know anything about the avant-garde theatre there's so much talk about? Have you seen Ionesco's plays? BERENGER: Unfortunately, no. I've only heard people talk about them. <...> JEAN: There's one playing now. Take advantage of it." Ionesco, Eugène. *Rhinoceros and Other Plays*. Trans. Derek Prouse. Grove Press, New York: 1960, 23.

<sup>585</sup> From one of his notebooks from 1965: "Пьеса века – это 'Носорог' Ионеску" (5:293).

<sup>586</sup> "Поэтому все заветы Белинского и Чернышевского храню, как зеницу ока, и разбираюсь в частях речи и отличаю вставную новеллу от обыкновенной" (7:385).



to sawing wood.”<sup>587</sup> This dialogue is also comical in that Pasternak, whose prison status is that of a “genius” during his interrogations, is inferior to Solzhenitsyn who has merely memorized entries from a dictionary of literary terms. Here, the humorous discussion of the term “inserted novella” suggests Shalamov’s objection against the humor in the “inserted novella” “Улыбка Будды” [“The Buddha’s Smile”] in Solzhenitsyn’s novel *В круге первом* [*In the First Circle*] (1968).<sup>588</sup> Although Shalamov could not tolerate humor in his prose narratives about the camps, humor is allowed in prison and, by extension, in his play set in prison.<sup>589</sup> As a scene, “The Sawing of Firewood” is far removed from the atrocities of the camps; it would, in other words, not be unethical for the audience to laugh at the four Nobel laureates and their petty concerns.

Its comical moments notwithstanding, *Evening Discourses* is not a comedy. Laughter is suspended at the end of this scene by a potential sixth character on stage. The warden tells the four writers not to pay attention to this person occupying, as it were, a distant corner: “Warden: Here’s where you’re going to stack them, near the tower. And don’t look at that guy—he’s going to sit in the punishment cell anyway.”<sup>590</sup> This sixth person disrupts the humor by being unnamed, unlike the others, and excluded from the physical task. He could be the transitory hero, and his exclusion from the manual labor implies that his status in this prison, as in contemporary literature, is one of difference. Without a line of his own in the dialogues, he seems to succumb to the disability of his author, but this is not all that sets him apart from the rest: he has, according to the warden, broken one of the rules in prison. The offense of the Russian writer without a Nobel Prize is left unsaid in this fantastical play, but his presence suggests that he, too, has transgressed. As we shall see, the literary crimes of which he accuses Bunin, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn (an interrogation with Sholokhov is missing) are often his own. “The Sawing of Firewood” epitomizes Shalamov’s last play that flirts with the absurd and evokes laughter, yet performs a battle with excruciatingly high stakes for all writers on stage: who will win Russian literature?

### 1.a. The Text

Centered on the repercussions of a catastrophic twentieth-century for Russian writers with or without Nobel prizes, *Evening Discourses* constitutes a catastrophic text for both the reader and the scholar: what remains is a handwritten manuscript of approximately 100 separate pages in which his handwriting becomes less intelligible the more he writes. To write about, or even to read, this work is a challenge and that was true also for me: on the one hand, I found it daunting to

<sup>587</sup> “Вот об этих новеллах и частях речи у меня очень приблизительное представление. В Марбурге нас, понимаете, этому не учили. Но это, разумеется, не должно служить препятствием для пилки дров” (ibid.).

<sup>588</sup> From the last letter Shalamov sent to Solzhenitsyn: “‘Улыбка Будды’ – вне романа. По самому тону. За шуткой не видно пролитой крови. (В наших вопросах недопустима шутка)” (6:314). [“Buddha’s Smile” is outside of this novel. By its very tone. Blood is not visible behind a joke. (In our questions a joke is not allowed).]

<sup>589</sup> Compare with what Shalamov wrote to Kremenskoï about humor and the camp theme in 1972: “По сравнению с этой возможностью обновления прозы мне кажутся пустяками научная фантастика или какие-нибудь сатирические или юмористические пьесы. Мне кажется кощунством использование лагерной темы в комедии или шуточной поэме. Твист ‘Освенцим’ или блюз ‘Колыма’ кажутся мне кощунством. Юмористика имеет свои пределы, использовать ее в лагерной теме представляется святотатством” (6:581). [Compared with this opportunity for an update of our prose, science fiction or some satirical or humorous plays seem trivial to me. To use the camp theme in a comedy or a humorous poem seems to me a sacrilege. An “Auschwitz twist” or a “Kolyma blues” seem like blasphemy to me. Humor has its limits, to use it in the camp theme is blasphemous.]

<sup>590</sup> “Вот тут и складывайте, около вышки. А на того парня не смотрите – ему все равно в карцере сидеть” (7:385).

reconstruct a meaningful whole from its pieces, and, on the other, the way in which the text resists closure is an indication that a ‘meaningful whole’ may be opposed to Shalamov’s vision.

As if to illustrate the manuscript’s resistance to totality, the first publication of *Evening Discourses* in 2013 did not include all its fragments or even all its scenes. The published version of the play ends on page 64, leaving almost forty pages omitted; the majority have not yet been deciphered. Shalamov’s two lists of dramatis personae and three outlines for the structure of the play are only available in the unpublished manuscript. His first list of characters contain not only the four Russian Nobel laureates at the time, but also the French writer Jean-Paul Sartre (who won in 1964), the American playwright Arthur Miller, and Anna Akhmatova (who was nominated in 1965).<sup>591</sup> His second list of characters is perhaps even more peculiar: it includes “Доктор наук Стукач” [“doctor Stoolpigeon”], “Кукумилев, наследник” [“Kukumilev, heir”] (a wordplay on the last name Gumilev which refers to the son of Nikolai Gumilev and Akhmatova, Lev Gumilev), and “Ебастернак, наследник” [“Ebasternak, heir”] (a more vulgar wordplay on the last name Pasternak which suggests Pasternak’s son Evgenii Pasternak).<sup>592</sup> This list of dramatis personae ends with what appears to be a choir of eight academics with sarcastically similar-sounding names: “Fant, Font, Fond, Funt, Fent, F’iunt, Fënt.”<sup>593</sup> The choir is absent from the play, as are Ebasternak, Kukumilev, Doctor Stoolpigeon, Miller, and Sartre; the manuscript version contains a scene with Akhmatova that I was unable to render legible and thus it will not be discussed in this chapter.

In a similar way, several of the scenes and acts in the manuscript’s three outlines are absent from the final fragmentary version of the published play. Two of these three outlines contain numbered lists with titles for different scenes, while one outline provides an overview of the titles for its five proposed acts.<sup>594</sup> The first outline includes seven scenes:

1. The Vernissage
2. Evening
3. Fathers and Children
4. Requiem
5. Nobel Laureates
6. The Evening Discourses of Mr. X
7. Libido<sup>595</sup>

Three of these seven scenes are included in the published version of the play (5. “Нобелевские лауреаты” [“Nobel Laureates”], 6. “Вечерние беседы мистера Икса” [“The Evening Discourses of Mister X”], 7. “Либи́до” [“Libido”]); one exists in the manuscript version but is not yet deciphered (1. “Верниссаж” [“Vernissage”]); and three appear never to have been written by Shalamov (2. “Вечер” [“Evening”], 3. “Отцы и дети” [“Fathers and Sons”], 4. “Панихида” [“Requiem/memorial service”]). In the published version of the play, scene 5, “Nobel Laureates,” extends over several scenes; scene 6, “The Evening Discourses of Mister X,” seems to have given the title of the play (“Вечерние беседы (фантастическая пьеса)” [“Evening

<sup>591</sup> Shalamov, *Vechernie besedy*, F. 2596, op. 2, ed. khr. 100, l. 3.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4. This name can also suggest Boris Pasternak since his father, Leonid Pasternak, was a famous painter.

<sup>593</sup> “Фант, Фонт, Финт, Фонд, Фунт, Фент, Фьюнт, Фэнт.” *Ibid.*

<sup>594</sup> “I) Либи́до, II) Нобел. лауреаты, III) , IV) Отцы и дети, V) Шантажист.” [I) Libido, II) Nobel. Laureates, III) , IV) Fathers and Children, V) The Blackmailer.] *Ibid.*, л. 2. Act three is untitled.

<sup>595</sup> “1. Верниссаж [sic], 2. Вечер, 3. Отцы и дети, 4. Панихида, 5. Нобелевские лауреаты, 6. Вечерние беседы мистера Икса, 7. Либи́до.” *Ibid.*, l. 1.

Discourses (a fantastical play”] is written under the monologue by “X” on page fifty in the manuscript as if Shalamov suddenly decided upon this title);<sup>596</sup> and scene 7, “Libido,” was written as one scene and concludes the work.

The second outline structures the play not in scenes or acts, but rather according to the sequence of the numbered pages in the handwritten manuscript. The publication of the play in 2013 follows this outline by Shalamov in the ordering of the fragments but omits pages 65-99 in his plan (words marked in italics show questionable readings of his handwriting):

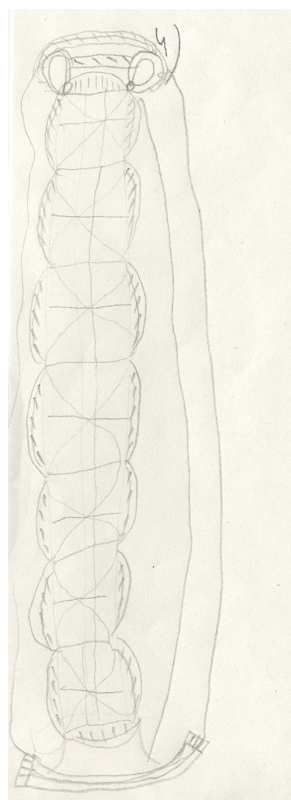
1) The first scene	1. 5 – 9	Loneliness
2) The second scene	1.10 – 12	America the Russian people
	1. 13	The Underground
	14 – 15	Solzhenitsyn
	16 –	Pasternak
3) the scene in <freedom>	18 – 22	about Dostoevsky
	Nob. Laureates	
U...y	23 – 25	Bunin Nob. Laureates
	26 – 37	Pasternak
	38 – 42	Solzhenitsyn
	43 – 47	The Sawing of Firewood
	48 – 49	Bunin “Laureates are chased in”
	50 –	About the Cross
	51	PH [progressive humanity]
!	53 – 55	The Wooden Stake
	56 – 63	Libido
	64	The End
	65	Libido
	68	About Suicide
	69	The Vernissage
	76	A and B were sitting on the pipe
	82	<i>Ardov’s Hanger</i>
!	84 – 86	PH
	89 – 95	The Underworld
	98	Akhmatova. Antimemoir about PH
	99	PH <sup>597</sup>

This outline stretches over two pages in the manuscript and on each page the list is accompanied by an intriguing doodle: the first doodle, on page 1a, resembles a sleeping bag which is zipped up and divided into seven rounded ‘sections’ (seven is the number of scenes in Shalamov’s first outline), and the second doodle, on page 1b, appears as two triangular cobwebs joined in the upper right corner of the page. The rest of the manuscript is devoid of illustrative scribbles.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., л. 50.

<sup>597</sup> “1) Первая сцена л. 5 – 9 Одиночество; 2) Вторая сцена л. 10 – 12 Америка рус. народ; л. 13 Подполье; 14 – 15 Солженицын; 16 – Пастернак; 3) сцена на <воле> 18 – 22 о Достоевском; Ноб. лауреаты; у...сий 23 – 25 Бунин Ноб. лауреаты; 26 – 37 Пастернак; 38 – 42 Солженицын; 43 – 47 Пилка дров; 48 – 49 Бунин “Лауреатов пригнали”; 50 – О кресте; 51 ПЧ [прогрессивное человечество]; ! 53 – 55 Осинный кол; 56 – 63 Либи́до; 64 Конец; 65 Либи́до; 68 О самоубийстве; 69 Верниссаж; 76 А и Б сидели на трубе; 82 Вешалка *Ардова*; ! 84 – 86 ПЧ; 89 – 95 Подземный мир; 98 Ахматова. Антимемуар о ПЧ; 99 ПЧ.” Ibid., л. 1a-1b.

Although the images do not represent prison as the space of the play, the first belongs to the realm of a convict: a sleeping bag would be a welcome presence in a cold cell (see figure 1).



**Figure 1.**

This outline shows that the published version stops at the scene “Конец” [“End”] on page 64 which, although the end neither of Shalamov’s envisioned play nor of his creative work on this text, is a convenient place to discontinue the dramatic narrative. Together with the preceding scenes, this ending proposes a more complete work, even though fragmented and disconnected in its structure (the more disconnected remarks that appear within the lines are omitted in the published version). The remaining scenes on pages 65-99, which have only been partially deciphered, show that not only did Shalamov leave the play unfinished while still at the stage of its development, but also that in the final thirty pages the action moves further away from the competitive confrontations between the transitory hero and the laureates in the Butyrka prison cell. We can only speculate what *Evening Discourses* would have been – and how it would have been performed on stage – if it Shalamov had been able to complete it. The final, hitherto undeciphered and unpublished, scenes of the play suggest that the metaphor of contemporary Russian literature as a prison may have been expanded to his contemporary Soviet society of the 1970s. In them, the abbreviation “ПЧ,” “прогрессивное человечество” [“progressive humanity”], appears frequently; it was Shalamov’s shorthand for the dissident intelligentsia at the time. The title of the penultimate scene, “Ахматова. Антимемуар о ПЧ” [“Akhmatova. Anti-memoir about PH”],<sup>598</sup> indicates a possible expansion of the drama through the inclusion of Akhmatova as a female competitor in the battle of Russian twentieth-century literature, and the negated genre of the memoir for the “progressive humanity” mocks the memoiristic writing prevalent at the time.

However, this scene, together with the other unpublished scenes, may never be fully deciphered. The ‘complete’ text of this ‘incomplete’ work might never materialize. Shalamov’s last longer work appears to be a catastrophe within a catastrophe: we will never know what it is or what it could have been. Instead, I suggest that our reading must allow for the prospect of never entirely penetrating his handwritten manuscript, that something inside it will remain unknown, and that this could be an imperative aspect of Shalamov’s late style. In the history of his art, to paraphrase and expand Adorno’s statement, this late work is a catastrophe that will never become completely accessible to us as readers.

Instead, the manuscript as well as the published version of the play presents us with the task of imagining the meaning of his last longer work for his late style. Suspended in the middle of a dynamic creative process, both the lists of dramatis personae and the outlines for *Evening Discourses* suggest that Shalamov worked through different conceptualizations of the play and that he most likely intended the finished version to be both longer and more complex than what has thus far been deciphered from his difficult handwriting and subsequently published. The manuscript needs further textological work, and although I have been successful in decoding some of the previously unreadable passages, these are not referenced in this chapter.

<sup>598</sup> Shalamov might have borrowed the term “антимемуар” [“anti-memoir”] from André Malraux’s *Antimémoires* [*Anti-Memoirs*] (1967) published in a Russian translation as *Антимемуары*.

## 1.b. The Context

Shalamov did not intend for his dramaturgy to be recovered decades later by scholars sifting through his archive. On the contrary, his plays were written for performance in their immediate cultural and historical context – although never staged in these contexts. If his earlier play *Anna Ivanovna* was a dramatic comment on the renewed masking of the Gulag in Soviet society toward the mid-1960s (albeit set in Kolyma, the stage is never transformed into a camp), *Evening Discourses* engages the stagnation of the 1970s by exploring how Russian literature through its Nobel laureates not only achieved international fame but also became complicit in a catastrophic twentieth century. In addition, just as *Anna Ivanovna* was meant to be staged by the director Leonid Varpakhovskiy, so Shalamov had also a director in mind for *Evening Discourses*: Yuri Lyubimov. After watching Lyubimov’s production of Bertolt Brecht’s *Leben des Galilei* [*Life of Galileo*] (1943) at the Taganka Theater in 1968, which due to his deafness was only possible in the company of Sirotinskaya,<sup>599</sup> Shalamov was inspired to write a play:

After *The Life of Galileo* with Vysotsky [Shalamov] said, “Let’s write a play for this theater.” I declined, of course, this co-authorship, but his interest for plays was renewed. He began to make outlines for the play *Evening Discourses*. Its plot is unpretentious: in a prison cell, all the Russian writers that are Nobel laureates meet: Bunin, Pasternak, Sholokhov, Solzhenitsyn. They’re made to saw wood; they carry out the slop tank. And in the evenings, they talk...<sup>600</sup>

*Evening Discourses* was thus written to be staged in a specific Moscow theater, Taganka, by a specific director, Lyubimov, and perhaps even with a specific actor in the role of the transitory hero: Vladimir Vysotsky, who played Galileo in *Life of Galileo*. Ultimately left unfinished, the envisioned performance could never materialize in Shalamov’s lifetime. However, its inspiration endures in the title: *Вечерние беседы* can be translated into English as evening “conversations,” but the theatrical event which prompted Shalamov to write this play reveals that what he had in mind was *беседы* as a genre in scholarly writing – discourses. There are no ‘conversations’ in *Evening Discourses*; its scenes are structured as interrogations. Instead, the title refers to the last work by Galileo Galilei, *Discorsi e Dimostrazioni Matematiche Intorno a Due Nuove Scienze* [*Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Sciences*, Russian: *Беседы и математические доказательства двух новых наук*] (1638). The composition of these *Discourses* toward the end of Brecht’s play bears striking similarities to Shalamov’s work on *Evening Discourses*. Imprisoned after his recantation, Galileo composes his final text in defiance of his disability – blindness – and surrenders its only manuscript, which “will found a new physics,”<sup>601</sup> to be smuggled out of Italy.

<sup>599</sup> *The Life of Galileo* ran 1966 to 1976, but it is most likely that Shalamov saw it in 1968, as he writes in a notebook from this year: “Я много был в театре этот год. Не слышал ни слова из-за глухоты, но благодаря Ирине мир театра воскрес для меня – хоть и в тысячной доле. Только с ней видел много спектаклей” (5:304). [I was a lot in the theater this year. I didn’t hear a word because of the deafness, but thanks to Irina of the world of the theater was resurrected for me – if only in a thousandth of a fraction. Only with her did I see many performances.]

<sup>600</sup> “После ‘Жизни Галилея’ с Высоцким он сказал: ‘Давай напишем пьесу для этого театра.’ От соавторства я, конечно, отказалась, а к пьесам его интерес возобновился. Он стал делать наброски к пьесе ‘Вечерние беседы.’ Сюжет ее незагнанный: в тюремной камере встречаются все русские писатели, нобелевские лауреаты: Бунин, Пастернак, Шолохов, Солженицын. Их гоняют на пилку дров, они выносят парашу. А вечерами они беседуют...” Sirotinskaya, *Moi Drug Varlam Shalamov*, 23-4.

<sup>601</sup> “ANDREA: The ‘Discorsi!’ *He leafs through the manuscript. Reads:* ‘It is my purpose to establish an entirely new science in regard to a very old problem, namely, motion. By means of experiments I have discovered some of its

Shalamov too wrote his last play in defiance of disability – the deafness that would not let him hear the words of Brecht’s play and Meniere’s disease that made his handwriting on its only manuscript near unintelligible. Unlike Galileo, Shalamov neither finished his *Discourses* nor wished for this text to appear in *tamizdat*.

*Evening Discourses* bears traces of not only the content in Brecht’s *Life of Galileo*, but also of its theatrical form in Lyubimov’s production. Shalamov saw in it a belated revival of the theatricality of Russian and Soviet modernist theater in the 1920s in general and of Vsevolod Meyerhold in particular. He told Sirotinskaya: “All of this has already been. <...> Meyerhold. It’s forgotten now.”<sup>602</sup> The theatricality of Meyerhold’s productions, which Shalamov watched in the 1920s and 1930s in Moscow, informed *Anna Ivanovna* written ten years earlier.<sup>603</sup> One aspect of this middle period play set in Kolyma resounds with the late style *Evening Discourses*: the insistence of Shalamov that his dramatis personae in *Anna Ivanovna* wear masks. This important detail is preserved in an unpublished 1964 letter from Solzhenitsyn to Shalamov.<sup>604</sup> Solzhenitsyn neither understood nor approved of this theatrical method, and the mask is not mentioned in the drama itself. However, the usage of function rather than names for the dramatis personae (or symbolic last names, as the last name Rodina for the eponymous heroine) suggests that they are masks rather than conventional roles. In this way, Shalamov’s dramaturgy in *Anna Ivanovna* appears to have been influenced by Meyerhold’s “stylized, external, non-psychological, popular”<sup>605</sup> theater epitomized by the mask. A comparable influence emerges in the masked ball in Brecht’s *Life of Galileo*; the mask lends Barberini, the future pope who will force Galileo to recant, the freedom to speak an otherwise unspoken truth.<sup>606</sup> Lyubimov extended Brecht’s usage of masks through a choir of monks whose faces were obscured by photographs.<sup>607</sup> I suggest that since Shalamov wrote *Evening Discourses* inspired by this production, the identity of the Nobel

properties, which are worth knowing.’ GALILEO: I had to do something with my time. ANDREA: This will found a new physics. GALILEO: Stuff it under your coat. ANDREA: And we thought you had deserted! No voice against you was louder than mine! GALILEO: Very proper. I taught you science and I denied the truth. ANDREA: This alters everything.” Brecht, Bertolt. *Life of Galileo*. Trans. John Willett. Arcade Publishing, New York: 1980, 105-6.

<sup>602</sup> “Это все было <...> Мейерхольд. Только забыто сейчас.” Sirotinskaya, *Moi drug Varlam Shalamov*, 23.

<sup>603</sup> I discuss the influence of Meyerhold’s productions of the 1920s on Shalamov’s dramaturgy at length in “What Cannot Be Known Cannot Be Performed: Staging the Gulag in Shalamov’s *Анна Ивановна*” in *BPS Working Paper Series*. The Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies at UC Berkeley, Aug 2014.

<sup>604</sup> See Solzhenitsyn’s letter to Shalamov from 20 September 1964: “Об использовании ‘масок’ вместо индивидуальностей воздержусь говорить. Здесь я могу быть особенно неправ, т. е. мне этот метод совершенно чужд и я могу быть несправедлив. Оправданием ‘масок’ является, м. б., желание автора показать о б щ н о с т ь происходящего, независимо от свойств характеров?” [On the use of “masks” instead of individuals I shall refrain from speaking. Here I can be especially wrong, since this method is completely alien to me and I may be unfair. The justification of ‘masks’ might be the author’s desire to show the *communality* of the action, regardless of the attributes of the characters?] RGALI, op. 2, d. 159.

<sup>605</sup> “And thus the mask can be seen as an overarching metaphor for the type of work Meyerhold wanted to create – a stylized, external, non-psychological, popular theatre.” Pitches, Jonathan. *Vsevolod Meyerhold*. London: Routledge, 2003, 58.

<sup>606</sup> “BARBERINI: <...> It’s my own mask that permits me certain freedoms today. Dressed like this I might be heard to murmur: If God didn’t exist we should have to invent him. Right, let’s put on our masks once again. Poor old Galileo hasn’t got one.” Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, 61.

<sup>607</sup> Lyubimov’s production of *Life of Galileo* used masks for one of its choirs: “Galileo was supported by two choirs: the Pioneer boys formed a choir in support of Galileo, representing hope. They stood on one side of the stage, while a choir of monks was placed on the other; this one was endowed with the function of repeating threats to Galileo. <...> Whereas the boys had angelic faces, the monks covered theirs with masks made from photographs.” Beumers, Birgit. *Yury Lyubimov at the Taganka Theatre, 1964-1994*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997, 38.

laureates would most likely have been indicated through analogous photographs masking the actors' faces.

Unlike Galileo, who does not have a mask of his own in the ball, the transitory hero wears a mask with dual connotations: the unnamed "I" hides the actor's face as well as the author's. This mask seems to be a stylization, rather than a representation, of "Shalamov the writer" (or of Solzhenitsyn's "former acquaintance Shalamov") that echoes the theatricality embodied in the 'fantastical' plot of *Evening Discourses*. This play is a meticulously stylized performance in which everything from its characters to its competition are restricted and confined within one small space of total control: the prison cell. The Nobel laureates are projections of their literary legacy rather than 'characters' and, more importantly, they are surrounded by other masks with less overt meanings: "I," the warden, and Krushel'nitsky. In this mishmash of famous writers and obscure figures, everyone is exposed in front of the audience, yet at the same time the dramatis personae remain distanced and fragmented bodies:

Masking in the theater is the supreme irony. The actor is, after all, no more than a man in a metaphorical mask. He is removed from the audience by the role he plays. Masked, he is removed once more, for the only reminder of his true self, his face, is concealed. Conversely, his role, now frozen in the fixed face of the mask, is directly exposed to the audience. Further, the insistent artificiality of the mask constantly reminds the audience of the artifice of theater while denying the audience any illusions of reality.<sup>608</sup>

The photographs of Bunin, Pasternak, Sholokhov, and Solzhenitsyn would certainly have underscored the artifice of Shalamov's dramaturgy: this imagined competition for Russian literature never happened. Furthermore, the masking of the actors' faces with the famous faces of Russian writers recalls ancient Greek drama in which stock characters were indicated by oversized masks with exaggerated expressions so that even those furthest away from the stage could perceive their distinct roles. When *Evening Discourses* is staged for the first time in Russia, perhaps even spectators with but a cursory knowledge of twentieth-century Russian literature will recognize these four laureates – and Shalamov himself.

When the performance of his last play finally materializes, I hope that also another key intertext will be considered in its interpretation for the stage: the Greek comedy *Βάτραχοι* [*The Frogs*] (404 B.C.) by Aristophanes.<sup>609</sup> The plot of *The Frogs* is as 'fantastical' as the plot of *Evening Discourses*: both stage imagined confrontations between culturally and historically significant writers – dead or alive – with the purpose of both writing and re-writing literary history. In Aristophanes' comedy, the playwrights Euripides and Aeschylus fight to claim the title of the greatest tragic poet. The play begins with Dionysus lamenting the state of contemporary Greek tragedy, after which he decides to bring back Euripides (who died the previous year) from Hades.

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<sup>608</sup> Smith, Susan H. *Masks in Modern Drama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 2.

<sup>609</sup> In his commentary to the 2013 publication of *Evening Discourses*, Esipov suggests Dostoevsky's plan for a chapter in his projected, but ultimately unwritten, novel *Житие великого грешника* [*The Life of a Great Sinner*] as an intertext and a possible inspiration for Shalamov: "...писатель бессознательно подчинился тому же 'фантастическому' импульсу, который возник в свое время у Ф. М. Достоевского: 'Тут же в монастыре посажу Чаадаева (конечно, под другим именем). Почему Чаадаеву не посидеть года в монастыре? К Чаадаеву могут приехать в гости и другие, Белинский, например, Грановский, Пушкин даже'" (7:390). [... the writer unconsciously gave into to the same "fantastic" impulse, which appeared in F. M. Dostoevsky back in the day: "Right there in the monastery I'll put Chaadaev (of course, under a different name). Why not let Chaadaev spend a year in a monastery? Chaadaev might be visited by others, Belinsky, for example, Granovsky, even Pushkin.]

However, upon arrival in the netherworld Dionysus finds that Euripides has challenged Aeschylus to his seat of honor at Pluto's dinner table. The play continues with a literary battle between the two tragedians in which they use quotations from the other writer's work to both mock each other and show the superiority of their own work. After the battle, Dionysus selects Aeschylus to accompany him back to Athens to redeem the state of contemporary drama.

The interrogations of the Nobel laureates in *Evening Discourses* revitalizes the performance of literature as competition in *The Frogs* and revives its lament for the state of contemporary literature: split in three separate and often mutually exclusive divisions – officially sanctioned but artistically defunct Socialist Realism, illegal *samizdat*, and self-expulsed *tamizdat* – this literary tradition has lost unity and direction. The winning writer must thus offer both redemption and an alternative direction for the future.

For this purpose, the late Shalamov retraces his steps to Butyrka prison, a topos from his youth and an institution in which he was incarcerated twice: first in 1929 and again in 1937. Unlike the camp, prison is a rare location in much of his prose. He did not include prison interrogations in *Kolyma Tales* (although interrogations in the camps are abundant), and when the prison is mentioned in the six cycles a fundamental difference between the prison and the camp is always underscored: “Prison and labor camp are different things, far removed from one another in their psychological content, despite their apparent commonality. The prison is much closer to normal life than the camp.”<sup>610</sup> Whereas he considered the camp to be an entirely destructive space, “defilement for all” as he stresses in his manifesto,<sup>611</sup> prison appears as a place with several redeeming qualities. He even states in his short story “Бутырская тюрьма (1929 год)” [“Butyrka Prison (the year 1929)”, which he wrote in 1961 and later included as the first chapter of the antinovel *Vishera*, that the experience in prison can be formative: “A Russian intelligentsia without prison, without prison experience, is not fully a Russian intelligentsia.”<sup>612</sup> In this narrative, the young Shalamov approaches his first time in prison with great anticipation of whom he might encounter there and how these meetings can help him figure out the political platform of the opposition, of which he was a part before his arrest in 1929. Prison becomes a space in which he can prepare himself intellectually to join in an ideological battle with the leaders of his time:

I really looked forward to meeting the leaders of the movement in the prison cell, in a free atmosphere, for leaders are leaders, and it would be good to get some valuable moral quality from them that they undoubtedly possess. I'd feel, even if I wouldn't understand, the presence of this secret god. I wanted to cross swords with them on a number of subjects, to argue and to clarify the things that were not entirely clear to me in this Trotskyist movement.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> “Тюрьма и трудовой лагерь – вещи разные, далекие друг от друга по своему психологическому содержанию, несмотря на свою кажущуюся общность. Тюрьма стоит гораздо ближе к обыкновенной жизни, чем лагерь” (2:100). This juxtaposition comes from “Как тискают романы” [“How Novels Are ‘Squeezed’”] (1959) in *Sketches of the Criminal World*.

<sup>611</sup> “Лагерь – отрицательный опыт, отрицательная школа, растление для всех – для начальников и заключенных, конвоиров и зрителей, прохожих и читателей беллетристики” (5:148). [The camp is a negative experience, a negative school, defilement of all – of the bosses and of prisoners, guards and spectators, passers-by and readers of fiction.]

<sup>612</sup> “Русская интеллигенция без тюрьмы, без тюремного опыта – не вполне русская интеллигенция” (4:154).

<sup>613</sup> “Мне очень хотелось встреч в тюремной (камере), в свободной обстановке с вождями движения, ибо вожди есть вожди, и было бы хорошо взять у них какое-то ценное моральное качество, которым они, несомненно, обладают. Я почувствую, если не пойму, присутствие этого тайного бога. И по ряду предметов



The young Shalamov sought in the prison cell to understand the Trotskyist movement in which he had been engaged and for which he had been arrested (and would later be sentenced to three years in Vishera for). At not yet twenty-two years old, he strove to learn from the leaders in this “free condition” and to sense in them the presence of “a secret god.” As the first chapter in *Vishera*, the naivety of the young transitory hero will soon be juxtaposed with the terror of the camps of the northern Urals where such “free conditions” for intellectual discussions are inconceivable. However, against the intertext of prison in Shalamov’s prose as a space of relative freedom, where the main events are conversations and confrontations, the choice for the setting of *Evening Discourses* seems more understandable. Prison, where he had excelled and been given his “best praise,” “You can be in prison,”<sup>614</sup> by the revolutionary Aleksandr Andreev, is the perfect location for Shalamov to “cross swords with” the Nobel laureates in a competition for the title of the greatest contemporary Russian writer.

## 2. Literature as Competition

While doing the same gymnastic exercises practiced in prisons worldwide,<sup>615</sup> Shalamov’s “I” begins with a long monologue that praises loneliness as the optimal state for a person and compares it to an isolation cell, his present space on stage. The monologue juxtaposes the number one with other possible numerical combinations and he declares: “In order to continue the race, for humanity to grow, we need a collective of five people.”<sup>616</sup> This declaration of the number needed to regenerate humanity appears as an allegory for Russian literature: the five family members necessary are the five writers required to continue the literary tradition. However, he adds, there is always the option to let the family line, and thus also the literary line, perish, and for that prospect four would be sufficient: “Of course, we can discontinue the human race, then there must be four people in a family.”<sup>617</sup> When this statement is read allegorically, the four family members that would lead to the end of their line become the four Russian Nobel laureates present in the play. The fifth person essential to the survival of Russian literature is the person on stage: the transitory hero. There are no scenes with four actors on stage at the same time; the play avoids this condemned number as if to imply that what is at stake is indeed the continuation, and not the demise, of Russian literature.

Even though the transitory hero soon returns to his favorite number one in his opening monologue, he is never alone on stage again. At the end of the monologue, the warden joins him to leave his side only during the interrogations, and even then he remains outside the cell door as if in anticipation of always being needed. An omnipresent interlocutor, the warden appears more and more as another double of the author as the play unfolds. Most the play consists of dialogues set up as interrogations between two characters, in which the warden either participates or listens

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хотел бы скрестить с ними шпагу, поспорить, прояснить кое-что, что было мне не совсем ясно во всем этом троцкистском движении” (4:153).

<sup>614</sup> “Вы – можете сидеть в тюрьме” (1:291). This compliment is related in the short story “The Best Praise” from *The Left Bank*.

<sup>615</sup> Lyubimov’s production of *Life of Galileo* begins with a similar physical exercise: “Galileo emerged in the first scene performing a handstand and standing on his head as part of his morning exercises; the world was turned upside down in front of his mental eye, just as he would, symbolically speaking, turn the notion of the world upside down.” Veumers, *Yury Lyubimov*, 38.

<sup>616</sup> “Для того чтобы продолжить род, чтобы человечество росло, нужен коллектив в пять человек” (7:371).

<sup>617</sup> “Конечно, человеческий род можно не продолжать, тогда в семье должно быть четыре человека” (ibid.).

from the other side of the cell door, and in these duels literature becomes perceived as a competition: “Two is hell too, but there a person can still come out a winner if he’s a leader, and accept defeat if he’s a follower.”<sup>618</sup> In this way, the opening monologue foreshadows the play’s construction around confrontational dialogues and sets the stage for a dramatic battle for Russian literature in which one can emerge as the winner.

The dramatization of this battle of the literary titans of the twentieth century takes place not only in an ambiguous space, a prison cell in an infamous Moscow prison, but also in what appears to be an ambivalent moment in time. The cell of the stage is distant not only from the geography and settings of Shalamov’s other works – this is not Kolyma, Visher, Vologda or the camps – but also from their historical consciousness. The play’s competition for literature unfolds beyond the flow of history, as if both absent from it and in defiance of time itself: “And the fact that Chernyshevsky is sold in Moscow for 5 kopecks, all this shows that the world is taking a breath to reflect on the future direction of morality, of thoughts, of ideas.”<sup>619</sup> Thus, the transitory hero constructs his own pause in the texture of history, in which the state of literature appears abysmal: the works of Chernyshevsky, whom Shalamov buried in the mass grave of Russian nineteenth-century literature in the draft for his literary manifesto “On Prose,” is sold (and presumably bought) for next to nothing. It is within this cultural vacuum that Shalamov’s play prepares to reveal a prospective path for the future.

During this lacuna in the history of literature, the settling of literary scores unfolds not only in anticipation of the future but also in a mourning of the past. Literature as a competition is a theme that frames the play, and the transitory hero and his warden return to it when the two again find themselves alone together in the cell in the penultimate scene in the published version of the play, “Осиновый кол” [“The Wooden Stake”].<sup>620</sup> This dialogue seems to have initially been a monologue, since the scene that precedes it is similar in content but presented as the statements of a certain “Iks.” Shalamov rewrote the scene as a dialogue that begins when the transitory hero asks his warden: “In what lies the secret of our dead, warden?”<sup>621</sup> Without waiting for an answer, he continues with a discussion of the atrocities in the concentration camps of the twentieth century and how he, a survivor, intends to commemorate those who died in them:

Millions were burned in the ovens of Auschwitz, ruined in the gold mines of Kolyma – an Auschwitz without ovens. I, who survived, will erect a monument on this burial pit – an obelisk or a cross – that I haven’t yet decided. A wooden stake in any case. I want to look back at the past standing, as you understand, very close to the cross – because I’m one of those who has been resurrected and crawled out of the pit – and if I look back, then the

<sup>618</sup> “Двое – это тоже ад, но тут еще человек может выйти победителем, если он – лидер, и смириться с поражением, если он – ведомый” (ibid.).

<sup>619</sup> “И то, что в Москве продают Чернышевского за 5 копеек, все это свидетельствует о том, что мир переводит дух, чтобы обдумать дальнейшее направление нравственности, мысли, идеи” (7:376).

<sup>620</sup> A similar “wooden stake” over a mass grave appears in the draft for his literary manifesto “On Prose” from 1965 and the scene in the play expands on this image: “На той братской могиле, которая вырыта, забит осиновый кол. И оглядываясь, порой мы смотрим на всё, что попадает в тень от этого столба, и это все отвергаем. Здесь и Чернышевский, и Некрасов, и, конечно, Лев Николаевич Толстой, ‘Зеркало русской революции,’ чтобы не забывать эту важную фамилию” (5:160). [On that mass grave, which is dug, a wooden stake is placed. And looking back, sometimes we look at everything that falls into the shadow of this pillar, and we all reject it. Here are Chernyshevsky, Nekrasov, and, of course, Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, “The Mirror of the Russian Revolution,” so as not to forget this important name.]

<sup>621</sup> “В чем тайна наших мертвецов, надзиратель?” (7:386).

shadow falls over a few more names, events, people, and ideas than would be the case for a person who had stepped away from the pit – in space or time.<sup>622</sup>

It is not the shape of the monument that is most striking, or his indecisiveness over whether it should be a cross or an obelisk, but the position he intends to take next to it. He will stand next to it, as an indispensable part of it or even a second monument. Together, he and the cross will share the same shadow and look back at the darkness they cast together over the past.

However, this image leaves the warden unimpressed: “It doesn’t matter, warden?”  
*Warden:* Doesn’t matter.”<sup>623</sup> As if to convince the warden of the importance of his monument, the transitory hero explores the segment of the mass grave caught in his shadow: “I look back from the cross, into the past, and I search for names that could lead humanity to such blood, to such mass murders.”<sup>624</sup> In this shadow where those are buried who are responsible for the atrocities of the twentieth century, he finds not politicians and ideologists, but writers: “All of Russian classical literature, which preached humanism and love for mankind, is on this list.”<sup>625</sup> The warden asks if Herzen will be found in this deadly shade, and the transitory hero replies: “See that’s the thing, warden. Herzen is unavoidably found there. The twentieth century is so terrible that you don’t know where to cut it in half, on which side of the scar is good and evil.”<sup>626</sup> The violence of the twentieth century, he argues, consumes everything in the past when one looks back at it from the distance of both time and space. Back then there were only two answers: yes or no. In the time after the revolution yes and no are no longer possible, and the “secret of our graves” with which he began the dialogue lies in who has killed whom in this mass grave of the twentieth century:

The main enemies of the winners were their comrades – not the nobility, not the tsar, not the dark forces in the countryside. Their own comrades in their common age-old struggle. These comrades were the first to be destroyed. And this is the secret of our graves.<sup>627</sup>

In this parallel with the situation of violence surrounding the Russian revolution, he claims that the secret of the mass graves is that those who fought for the same thing killed each other. Yet in this mass grave those who fall into the shadow of the transitory hero are not the politicians of the revolution, but Russian writers (with the curious addition of Spinoza).<sup>628</sup> It seems that the key to the presence of Russian literature lies in the implied second monument, his figure standing next

<sup>622</sup> “Миллионы же сожжены в печах Освенцима, загублены в золотых разрезах Колымы – Освенцима без печей. Я, уцелевший, на этой могильной яме воздвигну монумент – крест или обелиск – я еще не решил. Осинный кол во всяком случае. Я хочу оглянуться на прошлое стоя, как Вы понимаете, очень близко к этому кресту – ведь я один из воскресших и вылезших из ямы – и если я гляжу назад, то в тень креста попадает побольше имен, событий, людей и идей, чем у человека, шагнувшего в сторону от креста – в пространстве или во времени” (7:386-7).

<sup>623</sup> “Это все равно, надзиратель? *Надзиратель:* Все равно” (ibid.).

<sup>624</sup> “Я гляжу назад от креста, в прошлое, и ишу имена, которые могли привести человечество к такой крови, к таким массовым убийствам” (ibid.).

<sup>625</sup> “Вся русская классическая литература, проповедующая гуманизм и человеколюбие, стоит в этом списке” (ibid.) This list includes the same authors as in the draft for his manifesto with the addition of Gogol and Spinoza.

<sup>626</sup> “В том-то вся и хитрость, надзиратель. Герцен обязательно попадает. Двадцатый век так ужасен, что не знаешь, как рубить, по какому рубцу разделяются добро и зло” (ibid.).

<sup>627</sup> “Главные враги победивших – это их товарищи, а не дворянство, не царь, не темные силы деревни. Свои же товарищи по совместной вековой борьбе. Эти товарищи и были уничтожены в первую очередь. Вот тайна наших могил” (ibid.).

<sup>628</sup> Shalamov may have included Spinoza because he lacked the experience of exile, see Esipov, Valerii. “Traditsii russkogo Soprotivleniia” in *Shalamovskii sbornik*, vyp. 1, Vologda: 1994, 183.

to it. The shade that devours his literary predecessors in the nineteenth century emphasizes the confrontational aspect of the play again in its end and casts the theme of literature as a competition in a darker light than at its beginning. The secret of the mass grave of Russian literature, which this dialogue of mourning and monuments implies, is that writers who fight for the same thing must destroy each other. Thus, the enemy in this competition is the person who initially appears to be a comrade.

Indeed, Shalamov had connections of varying familiarity with the three Russian Nobel laureates whom he interrogates in *Evening Discourses* – he suffered a third sentence in the camps of Kolyma for stating that Bunin was a Russian classic, and he was personally acquainted with both Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. Perhaps it is telling, due to the absence of such a relationship between Shalamov and Sholokhov, that he never wrote an interrogation scene with him. At one point the other three writers were his “comrades,” and the competition, although it neither kills them nor buries them, does suspend them within the prison – a lenient substitute for a much harsher sentence. It appears that *Evening Discourses* erects a monument to Russian nineteenth-century literature while simultaneously becoming a monument itself: to the animosity, complicity, and ubiquitous competition within twentieth-century Russian literature.

Shalamov himself did not win any prestigious literary awards, not until very late in his life when he was too disabled by deafness and blindness to appreciate it.<sup>629</sup> In the twentieth century, in which Russian writers could win not only the Nobel Prize but also its Soviet calques – the Stalin and Lenin Prize – literature itself appeared more and more as a competition. Never having been considered for any such award at the time of writing *Evening Discourses*, when the only public appearance of the title of *Kolyma Tales* was in a condemnatory 1972 letter, the competition staged in Shalamov’s play is an alternative to the official recognition he never attained in his lifetime.

Instead of pitting himself against other unpublished or exiled writers, the writers called in by the warden belong to a “бригада” [“brigade”] of winners: “Warden: For the last thirty years there’s a whole Russian brigade of Nobel laureates. And you know what else occurs to me. How is it that you’ve not gone deaf and nevertheless it’s no mistake! Indeed, they’re all Russian – Bunin, Pasternak, Sholokhov, Solzhenitsyn.”<sup>630</sup> *Brigada* is an expression from the labor camp, indicating that they may be forced to work together, rather than against one another. There is a double shift that happens here when the competitors are introduced, both when the warden calls the transitory hero by the informal singular ‘you’ for the first time in the play and refers to his deafness (“How is it that you’ve not gone deaf...”). The arrival of the laureates on stage is

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<sup>629</sup> In 1981, the French division of PEN awarded Shalamov the Freedom Prize. Sirotinskaya describes how she gave him the news in the retirement home: “1 июня 1981 года я пришла его порадовать – французское отделение Пен-клуба одарило его премией Свободы. Я подхожу к кровати и беру его за руку, он всегда узнает меня по руке, на ощупь. Он долго и трудно усаживается на стул у тумбочки. – День, день какой? – 1 июня, понедельник! – кричу я в бескровное, сухое ухо. – Час, который час? Але! Час который? Але! – Пять, пять часов! Премию, премию дали! Премию! – Премия – деньги! Але! Але! Премия – деньги! – Во Франции! Он понимает и теряет к премии интерес.” [On June 1 1981 I went to give him the good news – the French division of the PEN Club had given him the Freedom Prize. I walk up to the bed and take him by the hand; he always recognizes my hand by his touch. He had a long and difficult time finally sitting down on a chair by the bedside table. – Day, what day is it? – 1<sup>st</sup> of June, Monday! – I scream into a bloodless, dry ear. – Time, what time is it? Hello! What time is it? Hello! – Five, it is five o’clock! Prize, they’ve given you a prize! A prize! – A prize – money! Hello! Hello! The prize – money! – In France! He understands and loses interest in the prize.] Sirotinskaia, *Moi drug Varlam Shalamov*, 51.

<sup>630</sup> “Надзиратель: Ведь за последние тридцать лет все нобелевцы – русская целая бригада. Вот и кажется что. Как ты не оглох и все-таки не ошибка! Действительно все русские и русские – Бунин, Пастернак, Шолохов, Солженицын. Целая русская бригада” (7:377).

marked by the first moment of intimacy between the warden and the transitory hero and the only reference to his deafness suggests that what is performed are imaginary confrontations in which the transitory hero, or Shalamov himself, could not take part. It is neither a “mistake” that so many of the Nobel laureates are Russian nor is it a “mistake” that he is not deaf – for this competition is premised on both the international prestige of Russian literature and on the overcoming, if only in a written text, of his own disability.

Before completing the formation of the literary brigade that will compete for the title of the greatest Russian twentieth-century writer, the transitory hero asks his warden about the whereabouts of Sartre, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1964 but rejected it because he did not want to become a literary institution. The warden’s answer, that Sartre is absent, leaves him disappointed: “Without Sartre, this list won’t be complete. Mainly because of his this, as they call it, existentialism. Repeat. *Warden*: Existentialism.”<sup>631</sup> With Sartre unavailable for an interrogation of his literary crime – “existentialism” – he asks for another Russian writer who has also been awarded an international prize: “And bring Akhmatova here at the same time – from the women’s cell. She, too, received some kind of award in this Nobel kingdom.”<sup>632</sup> Not only was Akhmatova nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1965, but she also traveled to Italy where she received the Etna-Taormina Prize for poetry in 1964. Thus, the imprisoned Russian writers who are called to perform in Shalamov’s competition are all, unlike him, already winners. Instead of an entering this battlefield as their inferior, Shalamov’s transitory hero asserts himself as their equal, or even superior, as if he had, by circumscribing his own disability, already overcome the main obstacle blocking his victory.

### 3. Literature as Confrontation

As previously mentioned, the battle for Russian literature in *Evening Discourses* appears as a Soviet-era re-writing of Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*: a prison cell replaces Hades and the honor to be fought for is that of the greatest Russian twentieth-century writer. Shalamov’s transitory hero seems initially to play the role of Dionysus in his interrogations of Bunin, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn and uses plenty of quotations from their works both to openly ridicule them and to indirectly argue for his own superiority as a writer. However, he is reluctant to bestow the coveted title of literary prestige on any of them. Instead of bringing one of them out of prison to redeem the state of Russian literature, this ‘Dionysus’ leaves the ending in a state of ambiguity: no one is released, not even the transitory hero, but all must remain in the prison – within the extended metaphor for the predicaments of the Russian literary tradition. *The Frogs* also shares another similarity with *Evening Discourses*; the title of Aristophanes’ comedy comes from the chorus of frogs that frame several of the acts. In one of Shalamov’s lists of dramatis personae there is a ‘chorus’ of academics – Fant, Font, Fond, Funt, Fent, F’iunt, Fënt – whose names said one after the other creates a humorous sound effect comparable to the croaking sound of the frog chorus: “Brekekekèx-koàx-koáx.”<sup>633</sup> Moreover, *The Frogs* also includes a fair amount of obscenity, especially related to the anal region of the male body, which could provide one explanation for

<sup>631</sup> “Без Сартра этот список будет не полон. Главным образом из-за его этого, как говорят, экзистенциализма. Повторите. *Надзиратель*: Экзистенциализма” (ibid.).

<sup>632</sup> “И заодно веди сюда Ахматову – из женских камер. Она тоже какую-то награду получила в этом нобелевском царстве” (7:378).

<sup>633</sup> See, for example, the first chorus in *The Frogs*: “FROGS: Brekekekex koax koax! / Brekekekex koax koax! / We are the children of the water marsh / So let us sing in unison our festive call.” Aristophanes. *Lysistrata, The Women’s festival, and Frogs*. Trans. Michael Ewans. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010, 172.

the lengthy discussion about the sore sensation after anal intercourse in the final scene, “Libido,” in *Evening Discourses*. Shalamov’s play, like ancient Greek drama, is an all-male performance (the scene with Akhmatova excluded) set in an all-male space, the prison, where the only access to physical intimacy is with a same-sex partner. However, in his interrogations of Bunin, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn it is not physical intimacy but literary intimacy that dominates the stage. In his accusations against the Nobel laureates, the transitory hero becomes close to them as well as forces them to encounter closeness with himself that is as unsolicited as it is catastrophic.

### 3.a. Bunin

Bunin is interrogated twice in *Evening Discourses*. In the first interrogation, which takes place in scene two, the transitory hero accuses him of having compromised his literary legacy through negotiation with Stalin: “And in 1945 you’d already agreed with Stalin and become an official Russian classic. But then I was totally not thinking that.”<sup>634</sup> He continues by relating the third sentence Shalamov received for the same claim only two years prior to Bunin’s alleged duplicity, in 1943: “...and I was arrested and convicted by a court in a court and sentenced to prison in prison, to camp in a camp!”<sup>635</sup> He even accuses him, also incorrectly, of being one of those anti-Semites repatriated to the Soviet Union. However, these accusations are neither enough nor purely literary; it seems that what Bunin is arrested for is his late style. The transitory hero uses the short story “Чистый понедельник” [“Clean Monday”] (1945) as his example of the problematic tendencies in Bunin’s late style: “*Bunin*: What about ‘Clean Monday.’ It’s a good short story. *I*: It’s an erotic senile short story.”<sup>636</sup> Shalamov elsewhere declares that this short story corrupted the literary legacy of the late Bunin for him; it is implied here that he suffered a third sentence without knowing that Bunin would compose such an “erotic senile” short story.<sup>637</sup> It seems that senile style, of which Bunin is guilty, is the opposite of late style and thus perverts the creative legacy of an artist.

In *Evening Discourses*, the mask of Bunin appears to be both “senile” and inept, and the transitory hero mocks him for not understanding how the prison works: “But why are you here? How did you get here? *Bunin*: They summoned me in the cell. They’re shouting: Bunin! Who is Bunin! I responded – and... *I*: You ought not to have responded. *Bunin*: What an honor. *I*: Bring

<sup>634</sup> “А в 1945 году Вы уже договорились со Сталиным и стали официальным русским классиком. А я совсем тогда этого не думал” (7:377).

<sup>635</sup> “...я был арестован и осужден судом в суде, приговорен тюрьмой к тюрьме, к лагерю в лагере!” (ibid.).

<sup>636</sup> “*Бунин*: А что ‘Чистый понедельник.’ Это хороший рассказ. *Я*: Это эротический старческий рассказ” (ibid.). Bunin himself thought differently of “Clean Monday”: “Ivan Alekseevich would be satisfied that you think most highly of the book *Dark Paths* [*Temnye allei*]. He thought that every story in it had been written ‘in its own rhythm,’ in its own key; and, with respect to ‘Clean Monday’ [Chistyĭ ponedel’nik], he wrote on a fragment of paper during one of his sleepless nights (I quote from memory): ‘I thank God that he gave me the chance to write “Clean Monday”....’” Smirnov, N. “Letters of V. N. Bunina” in *Soviet Studies in Literature* 1970, 6:3, 192.

<sup>637</sup> See Shalamov’s essay “Рассказы Бунина и стихи Бунина” [“Bunin’s Short Stories and Bunin’s Poetry”] (1960s): “Больше всего отвечают моему нынешнему идеалу рассказы Бунина последних лет – только не такие, как ‘Чистый понедельник,’ ‘Чистый понедельник’ – это рассказ старика, психологический феномен, объясненный еще Мечниковым в его этюдах о природе человека. Суть дела в том, что стареющие люди незаметно для себя концентрируют художественное внимание на вопросах пола особенным образом. Этого не избежали ни Толстой, ни Гете, ни Виктор Гюго” (6:114). [Bunin’s last short stories correspond most of all to my current ideal – just not such short stories like “Clean Monday,” “Clean Monday” is the tale of an old man, the psychological phenomenon that was explained by Mechnikov in his sketches about human nature. The essence of the matter is that aging people unwittingly concentrate their artistic attention on questions of sex in a special way. This was not avoided by Tolstoy, Goethe, or Victor Hugo.]

in whoever's next."<sup>638</sup> In this play, where prison is a metaphor for Russian literature, this dialogue indicates that Bunin does not understand how to behave in contemporary literature. The old, and presumably also dead, Bunin is a representative of an aesthetic expression in old age which has, to cite Said, survived beyond what is "generally acceptable."<sup>639</sup> Shalamov could not accept the late style of Bunin, and such a text as "Clean Monday" is a late work that he thinks should have been prevented.

In the second interrogation scene with Bunin, which takes place after "The Sawing of Firewood," he now appears in the cell in the uniform of a Soviet general. This outfit, he claims, was given to him by Stalin: "Yes, it was Stalin who helped me recover. I immediately saw that the uniform will save Russia, and acknowledged, so to speak, the spiritual defeat of Russia in this uniformed dispute. *I*: But it's really not about the uniform but about the rank."<sup>640</sup> The transitory hero is interested in his rank as a writer, not in the general's uniform. Yet Bunin is more attached to his new rank than to his status as a writer and presents it as a badge of victory bestowed upon him in the war against the Soviet Union: "I am grateful, that [he] gave me the rank of general. We won in our grievous war against the Soviet Union. As a writer I'm, as you know, proud."<sup>641</sup> Bunin seems content with having already won his own battle against the Soviet Union by surrendering to the head of state; at the same time, his victory betrayed Shalamov who suffered for publicly expressing his admiration of his earlier works in the camps. Thus, the interrogation of Bunin shows him to be an unfit competitor in the fight for the title of the greatest writer in the twentieth century. Bunin is not only disqualified by his complicity with the government and mocked for his senile style, but also becomes a fragmented representation of 'the Nobel laureate Bunin' when he wears, as it were, as a second mask through his general's uniform. The confrontations with Bunin seem to be an exercise in discrediting a previously strong competitor. Additionally, the two interrogations with him suggest that, unlike the senile style of Bunin, the late style of Shalamov will neither be an aesthetic disappointment nor a betrayal of his previous literary legacy. The compromise made by Bunin, although fictional and therefore untrue, stands in stark contrast to *Evening Discourses*, a dramatic text that makes no such compromises – not for the censorship, not for the dramatis personae, not for the audience, and certainly not for the reader and the scholar.

### 3.b. Pasternak

Pasternak is introduced in *Evening Discourses* through juxtaposition with Solzhenitsyn: the former, unlike the latter, is a genius. When Pasternak enters the cell for his interrogation, his sentence and its length are unknown. After verifying the documents, the warden declares the punishment to be "Immortality, eternity."<sup>642</sup> The transitory hero inquires as to the warden's opinion of this duration: "*I* (to warden): Is this good or bad – such a duration. *Warden*: In my opinion it's good. *I*:

<sup>638</sup> "А почему Вы здесь? Как сюда попали? *Бунин*: В камере вызвали. Кричат: Бунин! Кто Бунин! Я и отозвался – и... *Я*: Не надо было отзываться. *Бунин*: Честь имею. *Я*: Давай следующего" (7:377).

<sup>639</sup> "Lateness therefore is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it." Said, *On Late Style*, 16.

<sup>640</sup> "Да это Сталин помог мне прийти в себя. Я сразу увидел, что мундир спасет Россию, и признал, так сказать, духовное поражение России в этом мундирном споре. *Я*: Но дело в общем не в мундире, а в чине" (7:385).

<sup>641</sup> "Спасибо, что генеральское звание дал. Мы победили в своей тяжелой войне против Советского Союза. Писатель я, как Вы знаете, самолюбивый" (7:386).

<sup>642</sup> "Бессмертие, вечность" (*ibid.*).

And in my opinion it's bad. But eternal penal servitude, for example, was only a literary term."<sup>643</sup> With a reference to the 'literary term' of eternal *katorga* in the nineteenth-century, immortality as well as eternity becomes the punishment for literary crimes. Yet the parallel between Pasternak's sentence and a penal eternity that nevertheless came to an end suggests that even genius cannot endure uncontested. An indeterminate 'forever' might abruptly reach its expiration date.

The transitory hero begins his interrogation with a question concerning Pasternak's rejection of the Nobel Prize, an award he claims is "given for immortality": "Nevertheless, it was necessary to clarify what was hidden behind your rejection of the award that is given for immortality. It is impossible to get rid of immortality, even if the duration of one's sentence hasn't been declared. *Pasternak*: Yes, yes, but I sincerely don't know."<sup>644</sup> The answer by Pasternak comes across as both inarticulate and comical; as in his conversation with Solzhenitsyn, this mask reveals his ignorance yet he is unbothered by the impression it makes on others. Pasternak has already confessed his crime – which is not a specific text, not an artistic method, not an aesthetic tendency – but that he is, despite producing a comical effect on stage, a genius in literature: "You're a genius? *Pasternak*: A genius. *I*: Well, then all is in order. The most important confession is done."<sup>645</sup> With prison as a metaphor for Russian literature, Pasternak belongs within its wall as well as in its canon; his confession justifies his arrest.

However, the subsequent evidence used by the transitory hero against Pasternak appears unusual even in this 'fantastical' play. Pasternak is asked about his work as a translator: "And it was you who translated the Jewish poet Al'pert. *Pasternak*: Me. *I*: For this they might lower your score. *Pasternak*: What does this have to do with me? I translated whatever they gave me from the state publishing house, with the greatest indifference – the highest form of democracy."<sup>646</sup> In *Evening Discourses*, this poet's last name seems intentionally misspelled (Al'pert instead of Al'birt) to signify that the translated poet is secondary to the primary problematic of translation in this segment of the confrontation. It was Shalamov who in 1971 translated Al'birt, a survivor of Auschwitz, and in his notebooks, he contemplated both the translation process, which interested him "as a poet," and the differences between Auschwitz and the camps of Kolyma.<sup>647</sup> The

<sup>643</sup> "Я (надзирателю): Хорошо это или плохо – такой срок. *Надзиратель*: По-моему, хорошо. *Я*: А по-моему плохо. Впрочем вечная каторга, например, была только литературным термином" (ibid.).

<sup>644</sup> "Надо же было все же уточнить, что скрывалось за Вашим отказом от премии, которая дается за бессмертие. От бессмертия не избавиться, даже если срок не объявлен. *Пастернак*: Да, да, но я право не знаю" (7:379).

<sup>645</sup> "Вы гений? *Пастернак*: Гений. *Я*: Ну, вот все в порядке. Самое главное признание сделано" (ibid.).

<sup>646</sup> "А еврейского поэта Альперта Вы перевели. *Пастернак*: Я. *Я*: За это могут скинуть балл. *Пастернак*: А при чем тут я? Что давали в Гослите, то я и переводил с величайшим равнодушием – высшей формой демократизма" (ibid.).

<sup>647</sup> "Произвожу опыт большого, уникального интереса. Перевожу стихи Иосифа Альбирта, еврейского поэта, бывшего в Освенциме, сборник называется 'У колыбели поэзии.' Это – стихи, несколько <примитивные>, но душевные, и путь его [нрзб] мне близок и знаком (душой и телом), антропоморфизм. Я смотрю на себя как на поэта, как на инструмент, могущий передать тончайший оттенок времени – всего, к чему чувство и душа прикасаются. Сейчас я оцениваю человека, чья жалоба, (опыт) немецкого лагеря Освенцим, лагеря с другим языком, нравами лагеря же, опыт ночной – сознательно запускает (слова) нашей искренности" (5:316). [I'm conducting an experiment of great, unique interest. I'm translating the poems of Iosif Al'birt, a Jewish poet who was in Auschwitz, a collection entitled 'At the Cradle of Poetry.' These poems are a bit (primitive), but soulful, and the way his (illegible) is close to me and familiar (in soul and body), anthropomorphism. I look at myself as a poet, as an instrument, which is able to convey the subtlest nuance of time – of everything that is touched by emotion and soul. Now I'm evaluating a person whose complaint (experience) of the German camp Auschwitz, a camp with a different language, but with the same customs of a camp, a nighttime experience – that consciously triggers (the words) of our sincerity.]



similarities in their fates notwithstanding, Shalamov considered Al'birt to be a lesser poet than himself. The transitory hero thus suggests to Pasternak that translation can help a minor poet: “*Pasternak*: I translated everything – from Shakespeare to Al’pert. *I*: Shakespeare loses here and Al’pert wins. *Pasternak*: Maybe Shakespeare doesn’t lose. Comparison is a matter of taste.”<sup>648</sup> The comparison with Shakespeare here is not accidental; in the beginning of the 1970s, when Shalamov wrote *Evening Discourses* after his impressions at Taganka Theater, *Hamlet* ran in Pasternak’s Russian translation with Vysotsky in the title role (he also played Galileo in *Life of Galileo*) in the same theater.

Pasternak seems indifferent as to whether any poet “wins” or “loses” in translation; he maintains a subjective perspective on art (“a matter of taste”). The transitory hero subscribes to an understanding of literature in which such idiosyncratic considerations are unacceptable: his perspective is one of rules and limits, and thus also of potential transgressions. At the same time, this scene becomes destabilized as soon as we realize that the crime of which Pasternak is accused is Shalamov’s own – the improvement through translation, with his own literary talent, of an inferior poet’s works. It seems that another face, or rather another mask, glances out from behind the mask of Pasternak here: that of the author. The transitory hero peeps out from behind ‘the Nobel laureate Pasternak’ to suggest that his voice may speak through any mask.

The scene continues with poetry and with two confrontations organized by the transitory hero: the first is between the early Pasternak and the late Pasternak. One of his poems from 1922 is read and compared with one of his poems from 1942; this comparison then becomes an opportunity for the transitory hero to critique the late style of Pasternak that, like Bunin before him, comes across as an unfortunate consequence of his senility. He uses the late Pasternak’s revision of the early Pasternak’s poems to argue for a loss of creative vitality as well as a potential destruction of his legacy as a poet for the future of Russian literature:

Fortunately, the publishers of “The Poet’s Library” didn’t agree with this author’s senile delirium, and since you were already in the grave, they could save Pasternak’s poems for Russia. Understand that the early Pasternak is one and the late another. I’d like for Russia to preserve both [his] poems and prose at their very best.<sup>649</sup>

This can be read as an implicit indication that the early Shalamov is different from the late Shalamov; it seems that when he wrote *Evening Discourses*, he was aware that he himself had become late. Here too the mask of Pasternak contains a hint from the author as if to argue that the late style of Shalamov is different also from the senile style of Pasternak. The transitory hero objects to any kind of post-factum revisions, and compares Pasternak’s late editing of his work with how Ivan Turgenev, a prose writer, revised the poet Fyodor Tyutchev: “This is worse than how Turgenev corrected Tyutchev. *Pasternak*: I always thought Turgenev’s text to be canonical. After all, Tyutchev saw this correction during his lifetime.”<sup>650</sup> Pasternak shows his allegiance to the authorized, and subsequently canonized, texts of these poems, whereas the transitory hero

<sup>648</sup> “*Пастернак*: Все переводил – от Альперта до Шекспира. *Я*: Шекспир тут проигрывает, а Альперт выигрывает. *Пастернак*: Может, и Шекспир не проигрывает. Сравнение дело вкуса” (ibid.).

<sup>649</sup> “К счастью издатели ‘Библиотеки поэта’ не согласились с этим авторским старческим бредом, и поскольку Вы лежали уже в могиле – спасли для России стихи Пастернака. Понимаете, ранний Пастернак один, а поздний – другой. Хотелось бы, чтоб Россия сохранила и стихи, и прозу в лучшем виде” (7:380).

<sup>650</sup> “Это хуже, чем правил Тургенев Тютчева. *Пастернак*: Я всегда считал Тургеневский текст каноническим. Ведь эту правку Тютчев видел при жизни” (ibid.).

considers such re-writing to be yet another literary crime. The canon, in other words, needs not be accepted for what it is for there is always the option to claim a canon of one's own.

In the further discussion of poetry, the transitory hero organizes a confrontation between Pasternak and Bunin that follows the prison tradition of an interrogation between the arrested and a witness. Bunin is asked to recite his poem on the death of Chekhov, who is set up as his direct predecessor in Russian literature: "Bunin, read your little poem about Chekhov's death. 'The Artist,' I believe it's called. *Bunin*: I don't remember it by heart."<sup>651</sup> The reason why Bunin does not remember this poem by heart, the transitory hero argues, is because he wrote poetry in the form of prose about a prose writer. Instead, Pasternak is made to recite his poem on the death of Vladimir Mayakovsky to demonstrate the difference: "Now listen to how a poet writes about a poet, how an artist writes about the death of an artist. If we're talking about poetry, not prose. Boris Pasternak will read 'The Death of a Poet.'"<sup>652</sup> A stanza from Pasternak's poem from 1930 follows, after which Bunin is once again disqualified from the competition, this time for his literary crime of having written poetry without knowing how: "You've lived a long life, Bunin, and yet you never figured out how to write poetry. Go."<sup>653</sup> Pasternak seems here to emerge as the winner in the confrontation with Bunin since the scene ends after this.

But did Pasternak win? A closer inspection of Pasternak's interrogation indicates that this interpretation may be unsatisfactory. In the victory of 'the poet who also wrote prose' (Pasternak) over 'the prose writer who also wrote poetry' (Bunin), there is another clash as well as another face behind these two masks. It is not only 'Pasternak' and 'Bunin' but also the two sides of Shalamov that are clashing: the poet and the prose writer. For those who read his short stories in *samizdat* and later found out about his poetry, he was 'a prose writer who also wrote poetry,' whereas for those who were familiar with his officially published poetry, and only learned about his prose in the 1970s when he was forced to publicly denounce their publication abroad, he became 'a poet who wrote also prose.' In the confrontation between Pasternak and Bunin, the transitory hero situates himself together with the winner: Shalamov, who wrote poems on the death of Pasternak, presumably "as a poet writes poetry about a poet" and not "prose about a prose writer," also wins. This victory trumps the victory of Pasternak since it was Shalamov who outlived him and it was he who commemorated Pasternak in poems, and not the other way around.<sup>654</sup> In his confrontation with Pasternak, the transitory hero participates in the enduring practice in Russian poetry of writing about the death of a predecessor to forge a space of one's own in the literary lineage: as Lermontov on Pushkin, as Pasternak on Mayakovsky, so also Shalamov on Pasternak.<sup>655</sup>

### 3.c. Solzhenitsyn

Unlike Bunin and Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn is an accidental and perhaps even superfluous figure in this prison of Russian literature according to the transitory hero: "The fact is, there's nothing

<sup>651</sup> "Бунин, прочти свой стишок о смерти Чехова. 'Художник,' кажется, называется. *Бунин*: Я не помню наизусть" (7:381).

<sup>652</sup> "Теперь послушай, как пишет поэт о поэте, художник о смерти другого художника. Если речь о поэзии, а не прозе. Борис Пастернак прочтет 'Смерть поэта'" (ibid.).

<sup>653</sup> "Длинную жизнь ты прожил, Бунин, а так и не мог понять, как пишут стихи. Иди" (ibid.).

<sup>654</sup> See Gofman, "Vidny tsarapany royalya..."

<sup>655</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the mythical and metaphorical meaning of the death of the poet in Russian culture, see Boym, Svetlana. *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.

to arrest him for and there's nothing criminal in his novels."<sup>656</sup> When Shalamov wrote *Evening Discourses*, Solzhenitsyn had been punished for his 'literary crimes' in the Soviet Union: he was expelled from the Writers' Union and exiled from the country. Yet in this play Solzhenitsyn is not under arrest for his novels, which have "nothing criminal" in them, but for his artistic method. Unlike the others, he enters the cell on his own, and not for a confrontation but for a confession: "*Solzhenitsyn* (closing the door): I want to make a confession to you. Heart to heart. *I*: This is a suitable place for a confession. Every confession is a prison. And every prison is a confessional. You've got my complete attention."<sup>657</sup> Although the scene begins as a confession, it soon turns into an interrogation when the transitory hero confronts Solzhenitsyn about what he deems to be his literary crime, namely humor in the representation of the camps:

*I*: It was you who wrote that the camp theme contains all opportunities for the creation of comedy, grotesque, burlesque, humor, and that jokes know no boundaries, no limits, no taboos.

*Solzhenitsyn*: Yes, I think so. After we've talked seriously about the camp, then it's okay to make a joke. After all, there's a humorous, funny side to everything. Everything has its place, also seriousness.

*I*: I absolutely disagree with you. Moreover, I believe this view to be sacrilegious. This is because [you] didn't see anything in the camp. The camp passed by you. It's not a topic for jokes, for humoresque. You cannot go into the ovens of Auschwitz and the mines of Kolyma with a joke. This theme is beyond humor.<sup>658</sup>

Since Solzhenitsyn's letters to Shalamov in the 1960s are not yet published, we do not know if Solzhenitsyn expressed these views in their personal correspondence. However, other works in the Gulag corpus testify to the importance of humor in relating the dehumanizing experience in the camps and would thus contradict Shalamov's perspective.<sup>659</sup> Here, the usage of humor disqualifies Solzhenitsyn as a writer of the camps, and "I" can claim a partial victory for his author once the camp theme, the focus for their rivalry, is removed from further discussion.

Solzhenitsyn yields and directs the confrontation in a different direction: "There's something else on my mind. *I*: What then? About questions of literature you've thus far said something not quite right, even more you've kept mum, tried to escape from the conversation, and approached each threat as a go-getter."<sup>660</sup> He desires to speak seriously with Solzhenitsyn "about literary questions" and Solzhenitsyn justifies himself as an informed interlocutor for this

<sup>656</sup> "То, что его и сажать не за что – и в романах его нет ничего криминального" (7:374).

<sup>657</sup> "*Солженицын* (Закрывая дверь): Я хочу сделать Вам признание. Как на духу. *Я*: Здесь подходящее место для исповеди. Всякая исповедь – тюрьма. И всякая тюрьма – исповедальня. Я – весь внимание" (7:382).

<sup>658</sup> "*Я*: Это Вы написали, что в лагерной тематике есть все возможности для создания комедии, гротеска, бурлеска, юмора – что у шутки нет границ, нет пределов, нет запретных областей. *Солженицын*: Да, я так думаю. После того, как мы поговорили серьезно о лагере – можно и пошутить – ведь во всем есть своя юмористическая, смешная сторона. Всему свое место – и серьезности. *Я*: Совершенно с Вами не согласен. Более того, считаю кощунственным такой взгляд. Это потому, что (Вы) не видели в лагере ничего. Лагерь прошел мимо Вас. Не тема для шутки, для юморески. В печи Освенцима и забой Колымы с шуткой не войдешь. Эта тема вне юмора" (ibid.).

<sup>659</sup> See Gullotta, Andrea. "Gulag Humour: Some Observations on Its History, Evolution, and Contemporary Resonance" in *Punishment as a Crime? Perspectives on Prison Experience in Russian Culture*. Eds. Julie Hansen and Andrei Rogachevskii. Ödeshög, Sweden: Danagård LiТНО АВ, 2014, 89-110.

<sup>660</sup> "Другое у меня на душе. *Я*: Что же? До сих пор по литературным вопросам Вы говорили что-то не то, больше отмалчивались, отделялись от разговора, подходили к каждой угрозе как делец" (ibid.).

purpose because he has studied this craft at official courses in the literary institute. What follows is his defense of his artistic method which centers on his straightforward “canonical” creation of a “canonical Russian hero” that is easily accessible to the reading public:

A primitive arrangement is needed, such primitive means that the thing is understood and widely accessible. That’s my main success. I learned how to represent the canonical Russian hero in the canonical way. <...> And I figured: why risk it and indulge in some kind of literary escapades and a search for form, when I’ve already mastered a reliable manner and a traditional conflict with traditional heroes from the people, from peasants...<sup>661</sup>

The transitory hero does not even engage with Solzhenitsyn’s ideas about literature, but interrupts his defense: “A writer, it seems to me, cannot look at it like that. For a writer, the main innovation is the form, the idea.”<sup>662</sup> Solzhenitsyn is thus disqualified a second time, this time from the larger competition for the title of the greatest Russian writer of the twentieth century. He is, according to the transitory hero, not even a writer. The preoccupation of Solzhenitsyn with the content of a literary work, rather than its form, and his desire to adapt his works to the readers is a compromise that annuls his literary status.

However, the mask of ‘the Nobel laureate Solzhenitsyn’ also contains a glimpse of the author when the confrontation moves from an abstract understanding of the “canonical Russian hero” to how this “new character” relates to the historical context: “*Solzhenitsyn*: <...> The main phenomenon in life has appeared – a new character. I’ll depict it in the canonical way, but won’t neglect it as a type. To some extent, I’ve mainly illustrated. Whatever. I don’t like all these modernisms.”<sup>663</sup> Rather than a contemplation of the heroes in Solzhenitsyn’s works, this comment gestures to the “new type” of character in Shalamov’s late style that is represented in this drama through the mask of the transitory hero. The transitory hero cannot exist beyond the form of the given work in which he appears; in *Evening Discourses*, he is a public mask that protects the private face of the author and allows him to stage a battle with the ‘winners’ of Russian twentieth-century literature. This “new type” of character is dynamic and unreliable in the performance: he hides behind the mask of anybody and his voice comes from anywhere. In the confrontation with Solzhenitsyn, what is at stake is the radically different artistic expression in *Evening Discourses* and how what is supposedly real – the real names of Russian writers – is transfixed and transformed within the form of the drama itself. Form is everything, and in this play the overarching form is confrontations. By entering the cell for a “confession” rather than an “interrogation,” Solzhenitsyn has already lost this competition. He did not comply with the form of the dramatic text and is thus dismissed.

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<sup>661</sup> “Нужен такой примитивный узор, такие примитивные средства, чтобы вещь была понята и широко доступна. Вот главная моя удача. Я научился изображать каноническим способом канонического русского героя. <...> И я рассудил: зачем же рисковать, пускаться в какие-то литературные авантюры, формальные поиски, когда я овладел надежным способом, традиционным конфликтом традиционных героев из народа, из крестьян...” (7:383).

<sup>662</sup> “Писатель, мне кажется, смотреть так не может. Для писателя главное новизна – формы, идеи” (ibid.)

<sup>663</sup> “*Солженицын*: <...> Появилось главное явление в жизни – новый характер. Я его изображу каноническим способом, но не пропущу как тип. В какой-то мере я более иллюстрировал. Пусть. Мне не по душе все эти модернизмы” (ibid.)

## 4. Literature as Catastrophe

There are other *dramatis personae* in the fragments of *Evening Discourses* who are neither included in the lists of characters nor representations of Russian writers. The first role to appear on stage, “I,” is unlisted, as is the warden, who arrives in the cell shortly thereafter. The last scene, “Libido,” features the curious visit of Krushel’nitsky, a mask disguised by a pseudonym. Except for the transitory hero, these characters are not contenders in the competition for Russian literature. Consequently, the function of both the warden and Krushel’nitsky in the drama is ambiguous as well as unexpected. Their presence is catastrophic in that it expands, alters, and ultimately disrupts the seemingly streamlined form of *Evening Discourses*.

The warden joins “I” after the opening monologue; he enters by turning the key and clicking twice with it in the lock – these two clicks repeat each time the warden reenters the cell. This dual sound suggests a doubling of the transitory hero in the warden; thus, the author in *Evening Discourses* wears two masks. With both their faces obscured by masks, the transitory hero and his warden engage in a playful game of who is who in their first encounter. Initially, the transitory hero mistakes the warden for another warden, Adamson, from Shalamov’s first incarceration in Butyrka: “I’m not Adamson at all. I’m but a simple warden. Adamson, like the writer Turgenev (did you read such an author?), doesn’t like talking about the meaning of life, about God, and wouldn’t ask you a question about any dead god. Adamson’s not Nietzsche, not Kierkegaard.”<sup>664</sup> The warden speaks about philosophy with the transitory hero and does so in the formal second person plural; as their identities have not yet become known, there is a distance between them: “Because the hour hasn’t yet not come to speak to you in the informal (option: Because the time hasn’t come yet. Take out the slop bucket!).”<sup>665</sup> The warden will eventually address him as “you” in the informal, and he will also be the only one on stage to acknowledge, or even be aware of, the author’s deafness.

The dialogue between the transitory hero and his warden often emphasize that the difference between them is enforced by their setting, and their different roles, rather than actual: “*Warden*: If there’s no form – there’s no writer. *I*: It is nice to hear this from a prison guard. That’s a big shift in the psychology of staff in penal institutions.”<sup>666</sup> Here the warden echoes what the transitory hero says to Solzhenitsyn, but he is not always such a predictable interlocutor. When the transitory hero attempts to discuss Pasternak’s early prose with him, the warden disappoints: “*Warden*: I understand very little about this. *I*: How?! Do they really not teach you the subject that you’ll judge?”<sup>667</sup> As if to prove that he is qualified for the interrogations of writers, the warden counters a remark “in secret” about the questionable status of Nikolai Gumilev as a “great poet” by saying that Innokenty Annensky is of similar stature and quoting from his poem “Среди миров” [“Among the Worlds”] (1909).<sup>668</sup> This move assures him that the warden will be a worthy accomplice in judging this battle for the future of Russian literature:

<sup>664</sup> “Я вовсе не Адамсон. Я самый простой надзиратель. Адамсон, как и писатель Тургенев (читали такого?), не любит разговоров о смысле жизни, о бже и не мог бы задать Вам вопрос о мертвом бже. Адамсон – не Ницше, не Керкегор [sic]” (7:372).

<sup>665</sup> “Потому что еще не пришел час называть тебя на ты (вариант: Потому что время еще не пришло. Выносите парашу!)” (ibid.).

<sup>666</sup> “*Надзиратель*: Нет формы – нет писателя. *Я*: Приятно слышать такое от тюремного надзирателя. Это большой сдвиг психологии работников пенитенциарных заведений” (7:374).

<sup>667</sup> “*Надзиратель*: Я в этом мало понимаю. *Я*: Как?! Разве вас не учат предмету, о котором вы судите” (ibid.).

<sup>668</sup> “Да, в следующем чекистском поколении принято было цитировать Гумилева и вздыхать. Каждый поэт погибает. Хотя – если сказать Вам по секрету – Гумилев не был таким уж большим поэтом” (7:374-5). [Yes, in the next generation of chekists it was customary to quote Gumilev and sigh. Every poet dies. Although – if I tell you

“There you go. This means you’re an enlightened collaborator.”<sup>669</sup> It seems that it is as important for the transitory hero to establish reciprocity with the warden as it is for him to interrogate and disqualify the other competitors in this prison.

However, one of the doubles is ‘more equal’ than the other. In the beginning of scene two, the warden agrees to a conversation about Dostoevsky on the condition that the transitory hero perceives his mask as representative of a different role:

*Warden:* Just don’t look at me as a warden. Look at me as a member of the Union of Writers or even better of Composers.

*I:* I didn’t even think that your mask, your role, your form – that all of this is the subject of some [kind of] analogy, subtext. I appeal to you as a person and not as a member of the Union of Writers. And this dead god you cannot replace for me.<sup>670</sup>

The warden suggests another form for himself in this prison of Russian literature, yet the transitory hero rejects this proposed change of mask and thus also of function. If the warden could present himself with the mask of a member of the Writers’ Union, he would become one of the competitors. In his role as a double, the rejection has also other implications: even the mask of “a member of the Writers’ Union” as a double to the author – Shalamov became a member shortly after the public denunciation of *Kolyma Tales* in 1972 – could not replace the “dead god” of this membership for him. Additionally, if the warden can propose a swift change of masks, the masks represented on stage are not static. By rejecting the warden’s suggestion, the transitory hero asserts himself as the authority in the play. It is the man also under arrest in a cell who rules this prison, since the double with the keys is not the double in charge of letting anybody out.

In the last scene of the published version of the manuscript, “Libido,” the warden announces an unexpected visitor. In walks a character who, unlike the writers, is disguised by a pseudonym: “*Warden* unlocks the door with a double turn of the key and *Krushel’nitsky*, smiling, squeezes into the cell wearing a white hospital gown, beaming in anticipation of the meeting.”<sup>671</sup> Esipov argues that the prototype for *Krushel’nitsky* is the literary critic and Korolenko scholar Aleksandr Khrabrovitsky;<sup>672</sup> indeed, some aspects of *Krushel’nitsky* in *Evening Discourses* have parallels in the life of Khrabrovitsky. According to Khrabrovitsky’s memoirs, he first read *Kolyma Tales* in 1966 and began visiting Shalamov in his home shortly thereafter. He tried to understand Shalamov’s “world view” but received the answer: “‘Yeah I don’t have any,’ he answered

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in secret – Gumilev was not such a great poet. *Warden:* Nor was Annensky: “Among the worlds, in the twinkling of stars...”]

<sup>669</sup> “Вот-вот. Значит и Вы – просвещенный сотрудник” (7:375).

<sup>670</sup> “Только не смотрите на меня как на надзирателя. Смотрите на меня как на члена Союза Писателей или еще лучше Композиторов. Я: Я вовсе и не думал, что Ваша маска, Ваша роль, Ваша форма – все это предмет какой[-нибудь] аналогии, подтекста. Я обращаюсь к Вам, как человеку, а не как к члену Союза Писателей. И мертвого бога Вы заменить мне не можете” (ibid.).

<sup>671</sup> “*Надзиратель* отпирает дверь двойным поворотом ключа и в камеру, улыбаясь, втискивается *Крушельницкий* в белом больничном халате, сияя от предстоящего свидания” (7:387).

<sup>672</sup> “Кто является прототипом Крушельницкого, следует сказать, чтобы избежать кривотолков, и сразу же заметить, что он – литературовед, исследователь В. Г. Короленко А. В. Храбровицкий – отнюдь не был ни провокатором, ни стукачом. Шаламов его знал давно, но с определенного момента невзлюбил и, поддавшись слухам, вероятно, стал подозревать в указанном грехе.” [“In order to avoid misunderstanding, I should at once note that he is the literary critic and researcher of V. G. Korolenko A. V. Khrabrovitsky – who was by no means an agent provocateur or a snitch. Shalamov had known him for a long time, but at a certain moment took a dislike toward him, succumbing to rumors and probably beginning to suspect him guilty of this particular sin.] Esipov, Valerii. “Dva geniia v odnom eshelone (V. T. Shalamov i Yu. G. Oksman)” in *Znamia* 2014, № 6: 183-97.

laughing.”<sup>673</sup> His evaluation of Shalamov is negative; he claims that he was “an unkind person” because he refused to tell one of their acquaintances, also a camp survivor, where he got his hearing aid and once cursed at him for praising Solzhenitsyn.<sup>674</sup> In the late 1960s, Khrabrovitsky helped Solzhenitsyn gather materials for *The Gulag Archipelago*; Shalamov rejected co-authorship with Solzhenitsyn on this work and in 1968, through Khrabrovitsky, prohibited Solzhenitsyn from using his texts.<sup>675</sup> Khrabrovitsky stopped visiting Shalamov in 1969, after Shalamov cursed at him because of Solzhenitsyn, but broke with him completely after the 1972 letter. Evidently, Khrabrovitsky thought that Shalamov himself participated in the circulation of *Kolyma Tales* abroad.<sup>676</sup> The two met coincidentally for the last time in 1979 when Khrabrovitsky visited an acquaintance in a nursing home who happened to share a room there with Shalamov: “When I asked if he remembered me, he replied that I in his life was a plus. Because I did not immediately understand his illegible speech, he took pen and paper from me and drew a ‘+.’”<sup>677</sup> However, in 1972, Khrabrovitsky seems to have been a ‘minus’ rather than a ‘plus’ in Shalamov’s life and he called him “an informant and asnitich.”<sup>678</sup> The accusation of Khrabrovitsky as an informer for

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<sup>673</sup> “Я познакомился с Шаламовым и бывал в его крошечной комнате коммунальной квартиры на Хорошевском шоссе, 10; он бывал у меня. Он был образованным человеком, читал книги по истории и философии, но я не мог уловить его взглядов. Однажды я прямо сказал ему, что не понимаю, какое у него мировоззрение. ‘Да никакого нет,’ – ответил он со смехом.” [I got to know Shalamov and visited his tiny room in the communal apartment on Khoroshevskoye Highway 10; he visited me. He was an educated man, he read books on history and philosophy, but I couldn’t get his views. I once told him straight out that I don’t understand what his worldview is. “Yeah I don’t have any,” he answered laughing.] Khrabrovitskii, A. V. *Ocherk moei zhizni. Dnevnik. Vstrechi*. Moskva: NLO, 2012, 208.

<sup>674</sup> “Человек он был недобрый. Одна моя знакомая, тоже бывшая лагерница, с которой я познакомил его, просила сообщить, где заказать слуховой прибор, такой, как у него; он не выполнил элементарной просьбы. Затем его мучила зависть, особенно к Солженицыну, которого он порочил (‘живет на подачки’); однажды обругал меня матерно за то, что я хвалил Солженицына.” [He was an unkind person. An acquaintance of mine, also a former camp inmate, to whom I introduced him to, inquired about where to order such a hearing device as his; he did not fulfill this elementary request. Then he was tormented by envy, especially toward Solzhenitsyn, whom he had defamed (‘he lives on handouts’); me he cursed at me with obscenities for praising Solzhenitsyn.] Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> “Через Храбровицкого сообщил Солженицыну, что я не разрешаю использовать ни один факт из моих работ для его работ. С – неподходящий человек для этого” (5:302). [Through Khrabrovitsky I informed Solzhenitsyn that I do not authorize the use of a single fact from my works for his work. (Solzhenitsyn) is an unsuitable person for that].

<sup>676</sup> “После смерти Шаламова (он умер в Москве 17 января 1982 года, на 75-м году жизни) выяснилось, что это была неправда. 18 декабря 1982 года слушал по ‘Голосу Америки’ в передаче ‘Из мира книг’ выступление редактора нью-йоркского ‘Нового журнала’ Романа Гуля. Вот моя запись этого выступления: ‘Роман Гуль сказал, что он получил рукопись “Колымских рассказов” Шаламова объемом в 600 страниц от американского профессора-слависта, которому вручил ее в Москве для публикации в “Новом журнале” сам Шаламов. На вопрос профессора: “Вы не боитесь?” – Шаламов ответил: “Мы устали бояться”.’” [After Shalamov’s death (he died in Moscow on January 17, 1982, at the age of 75), it turned out that it wasn’t true. On December 18, 1982, I listened to the *Voice of America* program “From the World of Books” with the editor of New York’s *Novy zhurnal*, Roman Gul’. Here are my notes for this speech: “Roman Gul’ said that he received a 600-page manuscript with Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales* from an American Slavic professor, who had been given it by Shalamov himself for publication in *Novy zhurnal*. To the professor’s question: “Aren’t you afraid?” – Shalamov replied: “We’re tired of being afraid.”] Khrabrovitskii, *Ocherk moei zhizni*, 209.

<sup>677</sup> “На мой вопрос, помнит ли он меня, он ответил, что я в его жизни плюс. Так как я не сразу понял его неразборчивую речь, он взял у меня ручку и бумагу и нарисовал ‘+.’” Ibid., 210.

<sup>678</sup> From Shalamov’s unfinished essay “В дебрях ‘Советского писателя’” [“In the Jungle of ‘the Soviet Writer’”] (1972): “Осведомитель и стукач Храбровицкий, работавший там редактором в отделе прозы, уверял, что даже получение гонорара за рецензию требовало отчисления в виде бутылки коньяка или ужина в ресторане за счет автора книги прозы, рецензента или автора стихотворений. Возможно, что это все – выдумка такого известного сплетника, как Храбровицкий, ибо за стихи дополнительного налога с меня не

the KGB was common in certain circles in the 1970s, and recent scholarship argues that such allegations were false.<sup>679</sup> Some sources suggest that Khrabrovitsky participated in the circulation of Shalamov's texts abroad,<sup>680</sup> and perhaps he suspected him of this when writing *Evening Discourses*.

Nonetheless, the mask of Krushel'nitsky is a dramatic abstraction rather than a personal attack. A personal attack by Shalamov on Khrabrovitsky because of his lost 'libido' would have been repulsive because of the personal catastrophe in Khrabrovitsky's life: his first wife, in fits of madness, killed three of their five children.<sup>681</sup> Khrabrovitsky never fully recovered from this trauma, although he eventually re-married (the granddaughter of Korolenko, his scholarly interest), and would supposedly tell people: "...I hacked my own children to death..."<sup>682</sup> Whether or not Shalamov knew about this family tragedy is unclear; Krushel'nitsky suffers from impotence because of a literary situation and is only partially a representation of Khrabrovitsky.

Although dressed in a white robe, the mysterious visitor is not disguised as a doctor in the final scene of *Evening Discourses*. He declares that he must discuss a delicate affair with the transitory hero. True to the prison setting of the play, he repeats the rumor that Krushel'nitsky was arrested and interrogated: "But they said that you were arrested and interrogated for a month. *Krushel'nitsky*: That's slander, the slander of Oksman. I left for a month to Leningrad. To take some rest. You understand."<sup>683</sup> "The slander of Oksman" here refers to the literary scholar Yulian Oksman, who was sent to Kolyma in 1937 on the same train as Shalamov, and who in

снямали" (7:418). [The informant and snitch Khrabrovitsky, who worked there as an editor in the department of prose, claimed that even getting royalties for a review required a contribution in the form of a bottle of cognac or a dinner in a restaurant paid for by the author of a prose book, the reviewer, or by the author of poems. It is possible that all of this was fabrication by the famous gossip Khrabrovitsky since they never charged me an additional tax for poems.]

<sup>679</sup> Shikman, Anatolii. "K istorii odnoi klevety" in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 2012, №118, 419-22.

<sup>680</sup> From Sergei Solov'ev's interview with Evgenii Pasternak: "[Solov'ev]: Знаете ли Вы о том, кто передал рассказы Шаламова за рубеж? Первый переводчик Шаламова на английский – Джон Глэд – утверждает, что это был Кларенс Браун, но известны несколько претендентов на эту роль... В архиве есть намеки на участие в этом процессе А. В. Храбровицкого... [E. Pasternak]: Кларенс Браун – вполне возможно... Кларенс Браун вывез наследие Мандельштама, мне хорошо известна вообще история с передачей чемоданчика рукописей, я ее наблюдал. Было несколько человек, которые в этом участвовали. А Храбровицкого я знал совсем немного, помню только, что Шаламов отзывался о нем как о человеке, преодолевшем страх." [(Solov'ev): Do you know about who handed over Shalamov's short stories abroad? The first translator of Shalamov to English – John Glad – claims that it was Clarence Brown, but several possible actors for this role are known... In the archive, there are hints A. V. Khrabrovitsky's participation in this process... (E. Pasternak): Clarence Brown – it's quite possible... Clarence Brown removed the heritage of Mandel'shtam (from the Soviet Union), I know the story of the transfer of the suitcase with manuscripts, I saw it myself. There were several people who participated in this. And I knew Khrabrovitsky very little, I remember only that Shalamov spoke of him as a man who overcame fear.] Pasternak, Evgenii. "Shalamov byl veren Pasternaku," <http://shalamov.ru/memory/187/> (full version of 2012 interview).

<sup>681</sup> In 1949, when Khrabrovitsky was living in Penza, his wife attacked their three living children, killing one (the ten year old son) and later confessing to having previously starved their two infants to death. He writes about this trauma briefly and in a rather incoherent manner in his memoirs: Khrabrovitskii, *Ocherk moei zhizni*, 60-1.

<sup>682</sup> "Он мне сказал: 'Вы француз, за то, что общаетесь с великим русским писателем, сядете здесь в тюрьму. Я был в концлагерях, я зарубил топором своих детей, я служу в органах, знаю, что говорю.'" [(Khrabrovitsky) told me: "You're a Frenchman, because you're spending time with a great Russian writer you'll go to prison here. I was in the concentration camps, I hacked my own children to death, I serve the authorities, I know of what I speak."] Rene Guerra, "Kak ia okazalsia baranom s piatiu nogami." Beseda s khudozhnitsei i iskusstvovedom M. Koldobskoi," in *Novoe vremia* (1999, No. 49). Cited in Shikman, "K istorii."

<sup>683</sup> "А говорили, что Вас арестовали, месяц допрашивали. *Крушельницкий*: Клевета, Оксмановская клевета. Я уезжал на месяц в Ленинград. Отдохнуть. Понимаете" (7:388).



the 1960s was one of the first to openly name the informers of the Stalin era among the currently living intelligentsia. He published these names abroad with the help of Gleb Struve in Berkeley, California.<sup>684</sup> It seems that Krushel'nitsky attempts to remove his name from such a list; however, this is not the delicate affair he has come to the cell to discuss:

But now I do not have an archival question, but the most palpating question, even if also underground and secret, which is more about medicine than about politics. Rather it concerns medicine and politics simultaneously. That's why I want to consult with you specifically. With your qualifications, your comprehensive explicit experience, you can diagnose better than all the doctors of the past, present, and future.<sup>685</sup>

The question he wishes to discuss is of medical as well as of political nature, and since he turns to the transitory hero within a prison setting as a metaphor for literature we can assume that the question also has literary dimensions. Yet the transitory hero's impromptu interpretation is as surprising as it is scandalous: "Pornographic cards. Are you selling these, the secret cards of the Parisian editions? *Krushel'nitsky*: No, not pornographic cards. But thereabouts. Let's close the door and switch to a half-whisper."<sup>686</sup> In his first whisper behind closed doors, Krushel'nitsky asks if the two of them can speak "as a man with a man" and their dialogue assumes homoerotic overtones. He then confesses that the reason why he is here is because he has lost his sex drive and has been suffering from this disability for an entire month. The reaction he receives from the transitory hero is as sudden and as it is striking: "Do you feel like as though you've been taken through the anus?"<sup>687</sup> Krushel'nitsky agrees to this comparison and is referred by the transitory hero to Solzhenitsyn as an expert on the consequences of anal sex: "You should approach your acquaintance Solzhenitsyn about libido. He wrote an entire novel, wherein he at length explores this question in such a situation."<sup>688</sup>

The reference to Solzhenitsyn (and not to Bunin or Pasternak) in "Libido" could allude to the loss of "libido" for Kostoglotov due to hormone treatment in Solzhenitsyn's novel *Раковый корпус* [*The Cancer Ward*] (1966). Despite his loss of virility – and quite within the tradition of the nineteenth-century Russian novelistic hero – the female characters still desire Kostoglotov, which Shalamov presumably found unlikely. Additionally, the reference to being the passive partner in homosexual intercourse infers a lack of masculinity in both Solzhenitsyn and Krushel'nitsky. It seems important that the transitory hero cannot give Krushel'nitsky more detailed advice, as this implies that he lacks personal experience with this and, therefore, his masculinity remains intact. Instead, the transitory hero asserts that such ailments were quite frequent in Butyrka prison of the past: the sexual urges of those under arrest were suppressed and they suffered a similarly sore anus, yet he claims to have been able to cure it. The visit by Krushel'nitsky to his cell concludes

<sup>684</sup> See Esipov, "Dva geniia v odnom eshelone."

<sup>685</sup> "Но сейчас у меня не архивный вопрос, а самый животрепещущий, если и подпольный, секретный, то больше касается медицины, чем политики. Вернее касается и медицины, и политики одновременно. Вот почему я хочу посоветоваться именно с Вами. При Вашей квалификации, Вашем всестороннем специфическом опыте Вы можете поставить диагноз полнее всех врачей прошлого, настоящего и будущего" (ibid.).

<sup>686</sup> "Порнографические карточки. Вы что ли продаете, секретные карточки парижских изданий? *Крушельницкий*: Нет, не порнографические карточки. Но в этом роде. Закроем-ка дверь и перейдем на полупшепот" (ibid.).

<sup>687</sup> "Чувствуете как будто Вас употребили в задний проход?" (ibid.).

<sup>688</sup> "Вы бы по поводу либидо обратились к Вашему знакомому Солженицыну. Он написал целый роман, где подробно исследует этот вопрос в сходной ситуации" (ibid.).

with a word of encouragement from the transitory hero, that his libido must return because the archive of Korolenko has not yet been completely investigated. The visitor takes his leave with relief: “*Krushel’nitsky*: Well, thank you for supporting me so much, you’ve understood my body and soul. *I*: Well, we’re mainly talking about the body here.”<sup>689</sup> It is thus the body, rather than the soul, of *Krushel’nitsky* that the transitory hero has tended to successfully in this scene.

At a first glance, the reference to anal intercourse and a disabled sex drive as its consequence seems out of place in this play as well as in a work by Shalamov. One explanation could be the setting of *Evening Discourses* – prison – where the only physical intimacy possible is between two same-sex partners. Although *Krushel’nitsky*’s request for an intimate dialogue “man to man” is not displaced – all scenes are conversations between men (the scene with Akhmatova would radically alter this masculine performance) – the visit by a character, who is neither a writer nor a contestant, upsets the hitherto confrontational and competitive trajectory of the play. His mask of a literary scholar introduces the idea that the catastrophic state of contemporary Russian literature has spread also to its criticism. Perhaps this is an implicit reference to the literary critic and party functional Mikhail Khrapchenko who became a laureate of the Lenin Prize in 1974 when no writers were awarded this prestige.

Even though the final scene appears disconnected from *Evening Discourses*, and it may even have been intended as an independent fragment, it can nevertheless be read within the incomplete ‘whole’ of the published text. The transitory hero previously reproached the late style Bunin for his “senile eroticism” in “Clean Monday” and “Libido” shows the audience that the late style Shalamov can succumb to comparable lapses of (homo)eroticism, although primarily in a sarcastic manner. Finally, the sore sensation in *Krushel’nitsky*’s anus can also be connected to the intertext of *The Frogs* in the play; this Greek comedy abounds in similar homoerotic conversations “man to man” where the ass as well as the anus inspires humorous situations. *Evening Discourses*, unlike much of Shalamov’s works, is often humoristic in its tone, and perhaps “Libido” should be read as a comical scene.

Yet the overall impression of Russian literary tradition in *Evening Discourses* is not comical but catastrophic: contemporary literature is in the catastrophic space of the prison; the late Bunin is a personal catastrophe for Shalamov; the late Pasternak is a catastrophe for Russian literature; and Solzhenitsyn is a catastrophe for both the method of Socialist Realism and the Nobel Prize as a literary institution. The text itself is a catastrophe: incomplete, often incoherent, and with several scenes and masks which seem out of place in the dramatic narrative. In this chapter, I have attempted to reconstruct a ‘whole’ from the sometimes incompatible fragments. This has in many ways been an unmanageable task and it seems that the best description of Shalamov’s last longer work might echo the interpretation by Said of Adorno’s Beethoven:

The catastrophe represented by late style for Adorno is that in Beethoven’s case the music is episodic, fragmentary, riven with the absences and silences that can neither be filled by supplying some general scheme for them, nor be diminished by saying “poor Beethoven, he was deaf, he was approaching death, these are lapses we shall overlook.”<sup>690</sup>

*Evening Discourses* could be dismissed as a difficult and disjointed expression of “poor Shalamov” who suffered deafness and blindness while writing this his last play in near unintelligible

<sup>689</sup> “*Крушельницкий*: Ну, спасибо, что Вы меня так поддерживали, поняли мое тело и душу. *Я*: Ну, тут главным образом речь идет на счет тела” (7:390).

<sup>690</sup> Said, *On Late Style*, 16.

handwriting. Strikingly and strangely different from his previous works, the play becomes an aesthetic catastrophe that simultaneously overturns and devastates the image of Shalamov as a professional writer known primarily for his prose about the camp experience. If this manuscript had never been found, it would neither have been missed nor could its contents have been inferred from his other texts. Yet this surprising work is not a “lapse” that we must “overlook”; on the contrary, it can tell us about what type of writer he saw himself as: the true winner of Russian twentieth-century literature and unabashedly superior to those with official prizes.

It is unexpected and startling to observe Shalamov’s otherwise thematically consistent oeuvre culminate in this catastrophic work that uses a public forum, the form of a theatrical performance, to stage what is a most private battle – his attempt to defeat his competitors in contemporary literature. But is it a public form of a private battle? The handwritten manuscript with its many impenetrable scenes suggests that *Evening Discourses* is rather a private performance of a public confrontation and that it is more concerned with his personal recuperation of his private face through his public mask. The catastrophe, which the play attempts to overcome, is contemporary literature *without* Shalamov. And so, the existence of his last play declares an alternative outcome for the competition it stages: it is not he who wins contemporary Russian literature but the future of Russian literature that wins Shalamov.

### Coda

In “Yakov Ovseevich Zavodnik,” written between 1970 and 1971 and included in *The Glove or KT-2*, Shalamov discusses why he opted to write poetry instead of prose when he was finally able to write again in 1949 while still in Kolyma:

The territory of Kolyma was too dangerous for prose; it was possible to risk it with poetry but not with a prose note. This was the main reason why I wrote only poetry in Kolyma. True, I had also another example – Thomas Hardy, an English writer who wrote only poetry for the last ten years of his life and answered the questions of reporters by saying that he was troubled by the fate of Galileo. If Galileo had written his texts in poetry, he wouldn’t have had any trouble with the church. I didn’t want to take this Galilean risk, although, of course, not for reasons associated with literary and historical tradition, but rather it was simply my prisoner’s intuition that told me what’s good and what’s bad, where it’s warm and where it’s cold when playing hide-and-seek with destiny.<sup>691</sup>

Kolyma was “too dangerous” for prose but Shalamov also refers to the example of the late Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and his fear of Galileo’s fate: “If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the inquisition might have let him alone.”<sup>692</sup> When Shalamov wrote “Yakov Ovseevich Zavodnik” in the early 1970s after almost two decades of struggling against censorship for the publication of his literary truth in the Soviet Union, he too might have had reason to fear the same cataclysmic fate. Galileo was indeed often on his mind during his late style: he saw Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* at the Taganka in 1968 and would use this theatrical event as an intertext in his last play *Evening Discourses* a few years later. Although he had not yet abandoned prose in favor of poetry, Shalamov would eventually follow Hardy’s example and more or less stop writing prose after 1973. His last works were poems.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> “Для прозы территория Колымы была слишком опасна, рисковать можно было стихами, а не прозаической записью. Вот главная причина, почему я писал на Колыме только стихи. Правда, у меня был и другой пример – Томаса Гарди, английского писателя, который последние десять лет жизни писал только стихи, а на вопросы репортеров отвечал, что его тревожит судьба Галилея. Если бы Галилей писал стихами, у него бы не было неприятностей с церковью. Я на этот галилеевский риск идти не хотел, хотя, разумеется, не по соображениям литературной и исторической традиции, а просто арестантское чутье мне говорило, что хорошо, что плохо, где тепло, где холодно при игре в жмурки с судьбой” (2:390).

<sup>692</sup> From Hardy’s notes on October 17 1896: “Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystalized opinion – hard as rock – which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel – which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries – will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing... If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone.” Hardy, Florence E. *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*. New York: The Macmillan Co, 1930, 57-8.

<sup>693</sup> Sirovinskaya writes: “Я ценила его прозу больше, чем его стихи, и это его очень обижало. А мне тяжело было слышать в 70-е годы, когда он говорил изредка: ‘Да что рассказы – нет в них ничего особенного.’ Его творческий поток в эти годы как-то переместился в стихи, а стихи все реже, как мне казалось, сохраняли крепость настоящей поэзии. Он пытался писать и стихи ‘на случай.’ Это не получалось, т. е. получалось плохо. Я, конечно, ничего не говорила ему, но он это чувствовал. Проза все иссякала, иссякала. После 1973 года он писал прозы совсем мало” (7:15). [I appreciated his prose more than his poems and this greatly offended him. And it was hard for me to hear in the 1970s, when he’d occasionally say: “What’s the fuss with these short stories – there’s nothing special in them.” His creative flow in those years somehow moved toward poetry, and his

In the light of the final eight years of Shalamov's life during which he mainly composed poetry (his last poems are dated 1981), it might seem unexpected that I have chosen to focus exclusively on his prose and dramaturgy in this dissertation. However, I believe that his late poetry was not representative of a specific late poetic style, but that poetry was simply the mode of expression for his last style. The distinction between a *late* work and a *last* work seems helpful here: whereas a *last* work is a work after which nothing else was composed, a *late* work is a work that is sudden, striking, suddenly different and strikingly different. Shalamov's last poems of the 1970s and early 1980s appear to belong to the first type: they continue, rather than trouble or disrupt, his poetic legacy and, were they left undated, would be difficult to place on a timeline as written simultaneously with his late experiments in prose, such as *Vishera* and *The Glove or KT-2*, or the calamitous *Evening Discourses*.

In Shalamov's late works, he is conscious about lateness as a category in art as well as self-conscious about being late himself. The paragraph quoted above from "Yakov Ovseevich Zavodnik" gestures to an awareness of his belated position, both in his return to literature after two decades in the camps and in his return to events in 1949 while writing in the 1970s. His late style is often premeditated and self-referential in this way: in *Evening Discourses*, he mocks the late styles of Bunin and Pasternak as a warning to both Russian literary tradition and to himself to not let his works suffer the same unfortunate senility or post-factum revision. Perhaps he subsequently took his own advice and thus safeguarded his legacy from such potential aesthetic embarrassment.

The end of Shalamov's late style – his deliberate recourse to poetry – appears to mirror the beginning of his late style in "On Prose." In his literary manifesto, he acknowledged his marginal position in the contemporaneous cultural context while simultaneously inventing a new center for the future of literary representation. His liberation of 'new prose' from the Russian literary tradition of the past was also informed by a self-conscious and self-referential approach to the craft of literature and the role of the professional writer. As his movement-of-one was shaped by a frustration with everything surrounding the first four cycles of *Kolyma Tales* – the prohibition in official Soviet literature and the reception as well as the interpretation of them in *samizdat* and *tamizdat* – so his abstinence from prose toward the end of the 1970s stemmed from a conscious choice to protect himself from being misunderstood.

However, this exodus from prose was not entirely a choice for Shalamov. During the last decade of his life, it became increasingly strenuous for him to physically produce longer prose narratives: although he could still write while suffering from progressive deafness from 1957 and onward, Ménière's disease eventually caused him to lose coordination and he could no longer control his hand, leaving his handwriting near unreadable. He started to become blind toward the second half of the 1970s and this forced him to dictate his last poems from 1979 to 1981.

Shalamov's increasing disabilities and the ways in which they limited his creative ability were partially responsible for what can be said to be the main distinguishing traits of the works written during his late style: the majority of them are incomplete, unfinished, and fragmentary. The only complete work of this late period is *The Resurrection of the Larch*, which he thought would become his "last book." In a sense, the fifth cycle of *Kolyma Tales* is indeed his "last book" and thus also a borderline text for any conceptualization of his late style: the works he wrote after it are neither books nor "last" but thoroughly "late." *The Fourth Vologda*, his childhood narrative,

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poems less and less, as it seemed to me, preserved the strength of real poetry. He even tried to write poems "on the occasion." This didn't work, that is, they turned out bad. Of course, I didn't say anything to him, but he felt it. His prose kept drying up, drying up. After 1973, he wrote very little prose.]

seems at first to be a complete text; yet it surrenders its structure into conventionally sized chapters after 50 pages and the final twelfth chapter lasts for almost 100 pages. He never finished *Vishera*, even though he had plans to do so in 1971. As a contrast, he might have intended to leave *The Glove or KT-2*, the sixth cycle of *Kolyma Tales*, unfinished – perhaps because he deemed the aesthetic effect of the incomplete better capable of representing the experience and perspective of the goner than an artistically immaculate closure. This strategy appears not to be applicable to *Evening Discourses*, the manuscript of which bares the distinct traces of abandonment, and neither to the other prose texts written during his late style but not analyzed in this dissertation: the biography *Fyodor Raskol'nikov* and the autobiographical text *About Kolyma*.

We may never know why he abandoned these texts, but another difficult aspect of Shalamov's life in the 1970s can somewhat explain this accumulation of unfinished works: exiled from Soviet literature due to censorship and in a self-appointed exile from Russian literature in *samizdat* as well as *tamizdat*, he lacked a contemporary reader. Without a reader, or any kind of circulation, waiting for his texts upon their completion, he might simply not have had the motivation to finish them. As a contrast, he was still compiling some of his poems into poetry collections at the same time, most likely because he could continuously publish them in the Soviet Union. Moreover, many of his poems appeared in periodicals and thick literary journals regularly, thus encouraging him to sustain and entertain the contemporary reader of his poetry.

Shalamov did not have a similar contemporary reader for his prose. In lieu of a reader, his late style works often search for an addressee – for someone to whom they can direct themselves as an 'I' to a 'you.' Although he had little access to real-life reader response, his transitory hero pursues communication with an elusive yet ever so necessary 'you.' Shalamov dedicated *The Revival of the Larch* to Sirotinskaya, but would eventually distance himself even from the person who had been the first-reader of his texts for many years. Some of the short stories in this cycle are about real-life individuals and thus directed to them; albeit a well-intended narrative strategy, these texts were not well-received by their 'characters' or those who were relatives of these 'characters.' On the contrary, and perhaps as a reaction to this failed experiment, several short stories in *The Glove or KT-2* contain an ambiguous 'you' who becomes the impossible reader: the one who will never read and who will never come to understand because of this. *The Fourth Vologda* turns to Shalamov's mother in a similar way; as she passed away almost forty years before, she will never read it. *Vishera* looks for the 'you' in his earlier self before both *Kolyma* and *Kolyma Tales* yet cannot fully separate itself from the 'I' of the late author. The transitory hero of *Evening Discourses* speaks to each Russian writer with a Nobel Prize in the informal as 'you' ("на ты") yet the warden initially addresses him in the formal ("на вы"). This emphasizes his difference: one of these Russian writers is not like the others.

Shalamov was different from the four Russian Nobel laureates and his last period seems to distance him further from his compatriots and contemporaries as both a writer and an individual. His late style coincides with the late style of the Soviet Union. His late work is to his own death what his life and work are to the death of the Soviet Union. Indeed, his three periods suggested by me in this dissertation roughly coincide with the Soviet Union's youth, maturity, and old age (1965-85). Therefore, it seems fitting that descriptions of his late style evoke descriptions of the "period of stagnation" (as both stagnant and intense, agony and culmination). In this way, the Soviet Union lasted one human lifetime – Shalamov's lifetime.

In sum, by detecting and constructing a distinct late style for Shalamov and his works, we allow him to break finally the bonds of Russian literature, in which scholarship on late style as of yet is uncommon. In this same subversive move, which intentionally mirrors the discourse of his manifesto, he becomes firmly situated in his rightful place within the larger historical and cultural

continuum of modernism.<sup>694</sup> And if his late works were interpreted as belated or ill-timed in the Soviet context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Shalamov's late style appears to be timely in 2017: the number of studies devoted to late style almost doubled between 2015 (65) and 2016 (110). His late texts may now be read as not simply unfinished and difficult, but also as creative responses within a greater aesthetic dialogue.

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<sup>694</sup> "Modernism as margarine is only one of the many thematic, theoretical, and stylistic inflections that are suggested by understanding the term 'late modernism' as tautological, where lateness is viewed as always already a constituent element of modernism." Hutchinson, *Lateness*, 20.

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**Appendix:** Chronological List of Shalamov's Works (Prose, Dramaturgy, Memoiristic Texts)

Note that texts from the six cycles of *Kolyma Tales* are designated the following colors (if a text was written during more than one year it is assigned to the year it was finished):

1. *Kolyma Tales* (blue; *KT*)
2. *The Left Bank* (green; *LB*)
3. *An Artist of the Spade* (orange; *AS*)
4. *Sketches of the Criminal World* (dark blue; *CW*)
5. *The Resurrection of the Larch* (red; *RL*)
6. *The Glove or KT-2* (purple; *KT-2*)

**1930s**

- “Ганс” [“Hans”] (1930s)  
 “Три смерти доктора Аустино” [“The Three Deaths of Doctor Austino”] (1930s)  
 “Возвращение” [“The Return”] (1930s)  
 “Господин Бержере в больнице” [“Mister Berzhere in the Hospital”] (1930s)  
 “Пава и дерево” [“The Peahen and the Tree”] (1930s)  
 “Маяковский разговаривает с читателем” [“Mayakovsky Speaks with the Reader”] (1930s)  
 “На заводе” [“In the Factory”] (1930s)  
 “Вторая рапсодия Листа” (1930s)  
 “Карта” [“The Map”] (1930s)  
 “В зеркале” [“In the Mirror”] (1930s)

**1954**

- “Ночью” [“At Night”] (1954)  
 “Плотники” [“Carpenters”] (1954)  
 “Апостол Павел” [“Apostle Paul”] (1954)  
 “Заклинатель змей” [“The Snake Charmer”] (1954)

**1955**

- “Одиночный замер” [“Individual Measurement”] (1955)  
 “Татарский мулла и чистый воздух” [“The Tatar Mullah and Clean Air”] (1955)  
 “В бане” [“In the Bathhouse”] (1955)

**1956**

- “По снегу” [“Along the Snow”] (1956)  
 “На представку” [“On Tick”] (1956)  
 “Кант” [“Kant”] (1956)  
 “Инжектор” [“The Injector”] (1956)  
 “Сгущенное молоко” [“Condensed Milk”] (1956)  
 “Хлеб” [“Bread”] (1956)  
 “Первая смерть” [“The First Death”] (1956)  
 “Геркулес” [“Hercules”] (1956)  
 “Шоковая терапия” [“Shock Therapy”] (1956)  
 “Медведи” [“The Bears”] (1956)  
 “Букинист” [“The Bibliopole”] (1956)

**1957****1958**

- “Дождь” [“Rain”] (1958)
- “Шерри-бренди” [“Cherry Brandy”] (1958)
- “Тетя Поля” [“Aunt Polya”] (1958)
- “Васька Денисов, похититель свиней” [“Vas’ka Denisov, Kidnapper of Pigs”] (1958)

**1959**

- “Сухим пайком” [“Dry Rations”] (1959)
- “Ягоды” [“Berries”] (1959)
- “Сука Тамара” [“The Bitch Tamara”] (1959)
- “Детские картинки” [“Children’s Drawings”] (1959)
- “Серафим” [“Seraphim”] (1959)
- “Выходной день” [“A Day Off”] (1959)
- “Домино” [“Dominoes”] (1959)
- “Красный крест” [“The Red Cross”] (1959)
- “Тифозный карантин” [“Typhoid Quarantine”] (1959)
- “Алмазная карта” [“The Diamond Map”] (1959)
- “«Комбеды»” [“Committees for the Poor”] (1959)
- “Последний бой майора Пугачева” [“Major Pugachev’s Last Battle”] (1959)
- “Крест” [“The Cross”] (1959)
- “Июнь” [“June”] (1959)
- “Май” [“May”] (1959)
- “Ключ Алмазный” [“The Diamond Spring”] (1959)
- “Зелёный прокурор” [“The Green Prosecutor”] (1959)
- “Эхо в горах” [“Echo in the Mountains”] (1959)
- “Берды Онже” [“Berdy Onzhe”] (1959)
- “Об одной ошибке художественной литературы” [“About One Mistake of Fictional Literature”] (1959)
- “Жульническая кровь” [“Rogue Blood”] (1959)
- “Женщина блатного мира” [“The Woman of the Criminal World”] (1959)
- “Тюремная пайка” [“Prison Rations”] (1959)
- “«Сучьа» война” [“The ‘Bitch’ War”] (1959)
- “Аполлон среди блатных” [“Apollo among Thieves”] (1959)
- “Как «тискают романы»” [“How Novels Are ‘Squeezed’”] (1959)

**1960**

- “Посылка” [“The Package”] (1960)
- “Галстук” [“The Necktie”] (1960)
- “Стланик” [“The Dwarf Cedar”] (1960)
- “Аневризма аорты” [“Aortic Aneurysm”] (1960)
- “Мой процесс” [“My Trial”] (1960)
- “Припадок” [“The Seizure”] (1960)
- “Надгробное слово” [“Eulogy”] (1960)
- “Курсы” [“Courses”] (1960)

**1961**

“Тайга золотая” [“The Golden Taiga”] (1961)

“Академик” [“The Academic”] (1961)

*Моя жизнь: Несколько моих жизней* [*My Life: A Few of My Lives*] (1961)

**1962**

“Заговор юристов” [“The Lawyers’ Plot”] (1962)

“Иван Федорович” [“Ivan Fedorovich”] (1962)

“Потомок декабриста” [“Descendant of a Decembrist”] (1962)

“Бизнесмен” [“The Businessman”] (1962)

“Калигула” [“Caligula”] (1962)

“Человек с парохода” [“The Man from the Steamship”] (1962)

**1963**

“Прокаженные” [“Lepers”] (1963)

“Необращенный” [“The Unconverted”] (1963)

“Утка” [“The Duck”] (1963)

“Уроки любви” [“Love Lessons”] (1963)

“Подполковник медицинской службы” [“Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Service”] (1963)

**1964**

“Лучшая похвала” [“The Best Praise”] (1964)

“Магия” [“Magic”] (1964)

“Кусок мяса” [“A Piece of Meat”] (1964)

“Начальник больницы” [“Head of the Hospital”] (1964)

“Как это началось” [“How It Began”] (1964)

“Почерк” [“Handwriting”] (1964)

“Артист лопаты” [“An Artist of the Spade”] (1964)

“Первый чекист” [“The First Chekist”] (1964)

“Вейсманист” [“Weismannist”] (1964)

“В больницу” [“To the Hospital”] (1964)

“Первый зуб” [“The First Tooth”] (1964)

“Погоня за паровозным дымом” [“Chasing Locomotive Smoke”] (1964)

“Поезд” [“The Train”] (1964)

**1965**

“Прокуратор Иудеи” [“The Procurator of Judea”] (1965)

“В приемном покое” [“In the Waiting Room”] (1965)

“Геологи” [“Geologists”] (1965)

“Ожерелье княгини Гагариной” [“Princess Gagarina’s Necklace”] (1965)

“Лида” [“Lida”] (1965)

“Эсперанто” [“Esperanto”] (1965)

“По лендлизу” [“Lend-Lease”] (1965)

“Сентенция” [“Sententia”] (1965)

“РУР” [“Troops with Reinforced Regime”] (1965)

“Богданов” [“Bogdanov”] (1965)

“Инженер Киселев” [“Engineer Kiselev”] (1965)

“Любовь капитана Толли” [“Captain Tolli’s Love”] (1965)

“Протезы” [“Prostheses”] (1965)

“Облава” [“The Raid”] (1965)

## 1966

“Тишина” [“Silence”] (1966)

“Термометр Гришки Логуна” [“Grishka Logun’s Thermometer”] (1966)

“Храбрые глаза” [“Brave Eyes”] (1966)

“Марсель Пруст” [“Marcel Proust”] (1966)

“Смытая фотография” [“The Washed-Out Photograph”] (1966)

“Рябоконь” [“Ryabokon’] (1966)

“Экзамен” [“The Exam”] (1966)

“За письмом” [“Retrieving the Letter”] (1966)

“Золотая медаль” [“The Golden Letter”] (1966)

“Белка” [“The Squirrel”] (1966)

“Водопад” [“The Waterfall”] (1966)

“Укрощая огонь” [“Taming the Fire”] (1966)

“Воскрешение лиственницы” [“The Revival of the Larch”] (1966)

“У Флора и Лавра” [“At the Church of Sts. Florus and Laurus”] (1966)

## 1967

“Тропа” [“The Path”] (1967)

“Графит” [“Graphite”] (1967)

“Причал ада” [“The Dock of Hell”] (1967)

“Две встречи” [“Two Meetings”] (1967)

“Начальник политуправления” [“Head of the Political Administration”] (1967)

“Житие инженера Кипреева” [“The Life of Engineer Kipreev”] (1967)

“Боль” [“Pain”] (1967)

“Безымянная кошка” [“An Unnamed Cat”] (1967)

“Чужой хлеб” [“Someone Else’s Bread”] (1967)

“Кража” [“The Theft”] (1967)

“Город на горе” [“The City on the Hill”] (1967)

“У стремени” [“At the Stirrup”] (1967)

“Хан-Гирей” [“Khan-Girei”] (1967)

“Вечерняя молитва” [“The Evening Prayer”] (1967)

“Борис Южанин” [“Boris Yuzhanin”] (1967)

“Визит мистера Поппа” [“Mister Popp’s Visit”] (1967)

“Шахматы доктора Кузьменко” [“Doctor Kuz’menko’s Chess”] (1967)

“Начало” [“The Beginning”] (1967)

## 1968

## 1969

### Dated only to the 1960s

*Анна Ивановна* [Anna Ivanovna] (early 1960s)

“Шахматы и стихи” [“Chess and Poetry”] (1960s)

“Глухие” [“Deaf People”] (1960s)

“Берзин” [“Berzin”] (1960s)

“[О детстве]” “<About Childhood>” (1960s)

## 1970

“Вечная мерзлота” [“Permafrost”] (1970)

## 1971

*Четвертая Вологда* [*The Fourth Vologda*] (1968-71)

*Вишера (Антироман)* [*The Antinovel Vishera*] (1961-71)

“Талина Павловна Зыбалова” [“Galina Pavlovna Zybalova”] (1970-1)

“Леша Чеканов, или однодельцы на Колыме” [“Lesha Chekanov, or Coconspirators in Kolyma”] (1970-1)

“Доктор Ямпольский” [“Doctor Yampol’sky”] (1970-1)

“Иван Богданов” [“Ivan Bogdanov”] (1970-1)

“Яков Овсеевич Заводник” [“Yakov Ovseevich Zavodnik”] (1970-1)

“Александр Гогоберидзе” [“Aleksandr Gogoberidze”] (1970-1)

“Военный комиссар” [“The Military Commissioner”] (1970-1)

## 1972

“Перчатка” [“The Glove”] (1972)

“Тачка II” [“Wheelbarrow II”] (1972)

“Рива-Роччи” [“Riva-Rocci”] (1972)

“Студент Муса Залилов” [“The Student Musa Zavilov”] (1972)

## 1973

“Триангуляция III класса” [“Triangulation of Class III”] (1973)

“Цикуга” [“Cicuta”] (1973)

“Подполковник Фрагин” [“Lieutenant Colonel Fragin”] (1973)

“Афинские ночи” [“Athenian Nights”] (1973)

“Путешествие на Олу” [“Journey to Ola”] (1973)

*Фёдор Раскольников* [*Fyodor Raskol’nikov*] (1973)

## Mid-1970s

*Вечерние беседы* [*Evening Discourses*] (mid-1970s)

## Dated only to the 1970s

[*О Колыме*] <*About Kolyma*> (1970s)

[*О современниках*] <*About Contemporaries*> (1950s-1970s)

## Undated

“Сергей Есенин и воровской мир” [“Sergei Esenin and the Criminal World”] (undated)

“Спецзаказ” [“A Special Order”] (undated)

“Тачка I” [“Wheelbarrow I”] (undated)

“Вставная новелла” [“An Inserted Novella”] (undated)

“Жук” [“The Beetle”] (undated)

“Краткое жизнеописание Варлама Шаламова, составленное им самим” [“A Brief Biography of Varlam Shalamov, Composed by Himself”] (undated)

“Двадцатые годы” [“1920s”] (undated)

“Москва 20-х-30-х годов” [“Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s”] (undated)

“Что я видел и понял в лагере” [“What I Saw and Understood in the Camp”] (undated)