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Becoming an Andegraund Poet: Elena Shvarts and the Literary Environment of the Late Soviet Era

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Becoming an *Andegraund* Poet: Elena Shvarts and the Literary Environment
of the Late Soviet Era

By
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Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Note on Transliteration and Translation	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Début	25
Chapter Two: Behind the Scenes.....	94
Chapter Three: <i>Andegraund</i>	156
Conclusion	249
Appendix: Illustrations.....	254
1-2. The Egyptian House (ch. 1)	
3-4. Shvarts's iconic signature (ch. 1)	
5-6. The Buddhist Temple (ch. 3)	
7. Partial table of contents of <i>The Host Driving Out Demons</i> (ch. 3)	
Bibliography	261

Abstract

My dissertation focuses on Elena Shvarts (1948-2010), a Russian-language poet of the “unofficial” culture that flourished alongside state-sponsored arts in the post-war USSR. I ask how Shvarts became a leading talent of her generation in 1960s-1970s Leningrad, producing a substantial and sophisticated body of work without access to traditional print audiences. Studying Shvarts’s strategies for self-realization enhances our understanding of the forces that shaped late Soviet literature and the cultural field of dissidence from within and without. I trace her formation and rise to recognition, interweaving discussions of the political, literary, and social environment of her youth and early adulthood with close interpretative readings of poems and declarative statements.

I apply a Foucauldian lens to the literary environment in which Shvarts came of age, presenting its formal, informal, and “public-private” institutions as a heterotopian network. Highlighting the relevance of the spoken word to the milieu, I argue that readerships for samizdat (self-published) literary periodicals were created and sustained by poetry readings, seminars, café culture, and other platforms for “oral publication.” Concepts from scholarship on European pre-print culture illuminate curation practices that ensured the survival of these ephemeral texts.

Chapter One describes Shvarts’s origins and arrival on the local cultural scene, drawing on her girlhood diary and an early story to assess her reputation as a precocious talent. Chapter Two examines Shvarts’s embrace of a polymetrical versification, hybrid stylistics, and overt spirituality that were unwelcome in an increasingly conservative political and literary environment. Chapter Three presents the undertakings of the *andegraund* (underground), with Shvarts as a central, theatrical, and yet elusive figure whose richly intertextual “vision

adventures,” “small epics,” and other poems resonated with her peers, even as she remained an aloof outsider.

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship demonstrating the vibrancy of the socialist 1970s, when nonconformists overcame fear and surveillance to pursue independent agendas throughout Eastern Europe. Here I document the innovative creative work that grew out of collective endeavors in Leningrad, a unique environment that gave rise to Joseph Brodsky and Elena Shvarts, among other figures who merit scholarly attention.

Note on Transliteration and Translation

In the bibliography and footnote citations, I use the Library of Congress simplified transliteration system for Cyrillic. In the body of the text, for proper and personal names I use an alternate transliteration system for ease of reading (Brodsky and Venzel, rather than Brodskii and Venzel'). Commonly used Russian borrowings, such as samizdat and perestroika, are not italicized.

All translations of Russian texts quoted in the dissertation are mine, unless stated otherwise.

Acknowledgments

This project had a rather long gestation and I have accumulated many debts of gratitude along the way. I want to express my appreciation to mentors at the University of Wisconsin who encouraged my initial interest in Shvarts's poetry, especially Alexander Dolinin and David Bethea. Thanks to them, I met Shvarts in Saint Petersburg and was able to facilitate her 2007 literary tour in the United States. Some years later, Judith Kornblatt helped me not to give up on a Ph.D. altogether, and is thus owed a special thanks. Conversations with UW Slavic Studies alums, especially Molly Blasing and Brian Johnson, kept me writing. The questions and comments of my dissertation readers – Karen Evans-Romaine, Andrew Reynolds, and Sunny Yudkoff – pushed me to consider what I was taking for granted, and suggested exciting avenues for future work. Most importantly, without the patient feedback of my advisor Irina Shevelenko, this study would have lacked structure, precision, and poetry itself.

Russian interlocutors generously shared their insights and first-hand knowledge of the *andegraund* with me: Boris Ostanin, Sergei Stratanovsky, Boris Vantalov-Konstriktor, Nadezhda Tarshis, Valery Shubinsky, and especially Kirill Kozyrev. They indulged my questions and helped me feel connected to Shvarts after her death, and I am grateful for the hours spent in their company. The same is true of Thomas Epstein and Sarah Bishop, who welcomed me into the Shvarts scholarly community and encouraged my study of her early writings.

My colleagues and students at Connecticut College have helped me in too many ways to list. This study would not be possible without the support of the Department of Slavic Studies, the Walter Commons for Global Study and Engagement, and Shain Library. The same must be said of my family, especially my partner Petko, who gave feedback at critical moments and let me believe the thing was good enough.

In memory of Elena Shvarts
Светлой памяти Елены Шварц

Introduction

Elena Shvarts (1948-2010) was a leading poet of her generation and a central participant in Leningrad unofficial culture, an archipelago of informal groups that successfully pursued unsanctioned creative agendas in present-day Saint Petersburg in the late Soviet era (1953-1991). In a society characterized by conformity, state atheism, and shortages economic and aesthetic, Shvarts was an eccentric ascetic devoted to the poetic craft, a blasphemous bohemian student of theology, an unpublished and unpaid writer who was nonetheless taken as an exemplar of the “Leningrad school” of Russian poetry,¹ which revived and remixed the practices of Russian modernism. Shvarts became a central figure in the *andegraund* (underground) even as she avoided and even mocked many of its institutions, successfully leveraging its platforms for theatrical self-expression and benefiting from discerning publics for her work. This study describes Shvarts’s literary milieu and traces her creative development, ending in 1978, by which time the poet’s worldview, poetics, and local reputation were firmly established, and her creative work had just begun to reach broader publics.

Unofficial Circles

Elena Shvarts’s youth coincided with a surge of interest in lyric poetry in the late 1950s in the Soviet Union. The “poetry movement” was facilitated by the Soviet Writers’ Union, which responded to a perceived lag in poetic production by establishing literary associations, conferences, and other institutional structures to reinvigorate it.² Literary circles for youth

¹ On the Leningrad school, see Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 182; Savitskii, *Andegraund*, 20; von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*; Aizenberg, *Vzgliad na svobodnogo khudozhnika*, 76-85.

² Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 3-82.

initiated Shvarts and her contemporaries into a culture of public poetry recitation and critique. Leningrad's Palace of Pioneers and House of Writers provided stages for the performance and distribution of poetry, and put Shvarts in dialogue with established and novice poets, such as Gleb Gorbovsky, Natalia Gorbanevskaja, Aleksandr Kushner, and Viktor Krivulin. In spite of her obvious talent, Shvarts was not allowed to advance through the official "literary process" to achieve book-length publications or membership in the Writers' Union, a form of recognition that would have entitled her to a share of the privileges and resources enjoyed by official cultural elites. As she and likeminded peers reached maturity, the gatekeepers of Soviet literature – mentors, reviewers, and editors – detained Shvarts and other poets of her generation at the lowest levels of the state's literary hierarchy, denying them access to platforms for their work.

Mikhail Aizenberg, a prominent poet of the same generation, once described the late Soviet literary underground as a "Union of Lone Wolves," adding that "[a]ll those who lived in the 'underground world' were lone riders, outsiders."³ True to this spirit, Shvarts aspired from age sixteen to labor over the "flasks and retorts" of poetic alchemy in solitude (5:395).⁴ However, she could not become a poet in her time and place without audiences. Her path in literature lay through local literary institutions and networks of association, of which the *krug* / *kruzhok* (circle) or *kompaniia* (friend group) was a primary unit. A lack of professional status liberated young creative types from many obligations of Soviet everyday life, and Shvarts's circles used the ample means at their disposal to contest and undermine the local creative unions' hegemony over cultural values and production. Appropriating time, space, and material that "belonged" to the state, they developed an alternative set of institutions, with their own seminars,

³ Kates, *In the Grip of Strange Thoughts*, 1.

⁴ Here and hereafter, parenthetical text references are to the volume and page of the five-volume *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*. Published 2002-2013, it is the most complete edition of Shvarts's works to date.

samizdat (self-published) journals, conferences and even an annual award. Poets, painters, translators, and critics pursued autonomous creative work that reached audiences by word of mouth, in hand-written and typed copies, and at domestic salons and art exhibits. This “second” or “unofficial” culture existed alongside and in tandem with the official Soviet one, fostering the creation and distribution of new kinds of art and providing venues to revive neglected traditions of the early twentieth century, when Russian avant-gardes had flourished in Saint Petersburg and in Petrograd, as the city was temporarily renamed during the First World War.

Shvarts and her contemporaries inherited this poetic legacy, together with values and models of conduct, from older contemporaries who had survived the Revolutions of 1917 and the civil war that followed, Stalinism and the Soviet carceral system, and the Blockade of Leningrad. Well before periodical samizdat almanacs and journals began to appear, figures such as Anna Akhmatova, Lydia Ginzburg, Elga Linetskaia, and Gleb Semënov were mentor-patrons to Shvarts and other aspiring writers, facilitating their literary self-realization and socializing them into intelligentsia traditions through seminars, study groups, and informal visits in private homes. The practices they passed on to their young acquaintances perpetuated the “staged and ritualized displays of cultural values” through which the intelligentsia had, in Elise Wirthschafter’s formulation, “secured its identity” in the pre-revolutionary era.⁵ It was thanks in part to their connections to living history that the nascent unofficial culture accessed Russian literary tradition through modernism, as Aleksandr Zhitenev, Ilja Kujuk, Marco Sabbatini, Thomas Epstein, Josephine von Zitzewitz, and other scholars have argued.⁶ Claiming as their predecessors

⁵ Wirthschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 90.

⁶ Zhitenev, *Poeziia neomodernizma*; Kujuk, “Leningradskii avangard 1960-x godov;” Sabbatini, “Pathos of Holy Foolishness in the Leningrad Underground;” Epstein, “Exiles on Main Street;” von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*.

Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, Gumilëv, Kuzmin, Khlebnikov, and Kharms, among many others, Shvarts and her peers aspired to recover and reinvigorate the brilliant poetic culture that Soviet cultural institutions and historiography had incompletely erased during the Stalin era (1926-1953), when these and other major figures were silenced or killed.

Generationally, Shvarts belongs to the *semidesiatniki* (people of the seventies), as they were known, born at the end of and after World War II, roughly 1944-53. Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 was the event that defined the prior generation of *shestidesiatniki* (people of the sixties), who came of age during the Khrushchev "Thaw" (1953-1964), the relatively liberal period following Stalin's death. A pivotal moment for Shvarts's generation came in 1968, both in the state's brutal response to the Prague Spring and in "rock music, zen, theories of alienation, structuralism, the sexual revolution," and other signs of the times that established generational solidarity for Leningrad bohemian youth in the 1970s.⁷ In terms of poetic generations, Shvarts's immediate predecessors in Leningrad included Gleb Gorbovsky (1931-2019), Viktor Sosnora (1936-2019), Leonid Aronzon (1939-1970), and Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996), some of the best-known Russian poets to emerge from the literary milieu in which Shvarts came of age.

Late Soviet unofficial culture was the process and product of individual and collective pursuits of alternative aesthetic and ethical agendas. Shvarts did not claim to be a dissident, with its suggestion of political opposition, and the present study does not refer to her as such. Her circles' intentional cultivation of *inakomyslie* (dissent; "other thought," literally) is undeniable, however, and they were essential participants in the broader cultural "field of dissidence" of late

⁷ Rogov, *Rossia/Russia: semidesiatye kak predmet istorii russkoi kul'tury*, 17.

Soviet society that Ann Komaromi has described.⁸ Shvarts and her contemporaries expressed their alterity through their clothes and conduct, but also through less material rituals of resistance such as spoken and written exchange, the recuperation and citation of avant-garde traditions, domestic salons and self-study.⁹ The thick samizdat journals that distributed Shvarts's poetry were quite literally the "hidden transcripts" of overlapping circles of the multigenerational *andegraund*, as it came to be known.¹⁰ Their collective self-preservation ensured their future place in Russian literature and cultural history.

Shvarts was never directly persecuted by the state, although her values and conduct were antithetical to mainstream Soviet society. Her poetry, too, flouted the formal conservatism of Soviet poetry and its standards of literary "decency." Nonetheless, by the time she was thirty years old, when this study ends, she had become a recognized person of letters whose prose, poetry, and translations circulated in local and transnational networks that circumvented the state-controlled publication system. Part of a large community of such artists, Shvarts was a "typical exception" to Cold War conceptions of the Communist Party's total control of artistic life.

Role playing is a central concern and trope of Shvarts's poetry, and literature became a theatrical space for her early on. The main sources of her *artistizm* (artistry) were three-fold:

⁸ The first chapter of Komaromi's *Uncensored* takes up the relationship between literature and the "field of dissidence," a term that reflects her use of Pierre Bourdieu's "field of cultural production" as a framework for understanding social relations among state, society, and those who pursued the autonomous production of knowledge in the late Soviet era. See also Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There*, 371-405 for discussion of Cold War constructs of the "dissident writer" and the politics of publishing nonconformist literary writings abroad.

⁹ Rituals of resistance as a phrase and notion draws on Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's seminal study of youth subcultures in post-war Britain, *Resistance through Rituals*.

¹⁰ "Hidden Transcripts" is the subtitle of James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. The phrase refers to subaltern discourse that normally occurs out of the hearing of authority and surveillance mechanisms, but becomes a display of resistance when it reaches the public sphere.

growing up in the wings of Leningrad's Bolshoi Drama Theater, where her mother worked; socialization into an intelligentsia culture of literary domesticity and creative *kruzhki* (circles); and her immersion in a polysemiotic "Petersburg text" in which architecture, history, and literature intermingled.¹¹ The city's lived and literary spaces were venues for self-expression and self-production that allowed Shvarts to cultivate and act out a bold and complex poetic persona.

Studying Shvarts's life alongside her poetry leaves one susceptible to the biographical fallacy, and the hazards of this approach to Shvarts's work in particular have been warned of.¹² It risks perpetuating a notion that enjoyed currency in Shvarts's time: that poetry written by women comprised "an unmediated reflection of the author's personal experience."¹³ Nothing could be further from the truth in Shvarts's case. The personal in her poetry is highly mediated by genre, poetic tradition, shifting settings, personae and masks. While it may have been "futile to subject her work to conventional linear analysis" when her poetry first became known to scholars and translators, as Catriona Kelly warned,¹⁴ recent publications from Shvarts's youth and early adulthood illuminate her development and reputation as a *wunderkind*. Thanks in part to these publications, this study charts, however patchily, Shvarts's path to literary recognition.

¹¹ V. N. Toporov formulated the idea of a "Petersburg text," in which the city's history, geography, architecture, and creative texts are intertwined (*Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury*, 7-118). On the Petersburg myth before and after the Bolshevik revolution, see Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, 4-8.

¹² Sandler, "Elena Shvarts," 1459. See also Sheinker, "Pri vzgliade v zerkalo," 107.

¹³ Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience*, 43.

¹⁴ Kelly, *History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, 411.

Conceptual Framework

My study takes as its starting point the era that preceded the “golden age of samizdat,” as Viktor Krivulin described the late 1970s, offering a pre-history of Leningrad unofficial culture through the life and work of Elena Shvarts.¹⁵ The connection between the external forces of literariness, literary environment, and Shvarts’s specific forms of expression may not be causal, but many of the works discussed in this study show them to be mutually constitutive. Alongside the description of Shvarts’s cultural context, I analyze her poetry and prose writings that shed light on her social experiences, involvement in local literary institutions, dialogue with contemporaries, and poetic self-fashioning. In analyzing these works I take a “close reading” approach, discussing form, identifying intertextual connections, and considering their place in Shvarts’s overall development.

Shvarts’s poetry is densely intertextual, and I do not seek a unifying heuristic to account for her strategies. She pointed to the high eclecticism of her circles, commenting that “the Leningrad school of poetry in its last stages was...as if all-inclusive [*vsepriemliushcha*],” simultaneously and equally under the influence of Symbolism, the OBERIU, Acmeism, and the literature of other (non-Russian) traditions.¹⁶ Shvarts’s intertexts come from a wide range of domains; Catriona Kelly has emphasized the lack of hierarchy in Shvarts’s “headspinning mosaic of citations from literature, painting, architecture, from folklore and popular belief.”¹⁷ I contribute pieces to this mosaic through my analyses, but cannot exhaustively discuss any single work. Most of these poems and texts were chosen with the aim of drawing out Shvarts’s

¹⁵ Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata.”

¹⁶ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 182.

¹⁷ Kelly, *History of Russian Women’s Writing*, 413.

connections to contemporaries or her genre development, and their citationality is not likely to be representative of her poetry as a whole.

The works I analyze reflect Shvarts's literary environment, or *literaturnyi byt* (daily life, mores), as Boris Eikhenbaum called it – the conditions and practices that enabled her to become a leading poet of her generation and an authoritative figure in unofficial culture.¹⁸ As Elena Fratto has recently summarized, literary *byt* “includes the conditions under which literature is produced and received, the space and modes of distribution, publishing companies, salons, public performances, and the building of a literary persona.”¹⁹ In his 1927 essay “*Literatura i literaturnyi byt*” (Literature and the Literary Environment) Eikhenbaum pointed to a shift in post-revolutionary literary culture, a focus on not “how to write?” but “how to be a writer?” These questions were still thoroughly intertwined in the post-war era of Shvarts's youth. Tracing her response to the twofold question “How to be a poet?” – how to navigate her literary environment and how to find her voice as a poet – I offer a thick description of the “nexus of literary, social, and historical forces”²⁰ that Shvarts creatively engaged alongside dozens of other *andegraund* artists, poets, photographers, and their audiences in late Soviet Leningrad.

Informal artistic settings were critical to Shvarts's formation and thus Eikhenbaum's “literary domesticity” (*literaturnaia domashnost'*) is also relevant to this study.²¹ As elsewhere in post-war Eastern Europe, space “played a fundamental role in the shaping of everyday sociality, large social formations, and indeed of socialism itself.”²² Discussion of the literary environment

¹⁸ Eikhenbaum, *O literature*, 428-436. For an English-language discussion of *literaturnyi byt*, see Greenfeld, “Russian Formalist Sociology of Literature.”

¹⁹ Fratto, “5=100: Long Live the ‘Filologicheskaiia Revoliutsiia,’” 675.

²⁰ Todd, “Literature as an Institution,” 22.

²¹ Eikhenbaum, *Moi vremennik*, 59-81.

²² Crowley and Reid, *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, 12.

in Leningrad seems inevitably bound up with its socio-spatial economies, and “Becoming an *Andegraund* Poet” attends to the formal and informal venues that sheltered Shvarts’s creativity and inspired her. It is not so complete a mapping as the guide to Sergei Dovlatov’s Leningrad by Lev and Sofia Lurie,²³ which has many points of intersection with “Shvarts’s Leningrad,” but my study similarly adds to spatial histories of Leningrad unofficial culture.

Spatial metaphors and practices are linked to notions of private and public social spheres, particularly so in scholarly analyses of the socialist project, which aspired to abolish private life.²⁴ In his study of late Soviet culture, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, Alexei Yurchak argued that “reality was not resisted but deterritorialized” by the people living outside (*vnye*) normative Soviet experience.²⁵ Yurchak drew on Deleuze and Guattari’s theorizing about interconnected knowledge systems to argue for a more fluid, mutually constitutive relationship between public and private in late Soviet culture, emphasizing that “*vnye*” and “deterritorialized” refer not to counter-publics insistently occupying counter-sites, but to dynamic, mutually beneficial relationships like that of the wasp and the orchid.²⁶ Shvarts’s circles were the primary occupants of the “deterritorialized milieus” in Leningrad that Yurchak describes in his book: the Palace of Pioneers, the café Saigon, the boiler rooms of centralized heating facilities.²⁷ Their relationship to these and other venues described below further

²³ Lur'e and Lur'e, *Leningrad Dovlatova: istoricheskii putevoditel'*.

²⁴ Deborah Field points to this linkage and argues that “public” and “private” were not stable categories in late Soviet culture. See Field, “Everyday Life and the Problem of Conceptualizing Public and Private during the Khrushchev Era,” 163-180.

²⁵ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 149.

²⁶ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 115.

²⁷ Yurchak takes these up in chapter four of *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 126-157.

demonstrate the symbiotic relationship of official and unofficial institutions and the inadequacy of dissident-conformist binary approaches to late Soviet subjects.²⁸

Many scholars have adapted Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere to frame unofficial culture as a "private public sphere," referring not to its physical spaces but symbolic relations to state and society.²⁹ The phenomenon of periodical literary samizdat exemplifies this mixed domain. The handmade journals that Shvarts's poetry appeared in were produced in small numbers for semi-private literary circles with personal typewriters, carbon sheets, and onion-skin paper that allowed simultaneous production of multiple copies that passed beyond the author's familiars to reach new readers.

Osip Mandelstam's widow Nadezhda described the era when Mandelstam's poetry was preserved in handwritten notebooks as a "pre-Gutenberg" one, as if the printing press had not yet been invented.³⁰ Anna Akhmatova is also credited with this expression that is used in reference to the various means undertaken to preserve poetry like her own *Requiem*, a lament on the Stalinist purges that was composed in secret and committed to memory by trusted friends.³¹ Poetry continued to circulate through spoken and handwritten reproduction in the 1960s and 1970s, a fact obscured by the term "samizdat culture." The story of samizdat, Krivulin later asserted, "begins with the voice, not the manuscript."³² Verbal artistry flourished through live poetry readings, seminars, and other gatherings that took place in official institutional contexts,

²⁸ See Platt and Nathans, "Socialist in Form," for a critical assessment of Yurchak's disruption of the official-unofficial paradigm in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

²⁹ Pollack and Wielgohs, *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe*, 95-118; Komaromi, "Samizdat and Samizdat Publics;" Smola and Lipovetsky, "Introduction: The Culture of (Non)Conformity in Russia."

³⁰ Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, 192.

³¹ Alexandra Harrington discusses *Requiem* as a text "designed for memory" and the work's path from hidden text to mass phenomenon in "'Golden-Mouthed Anna of All the Russias.'"

³² Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata," 343.

private domestic circles, and mixed private-public venues in post-war Leningrad, creating audiences and future readerships for Shvarts and her circles.

Attending to the spoken dimension of unofficial culture allows us to build on Komaromi's foundational theorizing about samizdat, in part by linking the instability of the samizdat text to the oral culture that thrived before and around periodical self-publication ventures. Scholarly approaches to print culture before the "Gutenberg revolution"³³ offer useful lenses for the analysis of verbal cultures of late socialism. Two concepts adapted from medieval manuscript studies illuminate attitudes towards spoken and written texts in "pre-Gutenberg" Leningrad. Paul Zumthor introduced *mouvance* to capture the fluidity of texts sustained by human, rather than mechanical, reproduction.³⁴ *Mouvance* does not pertain to "failures" on the part of the scribes or storytellers, but reframes the medieval work as a collectivity of its different manifestations, including oral renditions. The adaptation of texts for different audiences was part of this process, undertaken by "participatory scribes," another concept from scholarship on pre-print cultures of medieval Europe that is productively applied to Shvarts's circles and samizdat culture broadly. These are individuals who "deliberately rework texts in various ways," as Bella Millett put it.³⁵

Samizdat texts were created in the modern authorial mode, but its chain of reproduction was fertile ground for failures of memory, typos, and creative readings of semi-legible carbon copies. This kind of *mouvance* was unintentional. Short poems that circulated orally saw even greater variability, and attitudes toward them seemingly informed local notions of authorship and fair use. Konstantin Kuzminsky, the compiler of the massive *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern*

³³ Johannes Gutenberg did not invent moveable type, but is often credited with it.

³⁴ Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*.

³⁵ Millett, "Mouvance and the Medieval Author," 13.

Russian Poetry, was a particularly enthusiastic participant in the creative co-construction of Leningrad unofficial poetry. He openly returned “forgotten” stanzas to other people’s poems, included half-remembered texts, and ignored his comrades’ wishes.³⁶ When Dmitry Bobyshev complained about Kuzminsky’s appropriation of his poems, he replied that texts hanging about in samizdat were a “shared inheritance” (*obshchee dostoianie*).³⁷

Literature Review

A growing body of scholarship has shown the breadth and variety of cultural production in the Soviet epoch associated with economic and cultural “stagnation” (*zastoi*), when Shvarts achieved her greatest artistic successes.³⁸ The era’s stability fostered intensive artistic activity, long-term relationships, durable institutions, and episodes of peaceful co-existence with the KGB. Stanislav Savitsky’s *Andegraund* gave an early overview of important trends and groups in Leningrad unofficial culture. Interviews with participants informed Savitsky’s book and key studies that followed, including Emily Lygo’s *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975* and Josephine von Zitzewitz’s *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar 1974-1980*. The invaluable *Samizdat Leningrada* (Leningrad Samizdat), compiled by the leading figures and most active chroniclers of the “second culture” presents an encyclopedia of Leningrad unofficial

³⁶ Kuzmin'skii and Kovalev, *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, 2B:270 (hereafter cited as *Blue Lagoon Anthology*).

³⁷ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 2B:271.

³⁸ See Fürst and McLellan, *Dropping out of Socialism* and Fainberg and Kalinovsky, *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era* for recent studies on a wide array of alternative spheres in the Soviet Bloc.

literature.³⁹ The four volumes of eyewitness accounts amassed by Yulia Valieva have revealed a panoply of practices and attitudes, but also reinforced the importance of shared institutional structures to unofficial culture.⁴⁰

Ann Komaromi has laid critical groundwork for the study of unofficial artistic production in the late Soviet era through her scholarly analyses of samizdat culture, unofficial culture, and dissent, as well as through the digital Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat, which has made a wealth of samizdat texts accessible to contemporary scholars and to posterity.⁴¹ Adapting critical models of Pierre Bourdieu, Komaromi has described unofficial culture as an autonomous field in which samizdat played an essential role. Cultural autonomy was a powerful belief system shared by dissidents and artistic nonconformists, and yet, as she argues, their cultural production was firmly “embedded in the system and forms of Soviet expression from which we imagine it to be independent.”⁴² In a similar vein, Lygo’s study of Writers’ Union archival documents has shown the crucial role state-sponsored institutions played in fostering Leningrad’s poetic avant-garde. Many of the venues for creative resistance and realization that Komaromi, Lygo, and the current study describe have their roots in Khrushchev-era efforts to

³⁹ Dolinin, et al., *Samizdat Leningrada 1950-e – 1980-e* (hereafter cited as *Samizdat Leningrada*). In addition to entries on individual writers, groups, and publications, the volume includes a historical overview, timeline, photographs, a list of names and pseudonyms.

⁴⁰ Valieva, *K istorii neofitsial'noi kul'tury i sovremennogo russkogo zarubezh'ia; Litsa peterburgskoi poezii: 1950-1990-e; Sumerki “Saigona”*; *Vremia i slovo: literaturnaia studiia Dvortsa Pionerov*.

⁴¹ Komaromi, “Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat,” “Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture,” “Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon,” “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics.” The Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat is at <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/>.

⁴² Komaromi, *Uncensored*, 2.

manufacture “socialist fun” that Gleb Tsipursky has described, part of broader efforts to engage Soviet youth.⁴³

Ilja Kujuk and Marco Sabbatini have identified salient features of the “Leningrad text” of Russian literature through their studies of the city’s informal avant-garde groups and the cultural codes they engaged.⁴⁴ Kujuk, Sabbatini, and Ainsley Morse have emphasized the centrality of the OBERIU (*Ob'edinenie real'nogo iskusstva*, or Association for Real Art) and the absurd to the “left flank” of Leningrad poetry – from the Aronzon and Volokhonsky-Khvostenko circles to the *Khelenukty* led by Vladimir Erl and the Metaphysical school that Shvarts came to be associated with.⁴⁵ Their work has helped me to situate Shvarts in a broader local context.

Shvarts’s literary environment was inscribed in Soviet totalitarian culture, which discouraged manifestoes and formal declarations of loyalty to new esthetic programs. The internal divisions of the Leningrad school of poetry have been retrospectively mapped mostly along the lines of the friendship circles mentioned above, a tendency established in the first encyclopedic compilations of unofficial culture: the monumental print volumes *Apollon-77*, *The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, and *Samizdat of the Century (Samizdat veka)*.⁴⁶ Articles and book-length studies have been dedicated to such groups as the Philological

⁴³ Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun*, 54-133.

⁴⁴ Kujuk, “Leningradskii avangard 1960-x godov i ‘Leningradskii tekst’;” Sabbatini, “‘Leningradskii tekst’ i ekzistentsializm v kontekste nezavisimoi kul'tury 1970-x godov;” Sabbatini, “Pathos of Holy Foolishness in the Leningrad Underground.”

⁴⁵ Kujuk cites Viktor Krivulin’s *levoe krylo* (left flank) formulation in “Leningradskii avangard 1960-x godov,” 316; Morse, *Word Play: Experimental Poetry and Soviet Children’s Literature*, 48-74. Sabbatini’s book-length study on Leningrad unofficial culture, written in Italian, was unfortunately not available to the author of this study as a source. Savitsky focuses on the *Khelenukty* in “Khelenukty v teatre povsednevnosti.” The “metaphysical school,” though not framed as such, is arguably the subject of von Zitzewitz’s *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*.

⁴⁶ Viktor Kulle described the organizational system of Konstantin Kuzminsky’s division of Leningrad poetry into schools as the “printsip tusovki” (hangout approach). Kulle, “...ne izmeniv ni odnoi bukvy, ni odnogo znaka.”

School, “Akhmatova’s Orphans,” the Khvostenko-Volokhonsky circle, and the *Mitki* (Little Mityas).⁴⁷ Valieva’s volumes on the *Derzanie* (Daring) club at the Palace of Pioneers and the “Malaia Sadovaia” and “Saigon” café subcultures are essential for our understanding of unofficial culture generally and for Shvarts’s circles in particular.⁴⁸ Similarly, von Zitzewitz’s study of Shvarts and her closest poetic contemporaries, mentioned above, focuses on a religious-philosophical seminar in which some *andegraund* literati participated.

Thanks in part to the centripetal force of literary domesticity and the absence of a public record of unofficial poetry’s reception, there is little consensus about overarching rubrics and stylistic commonalities across these informal groups. Leningrad unofficial circles were undeniably in “intense intertextual dialogue”⁴⁹ with their modernist predecessors, as suggested above and as numerous scholars have pointed out. Sergei Zavialov makes the case for “retromodernism” as a label for this era, while Aleksandr Zhitenev has advocated “neomodernism.”⁵⁰ Mark Lipovetsky has presented the neobaroque as a major paradigm of late Soviet and post-Soviet letters and the antipode of Moscow Conceptualism.⁵¹ Oxymoronic neologisms and conjoined opposites are prime figures of Shvarts’s poetics, as Lipovetsky and others have argued, neobaroque devices that are linked to the notion of the Metaphysical

⁴⁷ Among other sources, see Rosen, “The Independent Turn in Soviet-Era Russian Poetry” (on the Brodsky circle); Kulle and Ufliand, “*Filologicheskaia shkola*” and Kolchinsky, *The Revival of the Russian Literary Avant-Garde* (on the Philological school); Nikol’skaia, “Krug Aleksii Khvostenko;” and Mihailovich, *The Mitki*.

⁴⁸ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo: literaturnaia studiia Dvortsa Pionerov; Sumerki “Saigona.”* See also Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii: 1950-1990-e* and *K istorii neofitsial’noi kul’tury i sovremennogo russkogo zarubezh’ia 1950-1990-e*.

⁴⁹ Von Zitzewitz, “From Underground to Mainstream,” 226.

⁵⁰ Zav’ialov, “Retromodernizm v leningradskoi poezii,” 30-52.

⁵¹ See Lipovetskii, “Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism,” esp. 185-192. For a fuller discussion in Russian, see Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 221-284.

school.⁵² Shvarts cultivated a multidimensional poetics of paradox, as I argue, that informed her writings and her very sense of self. Stephanie Sandler, an early and astute reader of Shvarts's verse, has observed that the "precarious but important balance" of light and dark is central to her poetic world.⁵³ A recent study by Giulia Gigante pursues this idea, tracing Shvarts's myriad representations of the conflict between darkness, shadow, and murk on the one hand, and moonlight, candlelight, reflections, and stars on the other, and leading her to define Shvarts's poetics as a metaphorically intertwined light-writing (*svetopis'*) and dark-writing (*temnopis'*).⁵⁴ This idea sees ample figurative and philosophical expression in Shvarts's writings of the 1970s, discussed in Chapter Three.

The first critical articles on Shvarts appeared in samizdat journals alongside her poetry in the late 1970s. Her contemporaries' responses to her work ranged from ecstatic embrace to wholesale rejection. Shvarts's strong feminine lyric personae provoked particular dismay among some male readers; Arkady Dragomoshchenko, Vladislav Kushev, and Mikhail Berg all authored scathing gender-focused responses.⁵⁵ Their outraged masculinity mostly obscured literary analysis in aggressive reviews casting Shvarts's spiritual seeking as a theatrical pose, even as they eagerly adopted the masks, pseudonyms, and alter egos that Shvarts had helped to

⁵² Lipovetskii, "Konets veka liriki," 207.

⁵³ Sandler, "Remembering Elena Shvarts," 144. Mikhail Sheinker also makes this point in his foreword to Shvarts, "Pri vzgliade v zerkalo," 107.

⁵⁴ Gigante, "Variatsii na temy sveta i t'my v poezii Eleny Shvarts," 68-75.

⁵⁵ Dragomoshchenko, "Blazhenstvo i mnogo neznykh sredstv;" Kushev, "Iz chastnykh besed zhurnalista Vladimirova i biologa Ambrosimova;" Berg, *Momemury*, esp. the chapter "Madam Viardo."

popularize. Other contemporary readers and critics – Tatiana Goricheva, Igor Burikhin, and Nina Guchinskaia – saw Shvarts’s religious imagery and expressions of faith as genuine.⁵⁶

The same depictions of sexual violence, feminine wrath, and the female body that caused controversy among her contemporaries caught the attention of Anglophone Slavists working in Gender and Women’s studies, who helped establish Shvarts’s canonical status in the 1990s through translations and critical analyses.⁵⁷ Summarizing anglophone scholarly approaches to Shvarts published between 1989 and 2002, the *Poetry Criticism* encyclopedia concluded that Shvarts’s verse “centers on metaphysical and physical elements of the feminine experience.”⁵⁸ A feminist lens productively illuminated the primacy of the body and embodied existence in Shvarts’s poetics. Studies by Dunja Popovic and Josephine von Zitzewitz have added to this foundational work, showing how the transformation of bodily experience into the poetic word imbues Shvarts’s poetic wor(l)d with physical and spiritual anguish. Popovic pointed to the prominence of the sacrificial body in Shvarts’s poetry, connecting it to Judeo-Christian and Russian poetic traditions of the poet as prophet who endures physical suffering in their receipt of the divine message.⁵⁹ In *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, von Zitzewitz compares attitudes toward the spiritually imbued poetic word in Shvarts’s circles, arguing that if for Viktor Krivulin and Aleksandr Mironov the literary word is “an echo of

⁵⁶ Goricheva, “‘Tkan' serdtsa rassteliu Spasiteliu pod nogi...;’” Burikhin, “O groteske i dukhovnoi kontseptsii v stikhakh E. Shvarts;” Guchinskaia, “Vos'merka logosa.”

⁵⁷ Early studies include Heldt, “The Poetry of Elena Shvarts” (1989); Goldstein, “The Heartfelt Poetry of Elena Shvarts;” Kelly, *History of Russian Women’s Writing 1820-1992*, 411-422. As Josephine von Zitzewitz has pointed out, gender-based anthologies also played a role in the construction of Shvarts as a woman writer (“From Underground to Mainstream”).

⁵⁸ Galens, “Elena Shvarts,” 130.

⁵⁹ Popovic, “Symbolic Injury and Embodied Mysticism,” 755.

Logos” and object of worship, for Shvarts language is an instrument for giving spiritual meaning to embodied experience.⁶⁰ Building on Popovic, von Zitzewitz argues that for Shvarts, poetry is “the flesh made Word,” an inversion of Biblical models of the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ, the “Word made flesh.”

Such framings present Shvarts’s lyric persona as a feminist heretic, who challenges and usurps the authority of the stereotypically masculine divine faces of Judeo-Christian culture. Other scholars have underscored the strong connections to Buddhism in Shvarts’s poetry.⁶¹ These two faith traditions are interwoven in *Works and Days of Lavinia, a Nun of the Order of the Circumcision of the Heart* (*Trudy i dni Lavinii, monakhini ordena obrezaniia serdtsa*, 1984), Shvarts’s “fragmentary novel” in verse, as Darra Goldstein described it,⁶² which has attracted considerable scholarly attention.⁶³ Sarah Bishop’s study of Shvarts’s long cycle underscores its combination of two “seemingly incompatible traditions,” part of Bishop’s broader argument about Shvarts’s cultivation of a poetics of “harmonious disharmony” in which seeming opposites couple and converge.⁶⁴

Leningrad-Petersburg was the main stage of Shvarts’s life and her poetry; through her intimate identification with the city, she drew on and added to its architectural, historical, and mythical identities. Recent studies have begun to address the outsized role that Saint Petersburg

⁶⁰ Von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 112-113.

⁶¹ Bishop, “Harmonious Disharmony;” Redko, “Boundary Issues in Three Twentieth-Century Russian Poets,” 231.

⁶² Goldstein, “The Heartfelt Poetry of Elena Shvarts,” 239.

⁶³ Goldstein, “The Heartfelt Poetry of Elena Shvarts;” Bishop, “Harmonious Disharmony;” Popovic, “Symbolic Injury and Embodied Mysticism;” Redko, “Boundary Issues in Three Twentieth-Century Russian Poets,” 210-220, 228-274; von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 120-123.

⁶⁴ Bishop, “Harmonious Disharmony,” 213.

and the Petersburg text play in her work. Maija Könönen has argued that Shvarts's gnostic metaphysics are driven by the violent history of the city founded by Peter the Great, who is an imperfect imposter and "false creator God" – both artisan and antichrist.⁶⁵ Könönen links Shvarts's map of Petersburg to her representations of the body, which stretches vertically and horizontally in a sign of the cross, at the center of which is the heart. Violen Fridli's study of Shvarts's "Elegies on the Cardinal Points" ("Elegii na storony sveta," 1978) similarly takes up the "spatial metaphysics" of the cross, arguing that the horizontal East-West axis of the cycle symbolizes the default domain of the poet, who seeks movement along a vertical North-South axis. Shvarts's blurring of the East-West binary is similarly taken up by Kristina Vorontsova in *Prostranstvo-Vremia – Androgin* (Space-Time is an Androgyne), the most sustained treatment of Shvarts's spatial poetics and only book-length study of her work as of this writing.

Barbara Heldt was one of the first anglophone scholars to connect Shvarts to gnosticism,⁶⁶ and who rightly saw in her poetry the fruit of "years of reading and writing... – the luxury and self-discipline of an outsider who stayed at home."⁶⁷ Shvarts **purused** interests in Buddhism, Hinduism, astronomy, esoteric and occult traditions, and making sense of her writings' geographic, folkloric, literary and religious allusions constitutes one of the challenges of her poetry. Shvarts emphasized that she was an autodidact without a systematic education, but she acquired thorough knowledge of the Western canon, becoming an erudite humanist like her closest peers. Georgina Barker's study of Classical motifs in Shvarts's poetry has shown the

⁶⁵ Könönen, "City and the Self in the Poetry of Elena Švarc," 413.

⁶⁶ Heldt, "The Poetry of Elena Shvarts," 381.

⁶⁷ Heldt, "The Poetry of Elena Shvarts," 383.

depth of her engagement with antiquity, a rich area for future research that the present study can only touch on.⁶⁸

Sources

This dissertation traces Shvarts's creative path through the official and unofficial literary institutions of her times, taking as sources ego-documents⁶⁹ and other primary texts: Shvarts's girlhood diary, autobiographical prose, and creative works; published interviews; memoirs and correspondence about Leningrad cultural life; Shvarts's 2007 lectures at the University of Wisconsin; and interviews with her contemporaries conducted in 2017 and 2018. My own conversations with Shvarts figure little in the footnotes of this study, but they have shaped it nonetheless. The five volumes of *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts* (Works of Elena Shvarts) are the main source and primary point of reference for her writings discussed below.⁷⁰ The corpus of Shvarts texts continues to grow through publications from the poet's domestic archive following her death. My study also draws on these early works in prose and poetry that illuminate the poet's experiments with genre and style.⁷¹

Many of the undertakings described in subsequent chapters unfolded outside of official artistic institutions, and we will not find a trace of them in the public record or in Russian state literary archives. The Saint Petersburg branch of the Memorial Human Rights Center has substantial holdings of Leningrad literary samizdat, and I became acquainted first-hand with its

⁶⁸ Barker, "Russia's Classical Alter Ego, 1963-2016," 73-145.

⁶⁹ This catchall term refers to letters, diaries, auto/biographical writings and "all forms of personal writing which reveal something of the author's self," as historian Geoff Mortimer puts it (*Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War 1618-48*, 189).

⁷⁰ As noted above, subsequent parenthetical references are to this collection, published 2002-2013. Shvarts compiled the first four volumes; literary executor Kirill Kozyrev compiled volume 5 after her death.

⁷¹ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi"; Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*; "'V zhivuii ranu nezžno vsypat' sol'....'"

fragile materiality studying their unique copies of the journals *Chasy* and *Thirty-Seven*. In the intervening years, these journals have fortunately been digitized almost in full, and references in the text below, unless noted otherwise, are to the online collections of the *Tsentr Andreia Belogo* (Andrei Bely Center) and University of Toronto's Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat.⁷²

Compilations put together by the citizen-historians and participants of unofficial culture comprise important reference sources for the present study, which makes frequent use of the encyclopedic *Samizdat Leningrada* and *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, as well as the seminar and conference papers published in *Istoriia Leningradskoi nepodtzensurnyoi literatury 1950-e-1980-e gody*, *Samizdat (Po materialam konferentsii "30 let nezavisimoi pečati. 1950-80 gody")* and *Vtoraia kul'tura: neofitsial'naia poeziiia Leningrada v 1970-1980-e gody*.

Project Goals and Chapter Overview

This study explores Shvarts's early literary biography and her career as a member of the Leningrad "unofficial" cultural scene through the late 1970s. It combines discussion of the political, literary, and social context of the Soviet 1960s and 1970s with close interpretative readings of Shvarts's poems and declarative statements. Comparing Shvarts's strategies for self-realization to those of her contemporaries enhances our general understanding of the forces that shaped the literary milieu and the cultural field of dissidence from within and without. Her path illuminates the co-constructed quality of late Soviet literature, both the body of work that came

⁷² The Andrei Bely Center's Elektronnyi arkhiv (electronic archive) of digitized samizdat is at http://samizdat.wiki/%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0. The Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat is at <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/>.

out of these contexts, and the ongoing entanglement of the ostensibly separate “official” and “unofficial” cultures. The circles, spaces, and institutions described in this study are part of a larger archipelago comprised of symbolic and physical spaces where alternative behaviors, language, and history held sway. I argue that the Leningrad *andegraund*, like unofficial culture broadly, was neither utopian nor dystopian, but heterotopian, as Michel Foucault has it. Unlike traditional utopias, heterotopias are “real places [...] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which [...] all the other real sites found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”⁷³ Mapping Shvarts’s early stages of creativity gives us access to the idiosyncratic workings of the heterotopian space of late Soviet culture, the time and place in which she came to artistic maturity.

Chapter One (1948-1964) describes Shvarts’s family background and the circumstances that engaged her in literary activity from childhood, with particular emphasis on institutions, mentors, and future collaborators. It traces some of the facts, myths, and metaphors about her origins that Shvarts wove into her prose and poetry. Her posthumously published girlhood diary provides insights into the literary environment of 1960s Leningrad and the prominent role that young people played in the city’s highly visible and audible poetry culture. Shvarts’s keen awareness of contemporary artistic trends and attention to genre is shown through a close reading of her early story “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks.” The place of oral culture, which allowed Shvarts to make her literary *début* without any print publications, is examined through the example of her poem “I Laughed” (“Smeialas’,” n.d.). Other early poems – “In the Cathedral” (“V sobore,” 1962) and “The Holy Fool” (“Iurodivyi,” 1962) – capture Shvarts’s spiritual interests and an elided lyrical *I*. The responses of her contemporaries to her

⁷³ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.

poetry and self-presentation show that poetic self-fashioning was a collective endeavor. The chapter closes with discussion of Shvarts's first venture into literary criticism and statement of poetic values, "About Marina Tsvetaeva" ("O Marine Tsvetaevoi," 1963).

Chapter Two (1965-1971) shows Shvarts to have been a reluctant and occasional participant in Leningrad's literary seminars and café scene and argues that her self-marginalization explains her near invisibility in the publications and histories of these institutions. As a university student, Shvarts pursued her own educational agenda, but also completed an undergraduate thesis and participated in a local translation seminar. At the same time, she composed works of apprenticeship and experimentation. We now know these years to be more productive than they previously appeared, thanks to the publication of Shvarts's "green notebook," with experimental works that illuminate her study of genre.⁷⁴ Her "Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin" ("Ballada o spiriticheskom seanse i teni Aleksandra Pushkina," 1968) and "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism" ("Rondo s primes'iu patriotizma," 1969) reflect her cultivation of a flexible polymetrical versification. Shvarts's ideas about meter and the limits of traditionalism find expression in the programmatic poem "Imitation of Boileau" ("Podrazhanie Bualo," 1971), a discussion of which closes the chapter.

When public recitations and other opportunities to reach poetry enthusiasts declined in the early 1970s, Shvarts and her contemporaries put apartments, ateliers, and other spaces to communal use for seminars, salons, exhibits, almanacs and journals – the institutions that brought together unofficial poets, photographers, critics, and philosophers. These ventures, the subject of Chapter Three, created ready audiences for Shvarts's poetry and private-public stages for her to cultivate dramatic authorial masks and indulge in extravagant behavior. In the mid-

⁷⁴ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi."*

1970s, Shvarts came into the spotlight of Leningrad unofficial culture through her involvement with a number of key undertakings. These included the *Lepta* anthology, a project whose failure helped give rise to the samizdat journals *Tritdstat' sem'* (Thirty-Seven) and *Chasy* (The Clock/Hours). Shvarts's first poetry collections appeared on their pages, followed by polemical exchanges about her poetics and her self-presentation. The journals also featured literary translations and prose writings that Shvarts published under pseudonyms. The theatrical talks on Russian poetry that she gave at her domestic "Chimposium," a mock literary salon, were part of the journals' "Chronicle" sections that documented the community.

The 1970s saw Shvarts's first books of poetry and her development of personalized genres. In "vision-adventures" (*viz'ion-priklucheniia*), such as "Seven Faces of the Buddhist Temple" and "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull," Shvarts presents fantastic scenes that unfold in a recognizable local geography. She also set the first of her "small epics" (*malen'kie poemy*) in a theatrical, metaphysical, but also everyday Leningrad. Through this genre, Shvarts advanced and embodied the bold physicality she had experimented with in the "green notebook."

In the Conclusion, I summarize the achievements and circumstances that granted Shvarts a highly idiosyncratic status as an outstanding outsider in the Leningrad *andegraund* literary scene of the Brezhnev era.

Chapter One: Début 1948-1964

Origins: Biological, Geographical, Mythological

Following her mother Dina Shvarts's death in 1998 – the “most terrible year of my life,” as she described it (3:255) – Elena Shvarts undertook a number of projects related to her family history and childhood, revisiting her early life writings and composing new ones. She digitized the childhood diary she had begun writing at the age of eight (5:256-393). She prepared a volume of her mother's diaries for publication, compiling detailed biographical information for its index and endnotes.⁷⁵ She wrote an entry for the *Leningrad Martyrology* project, “What Little I Know About My Executed Grandfather,” which drew on the same research.⁷⁶ In the autobiographical volume that followed, *The Visible Side of Life (Vidimaia storona zhizni)*, Shvarts recast her personal history in micro-essays that blended the historical self with the mythopoetic one she had cultivated in her poetry and prose of the 1970s and 1980s (3:170-224).

The discussion below draws on these writings for factual information and makes connections to earlier creative works in which Shvarts mythologized her origins, such as the 1979 poem “Birth” (“Rozhdenie”):

Из рук скользнул он, как лоза:
«Лети и не смотри назад.»
Когда же ангел закричал,
Заверещал, закукарекал,
Тогда я стала человеком,
Табак мне бросили в глаза.
Я очнулась синей, красной и слепой
На лопате деревянной, тупой.
Меня месили, мяли, били,
Пекли, кололи и давили,

⁷⁵ Dina Shvarts, *Dnevnik i zametki*.

⁷⁶ Shvarts, “Nemnogoe, chto ia znaiu.”

И шили – прямо на живом,
 Шестом толкнули, я упала
 Вниз по трубе горячей, алой.
 Глаза разъяла я с трудом
 И родилась чрез печку – в дом.
 (1:17)

He slipped from the hands, like a vine: / “Fly and don’t look back.” / It was when
 the angel cried out, / Began to squeal and crow, / That I became a person, / They
 threw tobacco in my eyes. / I came to – blue, red, and blind / On a dull wooden
 paddle. / I was mixed, kneaded, beaten, / Baked, hacked, and crushed, / And sewn
 – *in vivo*, / Pushed by a staff, I fell / Down along a hot crimson pipe. / I opened
 my eyes with difficulty / And borne thru the stove – came home.

Here the unborn poet is mixed, kneaded, and baked like dough, punctured and sewn to life. The folkloric-fantastic poem is saturated with metaphors of mixing, sewing, transformation, and fragile boundaries, but is soberly metapoetic as well, reflecting the violent shaping that Shvarts’s poetic personae are subjected to. Brought to life by the raucous cry of an angel, the poet is pushed to earth by an anonymous staff, and arrives in a different mythical space, as a baking loaf of bread turned into a baby from Russian folklore. The poet’s arrival on the earthly scene via a red-hot stovepipe also varies a fiery animation myth visible in the early writings discussed below. Most importantly, through the poem’s final word, *dom* (building, house, home), Shvarts conveys the security and importance of her childhood home.

Shvarts made many statements about herself as a poet, including a brief biography crafted in the late 1980s for the back cover of one of her first “officially” published collections:

To [answer] your question: I was born in ’48, at the corner of Lavrov and Chernyshevsky, so I’m a real cockney... My father’s name was Andrei Dzhedzhula, he died long ago and I never saw him. Dzhedzhula – that’s from Dzhedzhalii, there once was such a colonel and ambassador under Bogdan Khmelnitsky. He was a baptized Tatar, later the Dzhedzhulas got even more mixed... So, a Judaic-Slavic-Tatar-Gypsy mix... It’s not so important where I went to school as [the fact] that until 14 years of age I lived in the Egyptian house on Kaliaeva [Street]. Do you know that house? Giant pharaohs guarded its front doors, and Isis’s son Gor stretched his wings over the gates. As if I stepped out of

a pyramid into the world and found myself in the very heart of a mad northern city. That's why I am a purely Petersburg person: nervous, mistrustful, and living at the edge of worlds, like the city itself.¹

This description of the poet's origins is less fanciful than it appears. Indeed, Shvarts never met her father Andrei Dzhedzhula (1915-1971), a war veteran from the Vinnitsa region of Ukraine who became a professor of history at Kiev University.² Dzedzhula had studied in Leningrad before the war, but when he met Dina Shvarts he was a student at the Higher Party School in Kiev. A short romance at the Black Sea between Dzhedzhula and Shvarts's mother led to the birth of their "love child" (*ditia liubvi*), as Dina Shvarts reportedly referred to her daughter (3:203).

The legend of her conception was less important to Shvarts than her Cossack roots and the southern cardinal point on her map of the self that her paternal lineage provided. As a child Shvarts sought to meet her father, made trips to Kiev as a young adult, and even considered adopting Dzhedzhula as her pen name.³ Poetic works such as "Ballad, Seized by Paralysis at the End" ("Ballada, kotoruiu v kontse skhvatyvaet paralich," 1969), "Ballad of Makhno" ("Ballada o Makhno," n.d.), and "The Holy Fools' March on Kiev" ("Pokhod iurodivykh na Kiev," 1994) reflect this preoccupation with Ukrainian identity and history.⁴

Bloodlines are one thing; upbringing is another. Shvarts later wrote that her father's absence was fortunate (3:204) and that she made the right decision in not using his surname. She was born into a multi-generational all-female Jewish household and reared by her maternal

¹ Shvarts, *Stikhi*, back cover.

² Vidnians'kii, "Dzedzhula, Andrii Omel'ianovich." Available at http://esu.com.ua/search_articles.php?id=23957. A note in Dina Shvarts's *Dnevnik i zametki* incorrectly gives his year of birth as 1913 and his patronymic as Ivanovich (419). Elsewhere, Shvarts identifies her paternal grandfather as Emelian Dzhedzhula (3:205).

³ On Dzhedzhula as possible pen name, see Eliseev, "Triumf dlia Eleny." Note also the poem "Mogila ottsa" (Father's Grave) (3:160).

⁴ *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts* 1:42; 2:140-146; *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi,"* 64-65.

grandmother Liubov Izrail'yevna Shvarts (née Rubina, 1894-1950), her great-aunt Berta Izrail'yevna Rubina (1898-1980), and her mother Dina Morisovna Shvarts (1921-1998). They lived in a communal apartment in central Leningrad with three other families, in the “Egyptian house” at 23 Kaliaeva Street (now Zakharevskaya), two blocks inland from the Neva River and the Voskresenskaia Embankment.⁵ Shvarts pointed to the building adorned with deities, rearing cobras, winged suns, eyes of Horus, ankhs, lotuses, and scarabs, as her literal and symbolic cradle on multiple occasions (figures 1-2).⁶

Much as she leveraged the poetic potential of her father’s name without making it her literary identity, Shvarts harnessed the creative possibilities of the Egyptian house, turning the backdrop of her lived environment into a theatrical stage for self-fashioning. Shvarts’s claim of birth at the “corner of Lavrov and Chernyshevsky” is also geographically accurate. The birth clinic (*roddom*) where she was born was located some two blocks south of the building at the intersection of Chernyshevsky Prospect and Petr Lavrov Street (now Furshtatskaya).⁷ Shvarts’s fondness for geographical-historical rhymes accounts for her “real cockney” status: some two blocks in the opposite direction of the Egyptian House is the Neva River, an artery of the city that fans out in a delta past the islands to the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea, much as the rivers of London and Alexandria do.

Shvarts’s self-presentation as a “Judaic-Slavic-Tatar-Gypsy mix” and the mixing endured by the proto-poet in “Birth” suggest the intertwined multiplicity of her origins; elsewhere, she emphasized the co-presence of opposing elements. In the autobiographical essays of *The Visible*

⁵ Shvarts refers to the communal apartment on the first pages of *The Visible Side of Life* (3:170-171). She mentioned that three families lived in it in her UW-Madison lecture of 9 November 2007.

⁶ See Appendix for illustrations. For other references to the Egyptian House, see “Moi dom” (My House) (3:233), “Sny” (Dreams) (4:6); Shvarts, “Elena Shvarts.”

⁷ Dina Shvarts, *Dnevnik i zametki*, 263.

Side of Life, Shvarts suggested that her maternal Jewish and paternal Ukrainian Cossack–Crimean Tatar bloodlines were at odds with each other, speculating that her “internal contrariety” had a biological basis (3:207). Similarly, in the poem “Song of the Half-Blood” (“Pesnia polukrovki,” n.d.), the poet asserted “Cossack strength from Judaic will / You cannot partition off within yourself” (3:92). In this late poem, the symbol of the caduceus provides a visual representation of the marriage of opposites that ostensibly informed the poet’s character. The staff of Hermes, together with its Greek, Jewish, and Indian permutations, is also a source of imagery in the poem “The Russification of Kundalini (“Obrusenie Kundalini,” 1996) and the essay “Poetics of What Is Alive” (“Poetika zhivogo,” 1996) (1:341; 4:274). In medieval alchemical depictions of Hermes, the winged messenger of antiquity holds the staff entwined with snakes, his head topped by the Monas hieroglyph, a symbol of Mercury derived from the Egyptian ankh. These symbols were syncretically merged in an icon that Shvarts used as a signature and visual self-representation: an ankh with a top hat and outstretched wings, inside which figures an open book cum bowtie (figures 3-4).

Next door to the Egyptian House is the building Dina Shvarts lived in as a child with Shvarts’s maternal grandparents, and where she witnessed their arrest during the Stalinist Terror (3:253).⁸ As two of the millions of victims of the 1930s mass murders, their fate was “horrible in part due to its typicality,” as Shvarts observed in her note for the *Leningrad Martyrology*.⁹ Moris Abovich Shvarts (1894-1937) was arrested and shot for his alleged involvement in a

⁸ Shvarts, “Nemnogoe, chto ia znaiu,” 672. Dina Shvarts’s 1992 account of her parents’ arrest is available in the Iofe Fund digital archive: <https://arch2.iofe.center/person/42566>.

⁹ Shvarts, “Nemnogoe, chto ia znaiu,” 672. The article describes the pretext for her grandfather’s arrest, the police search of the apartment, the later arrest of his wife, the family’s fruitless efforts to locate them and learn of their fate.

Trotskyite-Zinovievite organization purportedly planning Kirov's assassination, having refused to confess to any crime.¹⁰ His wife Liubov Izrail'yevna Shvarts (1894-1950) was arrested and exiled in 1938, perhaps in response to her letter to Stalin protesting her spouse's unjust detention. She was released ten years later, around the time of Shvarts's birth. Following the arrest, their daughter Dina Shvarts (then sixteen years old) and her two younger sisters were taken in by their maternal aunt, Berta Izrail'yevna Rubina (1898-1980), who adopted three children of an "enemy of the people" at significant personal risk.¹¹ Rubina lived with Dina Shvarts into her old age and was the third member of the household from Shvarts's childhood into adulthood, filling the roles of "grandmother, and dad, and nanny" (3:200).

Shvarts's early years were not spent in the private domestic sphere; at the age of two she was placed in a child care center (*detskii sad*) affiliated with the leather factory where Rubina worked. She lived there Monday–Saturday, going home only on Sundays, until she was old enough for school.¹² In two micro-essays – "Childhood Illnesses" ("Detskie bolezni," 2000) and "Kindergarten" ("Detskii sad," 1996) – Shvarts associates preschool with vivid sensory experiences: the factory's howling whistle, the stench of soaking horse hides, the bitter taste of black chokeberry (3:173-174, 4:327-328).¹³ These and other details echo the 1986 poem

¹⁰ A typo in *Dnevnik i zametki* indicates that Shvarts's grandparents were arrested in 1933 (346). A different note dates Moris Abovich Shvarts's arrest to December 1936 (395), as "Nemnogoe, chto ia znaiu" also indicates.

¹¹ Expelled from the Communist Party, Rubina was not fired from her job "by a miracle," as Shvarts put it in "Nemnogoe, chto ia znaiu," 672. See also "Predki" (3:205) and Dina Shvarts, *Dnevnik i zametki*, 348.

¹² To live in such a facility seems to have been outside the norm. The "Babyhood" and "Nursery Days" chapters of Catriona Kelly's *Children's World* provide historical background and statistics that generally support this impression. As Kelly puts it, finding a kindergarten place was "...much easier for parents who were, in one sense or another, privileged," adding that such "exclusive" care was "not necessarily of high quality" (405).

¹³ It is standard to translate "detskii sad" as "kindergarten," but this rendering does not capture the duration of Shvarts's lived experience – at least three years.

“Kindergarten Thirty Years Later” (“Detskii sad cherez tridsat' let”), in which the poet returns to the “sadiĭ, adik, raĕk, sadok” (little garden, little hell, peep show/little heaven, hatchery) of her childhood. As Stephanie Sandler has pointed out, this work emphasizes the primacy of place for the poet, explicitly so in its lines: “Thus a person in the middle of life / Understands not what one is, but where” (3:234-235).¹⁴

“Kindergarten Thirty Years Later,” “Childhood Illnesses,” and “Kindergarten” have none of the exuberance of the Egyptian house bookcover biography, but in all four texts Shvarts shows herself growing up in a monumental necropolis, which Leningrad-Petersburg ever more clearly was, the older the poet grew. Even a brief comparison of these works shows Shvarts’s tendency to pass the same experiences through more than one genre, adapting her self-presentation accordingly. The later essays revisit and repeat the poem’s fantastic scenes in the “humble prose” that Shvarts, like Pushkin, turned to in maturity. Shvarts recreates the scenery, as it were, of the poem, but strips it of drama: precision and brevity reign in the prosaic “visible side of life.” In the poem “Kindergarten Thirty Years Later,” the same details (whistle, pond, berries, railroad, hides, stench, taste) are fit to archetypal patterns, endowed with historical depth and metaphysical significance. The poet, then a child, becomes aware of her own blood and bodily fragility when a doctor pricks her finger. His act points to the “terrors of socialization,” as Sandler observes,¹⁵ and a shift to a postlapsarian state of existence. Shvarts replays the Biblical Fall in her kinder-garden, where she acquires unwanted knowledge: that her “paradise” is also a graveyard, the seeming utopia of childhood – its opposite. This loss of innocence, with the bitter

¹⁴ Sandler, “Cultural Memory and Self-Expression,” 259.

¹⁵ Sandler, “Cultural Memory and Self-Expression,” 259.

aftertaste of forbidden fruit, is the cost of the knowledge, or *gnosis*, that Shvarts pursued in maturity.

A Soviet Childhood: Diaries 1957-1964

Shvarts began keeping a diary at the age of eight, supplying scholars of her work with an unusual and invaluable primary source about the poet's early years (5:257-393).¹⁶ Her record and representation of everyday life at home, school, and other social institutions – an “anthropological miracle,” in poet Aleksandr Skidan's estimation – is a document of interest not only to literary historians, but to any student of Soviet culture.¹⁷ The seven years it covers (1957-1964) show Shvarts's passage from naive child to jaded youth. Roughly contemporary with the Khrushchev era, it follows the emotional arc of the Thaw from hope to disillusionment, reveals how Shvarts was drawn into local literary life, and documents her acquisition of a network, a craft, and a reputation as a poet.

Soviet diaries, as we know from the many studies of recent years, served as laboratories of self-construction, and Shvarts's is no exception.¹⁸ She takes a practical attitude toward hers as an occasional record of activities and impressions: the what, who, and when of her reading, meetings, relations, travels, life events. Entries are regular, but far from daily and far from comprehensive. Juliane Fürst has argued that the subject of mature socialism was a “multi-

¹⁶ Also available at <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2012/3/dnevnik-2.html>.

¹⁷ Skidan, “Ot redaktora,” 236.

¹⁸ Foundational studies of Stalin-era diaries include *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* by Jochen Hellbeck and *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, edited by Garros, et al. There have been fewer studies of diaries written in the Khrushchev era; one exception is Pinsky, “Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev.” The *Prozhito* web archive of diaries may facilitate growth in this direction (<https://prozhito.org/>).

tasking individual, embedded in and divorced from the Soviet collective at the same time,” and we see Shvarts become such a figure in the diary.¹⁹ Its first four years are dominated by commentary on relationships with classmates and teachers.²⁰ Her descriptions of school emphasize conflict, with prominent accounts of disputes, physical fights, and “boycotts.” There are pleasures, too: the receipt, for example, of her third Pioneer attribute – the red booklet outlining the organization’s rules and recording her progress toward membership in the Communist Youth League (Jan. 1959, 5:264). Here and elsewhere, the political is intertwined with material and consumer culture: “I went to the shop and bought the ‘In Lenin’s birthplace’ postcards, and decided to collect postcards devoted to V. I. Lenin” (July 1958, 5:261).

Initially Shvarts writes “in Soviet tongues,” as Michael Gorham has it, weaving the discourse of the public sphere into her self-representation when, for instance, she reproduces the formulations of the self-congratulatory Soviet state: “Today marks 40 years of the medal-bearing [*ordenonosnyi*] Komsomol. Our squad gave gifts [...]” (Sept. 1958, 5:263). Newspaper headlines are absorbed into her personal chronicle: “Khrushchev has gone to America for talks with Eisenhower” (Sept. 1959, 5:271). Reflecting the political changes and continuities of the Thaw, Stalin is nearly absent in the diary, while Lenin is an admired figure, a benevolent Pioneer father associated with mankind’s progress. “If only Lenin were alive!” she exclaims on the occasion of Gagarin’s orbit around the Earth in April 1961 (5:283).

Her treatment of the genre evolves considerably as she matures from child to young woman, but the diary is mostly couched in plain prose. Memories or writings about travel,

¹⁹ Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 26.

²⁰ Shvarts attended first through fourth grade at school #185 on Shpalernaia Street (then Voinova), a few blocks from the Egyptian House. The House of Writers, a multifunctional building where the Leningrad branch of the Soviet Writers’ Union had offices and hosted events, was on the same street.

frequent in the second half, are more cohesive and lyrical. Occasional flights of fancy – as her summary of “drinking the moon” one December night – appear alongside the latest events (Dec. 1962, 5:315). Such “improvisation is rare,” however, as the author herself assessed her treatment of the diary in October 1963 (5:360). The entries are also a space for self-reflection and pursuit of self-understanding à la Tolstoy, but with none of his Benjamin Franklin-style accounting. Shvarts engages in “straight talk” with herself – “Lord, what an idiot and a jerk [*svoloch*] I am. [...] I write bad poems, absolutely mediocre. I’m grateful for Yu. A. [Berezhnova], but I talk to her like an egotistic idiot” (Jan. 1963, 5:322) – but also notes the mismatch between interiority and its verbalization in either diary or speech: “I always feel different inside” (July 1963, 5:344). Following a number of entries with overt literary treatment, she resolves to “write only the truth,” specifying that she means not the external or everyday, but an internal truth “of the barest inklings and true motivations that we often fail to realize.” Such writings, she continues, might be able to capture “the rising and setting of the spirit” (Nov. 1963, 5:376). In addition to the pleasure of encountering a defamiliarized Shvarts, the diary offers a counterpoint to her creative prose and poetry that treat the same events differently, including her 1961 trip to Kiev, discussed below.

***Kruzhki* (Circles)**

The role that late Soviet-era socio-cultural and educational institutions played in shaping readers and writers is particularly well illuminated by Shvarts’s diary, in which the consumption and production of texts feature prominently. She records the purchase of newspapers and magazines: *Sovetskii sport*, *Amerika*, *Polsha*, (1961-1962, 5:282, 5:289, 5:302). She mentions books that are lent or given as gifts, detailing specific works and authors: “Just now I sat down to

read Mayakovsky”; “I started reading *Facing the Flag* by Jules Verne”; “I read A. Blok’s *The Twelve*” (Aug. 1958 - Jan. 1959, 5:262-265).

As Shvarts found her way into the social circles where she would spend adulthood, standard sources of information and entertainment were pushed to the margins as she gained access to texts that circulated outside of official channels. The partial record of her reading in the diary at first reflects the school program: Gaidar’s *Timur and His Squad* and Aleksandr Herzen’s *Who is to Blame?*, for example (Aug. 1958, 5:262; Nov. 1959, 5:274). Mentors and friends supplied more sophisticated material, and by age thirteen she was recording impressions of works not available to the average Soviet citizen, such as Brodsky’s “Christmas Romance” and Kafka’s *The Trial* (June 1963, 5:340; Oct. 1963, 5:361).²¹

Co-curricular activities, to use a sufficiently close American analogy, were essential to Shvarts’s development as a writer. She participated in a “young correspondent” group (Sept. 1959, 5:272) and was appointed editor of the school paper (Oct. 1959, 5:273). She entered public competitions for young writers: “In the *Leninist Spark* they’ve announced a contest for a short story, I’m going to participate” (July 1958, 5:262). She also undertook her own compositional plans and projects: “Now I’m going to finish the first chapter of my story ‘Kostka, or ‘Duty’” (March 1957, 5:260). More importantly, she found her way into a local literary *kruzhok* (circle), at Leningrad’s Palace of Pioneers, through which many of the city’s intellectuals passed.²²

²¹ Brodsky’s poetry was published in the USSR only in the late 1980s. Excerpts from *The Trial* appeared in 1964, but the novel was published in full only in 1965 (Friedberg, *Decade of Euphoria*, 274; Tall, “Who’s Afraid of Franz Kafka”).

²² See Kelly, *Children’s World*, 551-560 for an overview of the Pioneer organization, including the role of the Palaces of Pioneers. The most substantial source on the literary circles at the Palace of Pioneers is the 730-page *Vremia i slovo: literaturnaia studiia Dvortsa Pionerov* compiled by Yulia Valieva. Contributors include such notable figures as Vladimir Britanishsky, Aleksander Gorodnitsky, Sergei Stratanovsky, Elena Ignatova, Lev Lurie, Alexandra Smith, and Valery Shubinsky.

Attached to schools, factories and houses of culture, *kruzhki* (circles) for artistic and scientific activities of all possible kinds – drama, drawing, photography, etc. – were widespread in Soviet everyday life and continue to exist in Russia today. Shvarts joined other schoolchildren in a writing circle for grades 8-11; she was in the 6th. “I’m the littlest one,” she wrote in her diary (Nov. 1960, 5:277).

Historically, *kruzhki* were a pre-revolutionary intelligentsia tradition for adults, not children. Barbara Walker has described them as a “central social, cultural, and economic institution” of Russian literary life from the late eighteenth century into the Soviet era.²³ When literary organizations were consolidated in the early 1930s and the Soviet Writers’ Union was established, adult circles were banned, and the *kruzhok* was transferred to the toothless realm of children’s education and edifying leisure. Walker’s description of adult circles is no less valid for the Leningrad literary circles for youth, fostering “self-development, self-advancement, institutional foundations for intellectual and ideological argumentation, the proliferation of published and unpublished works through semipublic or public readings, the founding of journals, and the plotting of revolutions.”²⁴ Indeed, Shvarts reaped all of these benefits, including opportunities for outright rebellion, through her network of Palace of Pioneers acquaintances. Such circles socialized young people into the intelligentsia tradition of the *kruzhok* itself, a key institution of unofficial culture in the 1970s. Shvarts’s “Chimposium,” discussed in Chapter Three, may be read as a send-up of this ubiquitous practice. The “circular” quality of the era connects it to previous ones when poetry thrived through literary domesticity: the early nineteenth century, exemplified by Arzamas and the Green Lamp, and the early twentieth, when

²³ Walker, “On Reading Soviet Memoirs,” 330.

²⁴ Walker, “On Reading Soviet Memoirs,” 330. See also Walker, *Maximilian Voloshin and the Literary Circle*, esp. 3-23.

kruzhki truly flourished: Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Tower,” Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius’s domestic salon, Maksimilian Voloshin’s Koktebel cottage, and Aleksei Remizov’s *Obezvelvolpal*, among others.²⁵

As archival studies undertaken by Emily Lygo have shown, officially sanctioned and sponsored literary institutions played a formative role in the development of late Leningrad poetry and the “second culture.”²⁶ Lygo has traced the Soviet Writers’ Union efforts to reinvigorate lyric poetry in response to a perceived “need for new voices” that led to increased opportunities for young people to develop and share their work, primarily through literary organizations (*literaturnye ob"edineniia*, or LITOs) for young writers. The *kruzhki* at the Palace of Pioneers were an analogous structure for children and teenagers. The LITO system and Palace of Pioneers *kruzhki* were not separate; participants passed in both directions, creating an intergenerational “field of cultural production,” as Bourdieu has it.²⁷ In the post-war context of the Thaw, such *kruzhki* and LITOs helped to lay the institutional and intellectual foundations of unofficial culture by fostering: textual exchange; public, semi-public, and private readings; aesthetically oriented discussion and debate; networks and mentor-mentee relations; and mutual documentation practices. These traditions were leveraged and repurposed as rituals of resistance in the 1970s.

The Palace of Pioneers and *Derzanie* (Daring)

²⁵ See Aronson and Reiser, *Literaturnye kruzhki i salony* for a historical overview of the literary *kruzhok* as well as entries on individual groups. For modernist groups, see Shruba, *Literaturnye ob"edineniia*, a dictionary of more than 350 literary societies, circles, and salons 1890-1917.

²⁶ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*; see also Lygo, “The Need for New Voices.”

²⁷ Participants occasionally refer to the circles at the Palace of Pioneers as a LITO. See, for example, Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 107.

To meet a non-genius among the sixteen-year-old wards of the Palace of Pioneers was practically impossible.
 – Viktor Krivulin

Shvarts's socialization into public literary life began in earnest through spoken readings and collective discussions of her and others' writing at the Palace of Pioneers in Leningrad. She was a semi-regular participant in the prose circle, then a poetry circle; curious initially, her interest faded and returned. At the poetry circle, she made the acquaintance of key collaborators in her literary future: Viktor Krivulin, Sergei Stratanovsky, Elena Ignatova, Evgeny Pazukhin, and Evgeny Venzel. She was guided by preceptors Yulia Berezhnova and Natalia Grudinina. From the Palace of Pioneers, she quickly passed into the LITOs and came under the guidance of Gleb Semënov, a prominent mentor and poet.

If the late Soviet era saw a Bronze Age of Russian verse, as some have suggested,²⁸ the Palace of Pioneers was its Lycée. Participant Petr Brandt used a more industrial metaphor, characterizing it as the “talent factory” (*kuznitsa kadrov*) of Leningrad unofficial culture.²⁹ It was housed in a luxurious and imposing eighteenth-century palace complex in the city center, the most impressive such facility in the Soviet Union, at one end of the famous Anichkov Bridge, with monumental neoclassical figures restraining rearing horses.³⁰ When the children and youth of post-war Leningrad, having little space of their own in *kommunalka* (communal apartment)

²⁸ Sedakova, “O ‘Bronzovom veke;’” Soprovsky, *Priznanie v liubvi*, 164; Kulakov, “Bronzovyi vek russkoi poezii;” Medvedev, “Prokliatyi poet andegraunda 50-x;” Valieva, “Nauchnye chteniia pamiati Liudmily Aleksandrovny Iezuitovoi.”

²⁹ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 100.

³⁰ Kelly, *Children's World*, 552. For period presentations of the Palace of Pioneers, see Boroditskaya and Golovan, *This Palace Belongs to the Children* (a Soviet view) and Morton, *Pleasures and Palaces* (a foreign visitor's perspective). On the Moscow Palace of Pioneers, a socialist modernist complex in the Lenin Hills that opened to great fanfare in 1962, see Reid, “Khrushchev in Wonderland.”

rooms, found themselves the primary occupants of the former Anichkov Palace, they were understandably excited. “This is going to be my primo spot,” Shvarts wrote after her first visit (March 1960, 5:274). Viktor Krivulin’s nostalgic description of the luxurious, spacious, simultaneously imperial and communitarian palace puts it at a remove from the everyday, a grandiose imperial-soviet pastiche: “Coming out of the November gloom into a blindingly bright palatial entry hall with marble, crystal, and mirrored floors that reflect two huge plaster figures flanking the grand staircase – a pioneer boy with a bugle and a pioneer girl saluting everyone bold enough to climb to the top – and you find yourself at home.”³¹

Other reminiscences similarly emphasize the cozy feel of the *kruzhki* at the Palace of Pioneers. Formal meetings were often complemented by household visits among participants or with mentor-leaders, who offered tea and conversation in a less constrained atmosphere, initiating some young participants into a culture of literary domesticity.³² This practice was not limited to the Palace of Pioneers; it was common for participants in Dmitry Maksimov’s Blok seminar or Elga Linetskaia’s translation seminar, described in Chapter Two, to continue their discussions after formal meetings in private rooms and apartments.

Shvarts’s *kruzhok* attendance in the early 1960s coincided with particular moment in the history of the Palace of Pioneers, when a critical mass of teachers and participants gathered around the groups for poets, prose writers, translators, and critics of various young ages. The supraorganization *Derzanie* (Daring) was a club established in fall 1962 that brought the various *kruzhki* together for discussions, special guests, even trips.³³ The “literary Saturdays” hosted at

³¹ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 51.

³² See Valieva, *Vremia i slovo* for numerous examples.

³³ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*; Pudovkina, “Klub ‘Derzanie.’”

the Palace of Pioneers became the “center of club life” according to many participants, with guest appearances by local poets and bards.³⁴ Circle leaders and participants alike took part in *disputy* (debates) about contemporary literature. Shvarts makes no mention of *Derzanie* in any of her life writings and appears not to have participated; still, the club was formative for her closest contemporaries and future collaborators. This situation is exemplary of Shvarts’s future role as an outsider who remained on the fringes of literary socializing in the second half of the 1960s.

The *kruzhki* in general and the *Derzanie* club in particular not only brought together young talents, but emboldened them to speak freely, experiment literarily, and to take as models both worthy mainstream writers and unjustly forgotten ones. Lev Lurie described the club as an exemplary, but not isolated, “oasis of free thought” for this generation.³⁵ Lurie’s characterization is borne out by many statements from other participants, such as this one by Liubov Beregovaia:

Club participants make interesting and bold statements. During the discussion of V. Aksënov’s “Ticket to the Stars,” Boris Shvaiger’s statement surprised, outraged, and stupefied the teachers: “Who said that losing your virginity is the same as losing your morality?” (this, in 1962 in the Palace of Pioneers!).³⁶

Some taboo topics were raised in more oblique terms. Krivulin later recalled Stratanovsky’s poem recited at a *Derzanie* event about Auschwitz and, simultaneously, the legacy of Stalinism, suggesting that participants also acquired or practiced Aesopian language through their participation.³⁷ Much as in the LITOs, the daring of some of the *Derzanie* participants had

³⁴ Names mentioned include Bulat Okudzhava, Aleksandr Gorodnitsky, Yuli Kim, Gleb Gorbovsky, and Viktor Sosnora. See Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 127, 130.

³⁵ Lur’e, “Kak Nevskii prospekt pobedil ploshchad’ proletarskoi diktatury,” 211.

³⁶ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 127.

³⁷ Krivulin, “Sergei Stratanovskii: k voprosu o peterburgskoi versii postmoderna,” 262. Aesopian language was an allegorical literary system deployed by Soviet era writers to circumvent censorship. See Losev, *On the Beneficence of Censorship*.

serious consequences that cost mentors considerable trouble. Elena Pudovkina's account indicates that local authorities put an end to the group in the early 1970s after Lurie accidentally left a pamphlet critical of Brezhnev at the Palace of Pioneers.³⁸ The venture's end reflects the changed atmosphere from the early 1960s, when *Derzanie* was established.

The Palace of Pioneers was an important locus of textual exchange, more often literary than political, as participants shared their own texts and others that they liked. Authors of reminiscences constantly mention that it was through the *kruzhki* that they first heard or read Pasternak, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Khodasevich, early Zabolotsky, and other modernists excluded from the Soviet canon of Russian literature.³⁹ Shvarts acknowledges the receipt of books from her *kruzhok* mentor Yulia Berezhnova in her diary (Dec. 1962, 5:316). Her new acquaintances Viktor Krivulin and Lev Vasilev lent her a copy of Pasquale Villari's *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, a figure she became enamored of (Nov. 1963, 5:377). Evgeny Feoktistov brought her a copy of the latest *Den' poezii* (*Poetry Day*) almanac with Gleb Semënov's verse in it (Dec. 1963, 5:381). Shvarts shared as well: Stratanovsky recalled that he first encountered the Russian Futurists when she lent him Benedikt Livshits's memoir *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*.⁴⁰

Shvarts's good fortune to have been born in one of the cultural capitals of the Soviet Union in a time of peace and political relaxation thus led her to a hothouse for literary youth. In fact, her mother's position as chief dramaturg for Leningrad's Bolshoi Drama Theater, combined with her talent and the institutions available to cultivate it, made Shvarts's creative context

³⁸ Pudovkina, "Klub 'Derzanie.'" See Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 102-104 for a shorter version of Pudovkina's essay.

³⁹ See Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*; Britanishskii, *Peterburg-Leningrad*.

⁴⁰ Sergei Stratanovsky, statement at Saint Petersburg event in memory of Shvarts, May 21, 2018; Conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

extraordinary. The theatrical milieu itself inspired her first long composition, a work of self-imposed and self-regulated literary apprenticeship.

Life on Stage: “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks”

Shvarts’s first substantial compositions were in prose, not poetry, thanks in part to the instruction she received at the Palace of Pioneers. Her diary gives us a glimpse of *kruzhok* activities: “We went over the description of [people’s] appearance in classical literature and the difference between nineteenth-century and contemporary descriptions of appearance. Then we described each other” (Dec. 1960, 5:279). Shvarts put some of these lessons into practice in her diary and in her story “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” (“Devochka so sta soroka vosem'iu rodinkami,” 1961).⁴¹

The story captures some two months of Shvarts’s lived experience in the summer of 1961, offering a snapshot of life with the Bolshoi Drama Theater (BDT), where Dina Shvarts was chief dramaturg for 30 years, working alongside its famous director Georgy Tovstonogov. She took her daughter on at least two of the theater’s summer tours (*gastroli*), thereby establishing Shvarts’s ideal mode of existence, as she later wrote: “I understood that the best thing in life was travel, but not simply travel, but [...] with the goal of performing for others (3:178-179). The early theatrical *gastroli* resumed in the post-Soviet years as literary tours (*literaturnye gastroli*), when Shvarts was able to travel internationally.

⁴¹ For diary examples, see 5:301-302; 5:342-343. The story is not included in *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*; textual citations below are from the print publication in *Peterburgskii teatral'nyi zhurnal*. A digital version is available at <http://ptj.spb.ru/archive/61/historical-novel-61/devochka-sosta-soroka-vosemyu-rodinkami/>

Sarah Bishop has rightly pointed to the “profound impact” of the theatrical tours on Shvarts in her 2010 overview of the poet’s biography and creative path.⁴² In *The Visible Side of Life*, Shvarts described her trips with the BDT as a series of “firsts”: her first experience of the church and of Dostoevsky (seen on stage, rather than read), first acquaintance with genius (Innokenty Smoktunovsky as Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*), first glass of wine, first look at the sea (3:178-183). Shvarts’s stage début even took place during the 1961 Kiev tour, a thrilling and kenotic experience, as she described it, that led to “creative exhaustion” (*tvorcheskaia opustoshennost’*) in the performer (3:181). The mature writer remarked that she “began to think” during these trips (3:179).

Life on tour was characterized by demanding artistic work – rehearsals and performances – alternating with local exploration and alcohol-infused socializing. The experience thus provided Shvarts with models of social and artistic behavior while it fed her imagination and ambition. These strong impressions also inspired literary compositions⁴³ such as “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks,” a short story-length narrative of her 1961 travels, which recreates her daily encounters, excursions, and conversations with the BDT company and their families. The narrator enters Saint Vladimir cathedral and feels a “surge of faith” (*priliv very*); she develops a serious crush on one of the actors, the young, handsome, and already famous Sergei Yursky; she has an anxious but exhilarating stage debut in Aleksei Arbuzov’s play *An Irkutsk Story* (*Irkutskaia istoriia*) as “the [little] girl with the bread roll” (*devochka s bulkoi*), a

⁴² Bishop, “In Memoriam. Elena Andreevna Shvarts,” 114.

⁴³ During her first trip with the BDT in the summer of 1959, Shvarts recorded impressions of a Tbilisi marketplace (5:267-269). The 1962 “In the Cathedral” discussed below, was inspired by a visit to the Saint Vladimir cathedral during the Kiev tour.

partial source for the story's title. When the theatrical "fairy tale," as she describes it, ends, the urban theatrical work is followed by seaside rest in Crimea that is also full of emotional highs and lows.⁴⁴

"The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks" draws on genres that had grown increasingly popular in Soviet literature in the second half of the 1950s, among them the travelogue, memoir, and autobiographical sketch. Anatoly Pinsky has linked the prominence of such diurnal, eyewitness accounts to the era's cultivation of new subjectivities and a desire for texts that presented "ostensibly unmediated attention to 'real' life."⁴⁵ Shvarts later described the text as "a reworked diary" (*vrode obrabotannogo dnevnika*), noting that she wrote it after the fact by memory rather than on the basis of recorded daily entries (5:146). There is structural overlap with a diary – each section of "The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks" takes place on a different day, as the epigraph emphasizes: "What's done is done – the day's pinned" (*Delo sdelano – den' prishpilen*).⁴⁶ Svetlana Shchagina's preface to the story's publication in *Peterburgskii teatral'nyi zhurnal* suggests that it be classified as *nonfikshn* (nonfiction).⁴⁷ In addition to the prominently featured Yursky, the story's real-life characters include Aleksei German, Georgy Tovstonogov, Dina Shvarts, Roza Sirota, Zinaida Sharko, Tatiana Doronina, and Efim Kopelian, Liudmila Makarova, and their son Kirill. However, the story is thin on the usual markers of an autobiographical narrative; it does not declare itself as such, nor does it articulate the temporal distance between the moment of telling and what is told. Its scope being limited by the tight temporal frame, as well as the author's tender age, it might be a

⁴⁴ Shvarts, "Devochka so sta soroka vosem'iu rodinkami," 152.

⁴⁵ Pinsky, "Diaristic Form and Subjectivity," 811.

⁴⁶ Shvarts credits Mayakovsky, but the phrase seems to come from a diary entry about Mayakovsky by Mikhail Prishvin.

⁴⁷ Shvarts, "Devochka so sta soroka vosem'iu rodinkami," 146.

reminiscence, but the text does not present events as remembered. The present tense marks events and thoughts as of the moment rather than retrospective, a strategy that reinforces the text's implicit claim to reflect authentic emotional experience.

Shvarts recreates daily experience but imbues it with her own lyrical consciousness, emphasizing the co-presence of the factual and the imaginative. The story opens as an aestheticized travelogue: "The train flows in the tar of night. Around [me] are unknown strange lands. I lie on the upper berth. The nightlight's blue pools quiver on the blanket, my arms, the window."⁴⁸ The poetic tone contrasts with the narrator's succinct self-introduction that follows: "My mom works in the theater. And this summer she took me on tour with her." Here and elsewhere we see in her narrative the "inherent duality" Jane Gary Harris discerns in the autobiographical mode, which asks the writer-narrator to mediate a "continuing dialogue between objective and subjective principles of art, between aesthetic interpretation and authenticity...between expression and experience."⁴⁹

A "reworked diary," "The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks" is nonetheless a "tale" as the label *povest'* suggests, and it follows a heartfelt plot. Its deliberate structure suggests that considerable care went into its composition. Part One, as it is labeled, is devoted to the theater's weeks in Kiev, Part Two – to the holiday that followed in Feodosia and Koktebel. Both parts open and close with a train ride and are subdivided into numbered sections. The sections of Part One have titles: "Introduction," "Arrival – the very beginning," "MKhAT – very first days," "Korogodsky," "Before the play" "The Play," "A Stroll," "Me and Kirka," "The Cathedral," "Zina, the theater, Serëzha – last day," "Serëzha," and "The Last Day." There are no

⁴⁸ Shvarts, "Devochka so sta soroka vosem'iu rodinkami," 146.

⁴⁹ Harris, *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, 24.

labels, only numbers in Part Two, an approach that underscores the psychological and geographical shift: from city to seashore, from work to rest, from high spirited hopefulness to despair, ennui, and ambivalence. Each part opens and closes with a train ride.

Shvarts foregrounds reading and writing in “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks,” revealing her acquaintance with a long list of recently published texts and popular authors and thereby the privilege she enjoyed during an era of widespread “book hunger,” when the print runs of popular new publications routinely fell short of consumer demand.⁵⁰ She depicts herself reading Henry Lawson’s tales of the Australian goldfields and Lion Feuchtwanger’s *The Pretender*, textual complements to the escape from everyday environs in which the narrator delights: “I’m traveling the streets of this city for the first time. I’m Christopher Columbus. Out the window are the West Indies” (146). The narrator also takes in the novel environments of Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* and Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes*. These and other readings demonstrate the author-heroine’s eager engagement with world culture via Thaw-era translations, which brought new voices, forms, and perspectives into Russian prose.⁵¹

Shvarts’s narrator is a discerning consumer of exciting stories. She suggests that she is also an experienced producer of them when she solicits and then critiques the literary endeavors of her companion and fellow BDT kid “Kirka” (Kopelian): “Red-faced and flustered, he tells [me] the story of some *aul* [mountain village], two communists, a bandit, and a girl. I explain to him its shortcomings.” Here the narrator performs the practices of critique carried out in the

⁵⁰ On “*knizhnyi golod*” (book hunger), see Lovell, *Russian Reading Revolution*, 60-69. On book shortages in a major city of the Soviet periphery in the 1960s, see Friedberg, *How Things were Done in Odessa*, 115-116.

⁵¹ Cultural contact with Europe during the Thaw was the result of official policy, much as the rise of poetry for youth was. See also Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, in which the author shows the centrality of literary translation to Thaw-era cultural exchange. See also Burnett and Lygo, *Art of Accommodation*, esp. 26-28..

Palace of Pioneers *kruzhok*, where Shvarts found an audience for her story when it was finished (Nov. 1961, 5:289).

There are a number of important points of intersection between Shvarts's story and Vasily Aksënov's *Ticket to the Stars* (*Zvëzdnyi bilet*). The novel appeared in print at the very time the action of "The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks" unfolds, in two summer 1961 issues of *Iunost'* (*Youth*). Now seen as exemplary of the youth prose movement, the work was widely discussed in the Soviet press for its socially daring plot and language. The seventeen-year-old protagonists of Aksënov's controversial novel assert their independence from the older generation through an impromptu escape to the Estonian seashore, where they sunbathe and learn to fish instead of working or preparing for university entrance exams. The heroes of *Ticket to the Stars* exchange greetings with each other in various European languages and with the locals in Estonian. "Київ" (Kyiv), as Shvarts makes sure to write in Ukrainian in her diary, and the Black Sea provide similar backdrops for her story (5:284).

In the western borderlands of the Soviet Union, Aksënov's characters are palpably close to the Europe of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, shiny Italian espresso machines, and neon signs, mentions of which textured *Ticket to the Stars* with a fashionable foreignness. The phrases and material culture that give the novel its stylish cosmopolitan feel point to the aesthetic pluralism of the period and reflect, like translations, the influx of European culture that accompanied the Khrushchev-era renewal of cultural ties with Europe and the Americas.

In "The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks," Shvarts depicts two BDT actors lounging on the shore reading *Ticket to the Stars* aloud to each other in earshot of sunbathing colleagues and their families. For a group of people preoccupied with artistic trends, the work must have reinforced a sense of belonging to Soviet culture's most progressive currents.

Aksënov's heroes are close to Europe, but the zones of cultural activity they desire to inhabit – cinema and the theater – remain out of reach. One of the main characters in *Ticket to the Stars* is an aspiring writer who pounds out screen plays on his typewriter at the beach and dreams up excuses to introduce himself to a famous film director. Their female companion, a blonde beauty nicknamed Bridgette Bardot, exclaims at one point, “Ia gotova sgoret' radi teatra!” (loosely, “I’d die for the theater!”). Shvarts inhabited this desirable realm already, spending her summer as a player in one of the country’s most prominent and progressive theaters, whose actors also appeared in films of the period. Following the 1959 productions of Aleksandr Volodin’s *Five Evenings* and Maksim Gorky’s *Barbarians*, the BDT was, in the estimation of theater critic and historian Anatoly Smeliansky, “Russia’s number one theater company.”⁵² The play she had appeared in was one of the most popular of the era and had even been performed at the International Drama Festival in Paris that spring.⁵³ It is not surprising that Shvarts the girl considered her lived experience worthy literary material.

Lexical expansion was one of the Thaw’s most palpable challenges to the narrow discursive range of Soviet literature. Translations, youth prose, and a “sincere turn” took the reading public into previously off-limits social, emotional, and cultural spheres.⁵⁴ It was in part for its unorthodox lexicon that the conservative Soviet literary establishment objected to Aksënov’s novel. Others saw the return of vernacular language as a marker of the “living word,”

⁵² Smeliansky, *Russian Theater after Stalin*, 50.

⁵³ Segel, *Twentieth-Century Russian Drama*, 362; Arbuzov, *An Irkutsk Story*, vi.

⁵⁴ The Thaw was characterized by a lyrical-confessional trend initiated by Vladimir Pomerantsev’s “On Sincerity in Literature” and Olga Berggolts’s “Conversation about the Lyric,” which appeared in 1953. For a recent critical assessment of the regimes of sincerity (*iskrennost'*) that ensued, see Rutten, *Sincerity After Communism*, esp. 67-77. Katerina Clark argues that the debate on *iskrennost'* began well before Stalin’s death in “‘Wait for Me and I Shall Return.’”

which had fossilized in the Stalinist era into clichés and bureaucratese.⁵⁵ Eleonory Gilburd has pointed out that it was in the era's "language debate" that Aksénov's texts intersected with those of J. D. Salinger.⁵⁶ Both *Ticket to the Stars* and *The Catcher in the Rye* prominently featured slang and colloquialisms, leading some readers to identify intensely with their heroes and others to object vociferously to the works' publication.⁵⁷ Shvarts similarly lards her story with everyday colloquialisms, euphemisms, and profanity: *nalizat'sia* (to get loaded/drunk), *smivat'sia* (to slip out/away), *tsapnut'* (to nab/grab), *nachikhat'* (couldn't care less), and *svoloch'* (jerk/bastard); she uses the verb *trepat'sia* (to run one's mouth) several times.

Gilburd's study of the era's influx of translated texts argues that it was in works by Salinger, Ernest Hemingway, and Erich Maria Remarque that readers found the authenticity missing from Soviet literature.⁵⁸ Salinger made a particularly strong impression on readers during the "decade of euphoria," as Maurice Friedberg entitled his study of foreign literature in the post-Stalin context.⁵⁹ Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* appeared in *Inostrannaia literatura* in late 1960. Not long after, in March of 1961, *Novyi mir* (*New World*) published "For Esme – with Love and Squalor" (under the title "Posviashchaetsia Esme"). As its plot is pertinent to the discussion that follows, I will briefly summarize Salinger's story. Not long before the

⁵⁵ Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 144.

⁵⁶ Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 148.

⁵⁷ Readers also pointed to biographical and temperamental points of overlap between the works' main characters, but youth slang was the shared stylistic feature that led readers to adduce Salinger's influence on Aksénov's novel, even though it was completed before the appearance of Rita Rait-Kovalëva's famous translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* (Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 145-147).

⁵⁸ See chapter 3, "Books about Us" in *To See Paris and Die*, 103-157.

⁵⁹ Friedberg, *Decade of Euphoria*, 199. Salinger's influence endured among Russian readers, as poet Dmitry Volchek's 2010 comments attest (Volchek, "Nad propast'iu vo rzhi"). Compare MacFadyen's *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse*, with discussions of who read which American authors in the 1960s, and Vail and Genis's assertion that Hemingway was the most important American writer for the "people of the sixties" in *60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (55).

Allied invasion of France in 1944, the narrator, an American soldier stationed in England, attends a children's choir practice on his day off. Among the singers is a girl with a charming voice: Esme, as we learn when they meet after the recital in a neighboring tea room. Having boldly introduced herself to the narrator, Esme poses a series of questions, some rather personal in nature. An orphan, she is forthright, poised, a bit of a snob. She wears a large wristwatch which belonged to her father. At the end of their conversation, Esme proposes that she and the soldier correspond with each other and offers to write the first letter. The narrator agrees, and they part. The second half of the story is recounted by a third-person narrator, Staff Sergeant X, the same (and yet not) soldier after the war, who is "cunningly disguised" in plain view of the reader. Shell-shocked, his head hurts, his hands tremble, his attention wanders. Having suffered the insensitive attentions and comments of a fellow soldier, he loses his temper and is left alone. A package, one of many on his littered desk, catches his eye. Opening it, he finds a note of encouragement from Esme and the watch, included for good luck. Its face has cracked in transit.

Esme enters Shvarts's story when BDT director Zinovy Korogodsky compares the narrator to her: "He thinks I'm like Esme from Salinger's story." With her absent father, chewed nails, and impressive vocabulary, there is a certain resemblance between Salinger's precocious thirteen-year-old heroine and Shvarts in 1961. Esme is coquettish, more *Lolita* than Holden Caulfield, the hero of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Nevertheless, Shvarts accepts the role, admitting "I play up the role of Esme a little," and making a sincere confession of her artifice.⁶⁰

Shvarts-the-author performs Esme-the-text as much as her narrator performs Esme-the-character. Like "For Esme – with Love and Squalor," Shvarts's story traces a chaste love story between a girl and young man. In both texts, the lover's wristwatch takes on symbolic

⁶⁰ Shvarts, "Devochka so sta soroka vosem'iu rodinkami," 147.

significance. In “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks,” the narrator confesses her feelings for Sergei Yursky to her companion Kirka; she allows the possibility of Yursky’s reciprocal interest through subtler intertextual means. When she is entrusted with the safekeeping of his watch during the BDT’s final Kiev performance, she kisses it tenderly when no one is watching. When the company leaves the theater, during their collective bus ride her gaze is drawn to Yursky’s hands and the yellow leather wristband visible against the guitar he holds while gaily singing the popular folk song about a girl’s love, “Vinovata li ia?” (“Am I to blame?”). Yursky is thus made into a textual counterpart of the narrator in ““For Esme – with Love and Squalor.””

When she is parted from her love interest, who is not vacationing at the Black Sea, the narrator of “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” stays in touch with him by going out to the balcony, where she hums “Vinovata li ia?” and asks the moon to convey her greetings to him: “Lunochka luna, bud' chelovekom, peredai emu privet plamennyi” (Moon, little moon, be a pal, pass him a fervent hello).⁶¹ This cluster of associations – balcony, Yursky, love/song – is anticipated in an earlier scene in Part I. Following her first rehearsal at the theater, she encounters Yursky for the first time in Kiev. Shortly after, she recounts: “After lunch I go to the room, lie down on the bed. I’m trembling all over, maybe from happiness. Such a surge [*stol'ko khlynulo*] of theater, nerves, people. I go out on the balcony that’s been soiled [*zagazhennyi*] by the doves. I feel better.” The narrator does not name Yursky; on first reading, she seems overwhelmed, but not necessarily lovesick. However, the scenario’s subsequent repetitions, with the addition of the song, makes clear the heroine’s use of it as a stage of

⁶¹ The euphony of “Lunochka” (little moon) and “Lenochka,” as Shvarts was commonly addressed in her youth, suggests the moon is a celestial counterpart or double.

sentimental performance. The balcony itself suggests indebtedness to theatrical models; its repetition points to a key feature of theatrical artifice: repetition itself. Meanwhile, the relief brought by the sight of the unsentimentally fouled balcony obliquely suggests the [tale of] “love and squalor” that Esme requests of the narrator in Salinger’s story, as if Shvarts-playing-Esme takes the task of narrating such a tale upon herself.⁶²

Elsewhere, the narrator of “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” adopts a tone that is closer to the hero of *Catcher in the Rye* than cool Esme or lovestruck maiden: “We are driving to Koktebel. Not far from Koktebel they stop [...]. I get out of the car. Lenka, you’re in the steppe, you cretin [*svoloch*], in the steppe. You notice how the grass smells, you notice how the stars fall, you jerk [*sobaka*]. I cheer up.” She even performs a bit of snobbishness à la Caulfield when she reports with derision the banal comments of outsiders during an excursion: “A dilapidated little boat is waiting for us. The trip is dull. Some big fat guys [*diad’ki*] hover around the director, slapping themselves on the belly, pronounce commonplaces like ‘The theater is high art.’” Combining Esme and Holden, feminine and masculine roles, Shvarts combines the tonalities of youth prose with the lyrical-confessional mode that flourished alongside it.

The emotional openness of Shvarts’s story exemplifies the “sincere turn” of the 1950s and its rehabilitation of private emotion. Imbued with theatricality on multiple levels, it simultaneously performs *iskrennost’* (sincerity). Shvarts strives to convey the internal world of the heroine through changing narrative perspectives that suggest self-estrangement. In Salinger’s “For Esme” we see something similar in the shift in narrative viewpoint that comes at the caesura of the story: the first part uses first person narration, the second part refers to a “he” who is,

⁶² Translator Rita Rait-Kovaleva used a variety of equivalents for Caulfield’s frequent profanity. She used *svoloch’* sparingly, where Salinger has “sonuvabitch,” “bastard,” and other terms of abuse. Elsewhere, for “bastard” she has *svin’ia* (pig), *kretin* (cretin), *podonok* (asshole); *ubliudok* (son of a bitch).

externally, the same *I* as in part one. *Ticket to the Stars* has two first person narrators, as well as a third person one. “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” contains such shifts, but they come in bursts such as this one:

I go into the sea. I don't feel like swimming. Lenka, go along this board every time and Serëzha will think of you one teeny time for some reason or other. You're a sentimental fool, Lenka, and besides that, a terrible snob. She comes to the Black Sea and is melancholy, who does that? – 13-year-old pipsqueak. Lenka feels cheerful, she likes sashaying into the sea in her swimsuit, likes swinging her shoulders and hips. She walks into the sea. I dive a long time, lie on my stomach, until I get tired of it. (154)

Simultaneously occupying and observing the self, Shvarts captures a range of imagined perspectives in this episode. As she sees herself from multiple perspectives, the narrator's stream of consciousness is comprised of competing discourses. It was this sort of representation of subjective experience, still suspect in Soviet literature, that motivated attacks on *Ticket to the Stars*, for publication of which *Youth* editor Valentin Kataev was fired. Overstepping the unarticulated limits on psychological realism prompted critics to talk of the novel's “lack of contact with socialist reality” and modernist solipsism.

In the summer of 1961, the space race was at its height and the Soviet Union in the lead, a point of pride reflected in Shvarts's diary, but not in “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks,” from which science is absent. Her stars are those of the lyricist, not the physicist, a popular distinction inaugurated by Boris Slutsky's 1959 poem “Physicists and Lyricists” (“Fiziki i liriki”). Stars appear in Shvarts's narrative only in Part Two, after she has left Kiev and arrives in Crimea. In the night sky at Koktebel they shine particularly brightly, prompting her to observe, “Probably van Gogh painted *The Starry Night* in Koktebel.”⁶³

⁶³ Shvarts encountered the famous painting during the composition of her story.” “Its riotous [*burnoe*] sky reminds me of Koktebel,” she wrote in her diary (October 1961, 5:289). *The Starry Night* reached Shvarts through *Amerika*

The title of Shvarts's story is explained in two episodes that come near its end. During the swimming excursion, the narrator has a near-death experience that prompts feverish chatter:

At five we left. At home Lenka felt hot. Temperature of 39.8. Before going to bed, she made a fleeting appearance on the balcony, stood for a bit, sang "Am I to Blame?" and urgently requested the Moon pass her greeting along to Serēzha. Having completed this ritual, she sprang into bed. An unusual, intoxicated merriness flooded her. Mama sat down on the bedside:

"What's wrong, Lenchka?"

"It's from melancholy."

"No, you overdid it swimming."

"I ought to know better – it's from melancholy. Mama, it's better in Koktebel, the stars are there, and I can't live without the stars, I want to drink the stars, I love the stars. Will you get me Andromeda?"

"There's no such star."

"There is. She said yesterday that there is."

"Who said?"

"Andromeda."

"I'll get you a wet cloth."

"Stay with me. Listen, I'm lucky, right? I've a lot of birthmarks, and also, I got to see Serēzha – that's good fortune. Sergei Yurevich is the best, right?"

"Sleep, Lena, sleep."

"I'm afraid I'll fall asleep and won't wake up, and all the birthmarks will have been for nothing."

"Lena, I'll get you some medicine, be quiet a while."

Lena dove into the left corner of the bed by the wall. The agitation passed, she felt light and dry. She was quiet. She felt like being quiet.

The following day, counting falling stars with her friend Kirka, the narrator reveals the number of her *rodinki* (birthmarks, moles, or freckles) to be one hundred forty-eight, a sign of *schast'e* (luck, happiness). Thus, Shvarts links the body's mysterious markings to fate and the cosmic order in her early story. The title encapsulates its salient qualities: "The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks" is a story about Shvarts in girlhood, but in the third person, estranged from herself through a theatrical literary gesture. Her extraordinary number of *rodinki* suggests a

magazine and thus joins the list of Thaw-era cultural products that inflect the pattern of her story. The strength of van Gogh's impression on Shvarts did not wane over time; she included the painter – the only one – in a list of figures "who fascinate" (3:230).

richness of fate's marks and that the sources of her good fortune, like the sources of her story, are many. Their number – 148 – also suggests a sustained attention to the body, as such a precise accounting of its markings would need to be. Lastly, birth and its marks could be described as an ur-text or master theme for Shvarts.

She read the first part of “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” to her peers at the Palace of Pioneers. According to her diary, they declared it “as bold as it is talented” (*naskol'ko smelo, nastol'ko talantlivo*) (Nov. 1961, 5:290). While there are minor moments of “subversive” talk – Sergei Yursky calls the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* newspaper “Komsomol debility” (*komsomol'skii marazm*), for example – the text is not politically daring. Its boldness stems from its experimental narration and psychological intimacy, which engage the textual politics of the day through its espousal of theatrical self-expression, stylistic and linguistic pluralism, and a Romantic view of the writer. In its insistent citationality and mixing of sources, meanwhile, “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” anticipates the high eclecticism that characterized Shvarts's poetry in the 1970s.

Shvarts later defined artistry (*artistizm*) as “complete sincerity, but at the same time, a detached gaze from the outside, both acting and directing yourself.”⁶⁴ Her early confessional text fits this description well, but the domestic and public readings she gave of “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” did not reveal the full extent of its sincerity. She read only the first part of the story at the Palace of Pioneers and to private domestic audiences. Kirill Kozyrev, the manager of Shvarts's literary estate who facilitated the story's publication, later found a

⁶⁴ From her acceptance speech for the prize for *artistizm* (artistry) awarded by the journal *Znamia* in 2007 (Shvarts, “Govoriat laureaty *Znameni*”).

shortened version of the text, suggesting that the author may not have wished for the complete narrative to be made public, even after the players' deaths.⁶⁵

Spiritual Metamorphoses: “In the Cathedral”

To judge by Shvarts's diary, her glamorous summer was followed by a year of artistic, social, and emotional confusion, in which self-castigation alternated with self-encouragement. She writes of failures, hopelessness, and suicide. She reports, among other incidents and accidents, a disastrous birthday party (her fourteenth) at which she “behaved like a drunken prostitute” (May 1962, 5:296). Constantly in conflict, unreliable, repentant, and unflinching in the telling of it, she is nearly kicked out of school. To finish her primary education, she switched to a vocational night school program specializing in preschool care for children (Sept. 1963, 5:351). Occasional comments convey her evolving attitude toward the society around her. As in “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks,” the profane voice of Holden Caulfield is audible in her expressions of disillusionment: “The teach [*uchila*] yammers history. [...] Lenin's portrait's gotten dusty” (Oct. 1962, 5:303). “I am not against Soviet rule [*vlast*']. But I'm against the creeps [*gady*] who don't give a damn [*naplevat*'], but speak in its name.” Adding immediately after: “And in these lines – it's not me,” Shvarts suggests that her reproduction of Salinger's tone is inauthentic, and perhaps that what was appropriate for her story failed to represent the “me” of the diary (Oct. 1962, 5:310).

Casting about through emotional highs and lows, she turned to poetry, seemingly because of the challenge it presented: “I thought that I was writing stories because it's easy, and [to write]

⁶⁵ Kirill Kozyrev, conversation with author, Sept. 21, 2019. A diary entry from 2006 suggests that Shvarts lost or discarded the text, which her Palace of Pioneers mentor Yulia Berezhnova returned to her forty-five years later (5:146).

verse – I’m not able” (Feb. 1962, 5:292). She soon had a poetic text she thought worthy of *Iunost'* (*Youth*) magazine. Lacking a “youth element,” it was not accepted (March 1962, 5:293-294). She was not discouraged, expressing determination to give herself two years to develop as a poet, that is, until the age of sixteen (June 1962, 5:297).

In the micro-essays of *The Visible Side of Life*, Shvarts wrote that her love of the church began on her trip to Kiev during the BDT theatrical tour (3:179-180). Her diary entry about the church visit was less decisive, but in it she does marvel at the true believers and speculate that, had she been born at a different time, she would probably also believe (June 1961, 5:285). There is a mention of the excursion to the Saint Vladimir cathedral in “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks.” The next year Shvarts revisited and poeticized her experience in “In the Cathedral” (“V sobore,” 1962), in which the lyric speaker is transformed into a church filled with incense, icons, and a crucified Jesus.

В соборе

Высокий и пустой собор.
И поп размахивает кадиллом.
Я сама превращаюсь в церковь,
я вся до краёв наполнена дымом.

Дымом глубоким и сладким.
На стенах висят иконы.
Плоские грустные лица,
плоские красные кони.

На потолке распятый Иисус.
В гвоздях, жёлтый, худой.
И маской Пьеро луна
плывёт над его головой.

“Иисус, я в Вас верю.
Вам от этого легче?” – шепчу.
Но я же не верю в бога,
мне его только жалко.

Я никому не вру.
 “Простите, Иисус”, – шепчу.
 (5:223)

In the Cathedral

A tall and empty cathedral. / And the priest brandishes the censer. / I turn into the church myself, / I am full to the brim with smoke. // With smoke deep and sweet. / On the walls hang icons, / Flat sad faces, / flat red steeds. // On the ceiling a crucified Christ. / In nails, yellow, skinny. / And in a mask of Pierrot the moon / floats above his head. // “Jesus, I believe in You. / Does that make you feel better?” – [I] whisper. / But I don’t believe in god, / just pity him. / I lie to no one. / “Forgive me, Jesus,” I whisper.

Shvarts recreates and embraces the atmosphere of the church, setting the scene and then occupying it as she is transformed into the building itself. The poet underscores her nonbelief, addressing Christ as a human being with the formal “Vy” (You). As Thomas Epstein has pointed out in connection with this poem, Shvarts was already a smoker at this age, and being filled with tobacco smoke was a routine physical experience.⁶⁶ This profane parallel is echoed in the tone of her question to Christ – “Does that make you feel better?” – which might also be translated: “does that make it easier for you?” The Christian savior’s proximity to the sad clown Pierrot likewise suggests a tragicomic attitude. Shvarts seemed to acknowledge and perpetuate this blasphemous persona in “Oh angels, you are feeble” (“O angely, vy khily...,” 1963), a poem written not long after, and which ends on a note of humorous self-irony: “is it for a hooligan like me / to sing prayers?!” (mne li, khuliganke / molitvy pet?!) (5:223). On the other hand, she reports in her diary that “In the Cathedral” moved some listeners to tears (5:298, 317). And for the mature Shvarts, being filled with smoke was a “habit of the body and the soul,” an ideal state and attribute of the rite of poetic creation (4:269). Smoking a hookah in Jerusalem, she recalled,

⁶⁶ Epstein, “Holy Madness” talk for 2017 ASEEEES annual conference.

“resembled my notion of paradise. Almost...” (4:188). Smoke is also a necessary attribute of Pythia, the high priestess and oracle at Delphi with whom Shvarts identified her poetic persona.

The lyric speaker of “In the Cathedral” seemingly expands to fill and be filled by the sacred space in which the “flat sad faces” of the saints are a decorative element equal to the “flat red steeds [*koni*],” boldly rhymed with *ikona* (icon). Yet the speaker addresses Christ respectfully and in a whisper. There were few working churches in the USSR, and the multi-sensory experience, as Shvarts presents it, was not necessarily familiar to her. The Khrushchev era anti-religious campaign had destroyed, closed, or repurposed thousands of monasteries and churches between 1958 and 1964.⁶⁷ The renewed Soviet battle for state atheism came in response to the religious revival that began during the war, when the state had softened its anti-clerical stance, and had quietly continued in its wake. Efforts to contain communities of faith were far from successful; the 1970s saw a flourishing of spirituality in unofficial culture in particular. Indeed, the rejection of a purely materialist worldview was a cornerstone of many participants’ dissent.

The attempted dialogue with Jesus in “In the Cathedral” is one of Shvarts’s earliest poetic conversations with the divine. Like the Biblical Job, she passionately questioned and criticized the Creator in much of her verse.⁶⁸ Other poems are repentant. The difference in tone between early works like “In the Cathedral” and later ones is partially illustrated through comparison with “The Corpses of March” (“Martovskie mertvetsy,” 1980), a poem whose opening seems to

⁶⁷ Catriona Kelly calculates that nearly 50 percent of working churches were closed, over 6,000 in all, in *Socialist Churches* (193). For other recent studies of the anti-religious campaigns, see Shkarovskii, “Russian Orthodox Church 1958–64;” Stone, “Overcoming Peasant Backwardness.” See Conquest, *Religion in the USSR*, 47-61, for an earlier overview of the anti-religious press campaign.

⁶⁸ Shvarts describes herself as “*Iovënok-kroshka*” (roughly, “little Job moppet”) in a late poem (3:83). See also her statement that “poetry is the experience of a naked person, left face to face with the world, having lost everything” (3:272-275).

revisit and reverse the logic of “In the Cathedral” (2:102-108). Questions of faith are front and center in the section labeled “Do you believe, do you know?” In the lines that follow, the church that becomes a human body, sprouting legs and a belly. To enter is to find oneself in its heart, to become part of the “body of the church” (2:102). Leaving, the poet contemplates throwing herself to the ground to kiss the sinful earth stuck to the heel of the church, speaking with a pathos and self-castigation characteristic of Shvarts’s mature work.

“In the Cathedral” also anticipates a central metaphor of *The Works and Days of Lavinia*, Shvarts’s book length cycle that takes place in the imaginary ecumenical convent of the Order of the Circumcision of the Heart. There is striking visual continuity between her early poem and the opening of “Spring Church” (“Vesenniaia tserkov”) – the 34th poem of the cycle, when the sound of the sisters’ Lenten singing penetrates Lavinia’s body and reaches her heart, leading her to reflect that her body has thus been transformed into a “soft white church”:

Весенняя церковь

Печальное постное пенье
 Проникло легко под ребра
 И сердца лампаду
 Протерло
 Ладонью.
 Как будто я стала сама
 Мягкою белою церковью,
 И толпы детей и старушек
 Входили, крестясь и мигая,
 Мне в чрево и кланялись сердцу,
 А сердце дымящим кадилом
 Качалось, так мерно качалось.
 (2:188)

Sad Lenten singing / Penetrated easily the ribs / And the lamp of the heart /
 Rubbed / With its palm. / As if I myself became / A soft white church, / And
 crowds of children and old ladies / Crossing themselves and blinking, came in /
 To my womb and bowed to the heart, / And the heart as a smoking censer /
 Swayed, so evenly swayed.

Here the body is open to symbolic injury; as a result, the attributes of the church are animated and brought into metaphorically reinforcing relations. The censer does not swing randomly, as it seems to in “In the Cathedral.” Enlivened as the beating heart of the faith community, it pendulates, warming and lighting the womb that is the “repository of the divine.”⁶⁹ It is the feminine body – absent in Shvarts’s early work – that harbors new life and the potential for the resurrection of the Word.

Lavinia’s temporary transformation into the church anticipates the cycle’s conclusion, when the erratic nun-poet is exiled from the community. She is rescued from despair and isolation by a Sun-Lion who visits Lavinia to comfort and entertain her. They retreat deep into the forest, where they build a hermitage with a Lavinia-sized church:

Мы за три дня избенку возвели
И церковь, полый крест – как мне приснилось –
В мой рост и для меня, чтоб я вошла,
Раскинув руки в ней молилась.

In three days we’d erected a little hut / And a church, an empty cross – like I’d
dreamed – / At my height and for me, so that I might enter, / And pray, arms
extended.

Time loses its grip on Lavinia in this pose of prayer and, eventually, she takes flight into the eternal:

Встаю я с солнцем, и водицу пью,
И с птицами пою Франциску, Деве,
И в темный полый Крест встаю,
Как ворот, запахнувши двери.
Текут века – я их забыла
И проросла травой-осокой,
Живой и вставшею могилой
Лечу пред Богом одиноко.
(2:220-221)

⁶⁹ Popovic, “Symbolic Injury and Embodied Mysticism,” 766.

I rise with the sun and drink a little water, / And sing with the birds to Francis, the Virgin, / And step into the dark empty Cross, / Like a gateway with doors slammed shut. / The ages flow past – I've forgotten them / Overgrown with sedge grass, / As a live and arisen grave / I fly before God all alone.

Lavinia's final act is a solo flight. The Christ-like ascetic and singer arises to leave the earth and yet remains materially connected to it. Here, as in "In the Cathedral," the poet's body expands to attain the contours of the building, literalizing the metaphor of the church as body. As Valery Shubinsky has pointed out, such metamorphic play of proportion constitutes one of Shvarts's favorite devices.⁷⁰ In her early poem, the transformation is tentative and incomplete, while the hermitage church of *The Works and Days of Lavinia* fits the poetic speaker perfectly, suggesting spiritual harmony.

Poetry, Oral Culture, and "Oral Publication"

Here is a quality of wonderful poetry – it passes
from hand to hand even without a printing press.
People rewrite poems by hand, learn them by heart.
– Aleksandr Kushner

Shvarts's first poems were written when enthusiasm for the verbal art form was at its height in the Soviet Union. "People talked only about poetry," Eduard Shneiderman recalled.⁷¹ Viktor Krivulin said that when he graduated from school in the early 1960s, "in an atmosphere of heightened interest to poetry, writing poetry seemed to me the only decent [*dostoinyi*] activity to engage in."⁷² The era's search for authentic self-expression helps to account for the popularity of

⁷⁰ Shubinskii, "Izobilie i tochnost'."

⁷¹ Schneiderman, "Govorili tol'ko o stikhakh."

⁷² Filippov, "Viktor Krivulin," 316.

lyric poetry. Its profile was further elevated by the famous Mayakovsky Square recitations and stadium readings of Bella Akhmadulina, Evgeny Evtushenko, and Andrei Voznesensky, which were recorded and broadcast for remote audiences and discussed in the media.⁷³ In Leningrad, on a smaller local scale, poets read their poems in semi-public and public venues, not only at the *kruzhki*, LITOs, and the House of Writers, a multipurpose institution of the Leningrad branch of the Soviet Writers' Union, but also in cafés and at universities. The encyclopedia of unofficial literary life *Samizdat Leningrada* (Leningrad Samizdat) includes numerous public readings in its chronology of significant happenings in 1953-1991, and they are similarly frequent in memoirs of the era, which mention: "Evenings of Poetry" at the Polytechnical Institute, "Evenings of Verse" at Leningrad State University, and "Poetry Evenings" at the House of Writers, with participation by Nikolai Rubtsov, Viktor Sosnora, Evgeny Rein, Joseph Brodsky, Yakov Gordin, Viktor Krivulin, Konstantin Kuzminsky, and many, many others.⁷⁴ One of the functions of *kruzhki* and LITOs was to facilitate such readings for participants. Occasionally there were all-Leningrad poetry readings and poetic "tournaments" where young poets read for larger audiences and competed with each other.

Private domestic recitations were also common, and an important way that literary relationships were initiated. Sometimes peers or mentors arranged private readings by younger poets for a carefully selected audience. Kushner recalled, for example, a recitation by Brodsky that was arranged for Lydia Ginzburg, Dmitry Maksimov, and Tatiana Khmel'nitskaia.⁷⁵ Krivulin offered to introduce Shvarts to Gleb Gorbovsky, a meeting that would presumably include a

⁷³ For a recent discussion of lyric poetry as a cultural phenomenon in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Loewen, "Blurred Boundaries."

⁷⁴ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 14-82; Kumpan, *Blizhnii podstup k legende*, 5-30; *Samizdat Leningrada*, 477-480; Shneiderman, "Govorili tol'ko o stikhakh;" Rein, "Interv'iu Evgeniia Reina."

⁷⁵ Kushner, *Po etu storonu tainstvennoi cherty*, 312-313.

poetic exchange (5:369). At her meeting with Anna Akhmatova, discussed below, Shvarts presented a text about Marina Tsvetaeva instead of reciting her own poetry, a choice that put a quick end to their acquaintance.

Such readings were essential to the word-of-mouth existence that Russian poetry led in the late 1950s and after. “Poetry was heard, not read,” wrote Petr Vail and Aleksandr Genis in their study of Soviet everyday life in the 1960s.⁷⁶ Dmitry Bobyshev recalled that there were “more than enough” (*khot' otbavliai*) opportunities to recite at student dormitories, the Poets’ Café, and the Scholars’ Club, even if “opportunities to publish were ephemeral.”⁷⁷ On such occasions, much smaller in scale than the famous readings of the late 1950s, verse was heard, memorized, and later written down and recited to others. Shvarts’s semi-public readings of “In the Cathedral” and other poems propelled their unmonitored and undocumented distribution. An entry in her diary demonstrates the anonymizing effect of passing poetry via the spoken word:

Around three o’clock Dinka suddenly wakes me up to tell me that Galia Agamirzian was saying that Shura Tsurtseladze brought some little girl’s poem about Jesus to the Theater Institute. Mom asked her: “Forgive me, Jesus, I whisper.” She said “How did you know?” Mom said: “That’s Lena’s poem.” Yursky and Sharko were there and apparently nobody believed her. (5:317)

This moment marks a step forward for Shvarts as a poet – citation by unknown people. On the other hand, credited to “some little girl,” the text of “In the Cathedral” has become common property, subject to intentional or unintentional changes.

Self-publication through samizdat was mostly episodic at this point, which saw occasional miscellanies and compilations. Aleksandr Ginzburg’s well-known *Syntax* (*Sintaksis*),

⁷⁶ Vail' and Genis, *60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 71.

⁷⁷ Bobyshev, “Akhmatovskie siroty,” 8.

a Moscow samizdat journal, and the Leningrad *Optima* are notable exceptions.⁷⁸ Still rather young for such endeavors, Shvarts did not make it into either, but she was included in the “Boys and Girls” section of the samizdat *Anthology of Soviet Pathology* (*Antologiiia sovetskoi patologii*, 1964), a collection of young Moscow and Leningrad poets.⁷⁹ It is an exceptional case of her inclusion in the unofficial undertakings of the 1960s.

If printing came at some point in the social life of a poem, it likely had a rich pre-print one in the form of recitations and handwritten copies. Copying verse by hand in *spiski* (copies) had long been a popular way to preserve and share verse, and the practice continued in the post-war era as a way to promote local contemporary poets and modernist poets whose work was not yet “rehabilitated” (Gumilëv, Kuzmin) or only beginning to trickle out in print and hard to obtain: Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, Khlebnikov, among many others. The live readings of *Requiem* and *Poema bez geroia* that Akhmatova offered her many visitors ceased with her death in 1966, but the cycle circulated widely before it was published thanks to the memorization and sharing practices of late Soviet culture. Krivulin pointed to the errata and misprisions that crept into her texts when “enthusiasts” reproduced Akhmatova’s unpublished texts from memory.⁸⁰ Feats of memorization, especially of poetry, are a commonplace of intelligentsia depictions of the era,⁸¹ practices facilitated by an educational system that required schoolchildren to memorize and

⁷⁸ Examples include the 1962 miscellany *Lai* (Bark) put together by students in Leningrad State University’s philological division, in which Krivulin and Pazukhin participated (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 417; Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 34-37). Gorbanevskaia apparently made samizdat copies of Akhmatova’s *Requiem* in early 1963 (Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, 508). *Syntax* (1959-60) was a Moscow samizdat journal put together by Aleksandr Ginzburg, for which he was arrested and tried. The third issue featured Leningrad poets (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 451; *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 1:315-325). Five issues of *Optima* (1960-1962), a samizdat journal of an unofficial LITO at Leningrad State University, were produced (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 437).

⁷⁹ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 392-393.

⁸⁰ Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata,” 347.

⁸¹ See, for example, Krivulin, *Kontsert po zaiavkam*, 108; Kumpan, *Blizhnii podstup k legende*, 13; Rubinshtein, “Kogda truba trubila,” 4; Plamper, “Cultural Production, Cultural Consumption,” 760.

recite poetry and to retell long prose texts from memory. Entrance and final exams in university were also oral. Soviet citizens put tradition and training to great creative use in a rich culture of *anekdoty* (jokes), *chastushki* (4-line folk rhymes), *blatnye pesni* (gangster songs), and other less constrained forms of verbal artistry. Russian guitar poetry was also thriving, and encouraged the creative reproduction of lyrics and rhythm. In the theatrical circles of the BDT, meanwhile, Shvarts was in the company of people who knew hundreds, if not thousands, of lines from plays and films.

Shared spoken texts had strong subversive potential. Young Leningrad poets exploited this everyday means of resisting the total discursive control to which the Soviet state aspired, composing “daring” texts as the *Derzanie* club seemingly encouraged them to. The anti-social character of some local poetry clearly contributed to its prestige, such as Evgeny Pazukhin’s “The Old Lady” (“Baba”), a “slap in the face of public taste” about a pregnant woman in public transport; its schoolboyish black humor is palpable from its first lines:

Баба

Троллейбус набит, как с начинкой пирог,
И морды – как спелые брюквы.
А баба, базаря, сочилась вперед
И навалилась брюхом.

The trolley is stuffed, like a pastry with filling, / And the mugs – like ripe rutabegas. / And this broad, having a chat, oozed forward / And flopped forward with her belly.⁸²

Pazukhin’s spontaneous public reading of this poem at a Palace of Pioneers event only increased its fame.⁸³ To recite a local rhyme on a taboo topic in the semi-public sphere was to risk

⁸² Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 36; Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 105-106; *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4B:165.

⁸³ Pazukhin recalled that it was twice as long before Konstantin Kuzminsky “circumcised” it – a nice example of collective curation (Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 166-167).

ignominy and the ire of mentors, but also to satisfy one's peers and achieve a dubious poetic glory. Talk about such events, meanwhile, turned into oral legends that enhanced authorial status, such as the well-documented scandal at the citywide poetry "tournament" held in 1960 at the Gorky House of Culture. The event did not require preliminary vetting of poems, but allowed people to sign up to recite when they arrived. Brodsky's recitation provoked a "total shock" in the audience, including LITO mentors Gleb Semënov and Natalia Grudinina, the organizer.⁸⁴ Of the thirty or so participants, Gleb Gorbovsky was declared the victor in spite of protests by the audience in favor of Brodsky, who was instead sanctioned and banned from public readings for a term of two years.⁸⁵ Such events were not confined to the first half of the decade; as late as 1968, a reading involving Brodsky, Sergei Dovlatov, Vladimir Maramzin, Vladimir Ufliand, and others ended in scandal and the dismissal of the assistant director of the House of Writers, where it took place.⁸⁶

Poetry was thus a public, embodied activity during the Khrushchev era, a dimension that has received relatively little scholarly attention.⁸⁷ As a social institution, it relied on live delivery, involving voice, gesture, and interaction with an audience. This performative dimension doubtless enhanced the pull of poetry on Shvarts, so recently enamored of life on

⁸⁴ Shneiderman, "Govorili tol'ko o stikhakh;" Kravulin, "Poeziia – eto razgovor samogo iazyka;" Gordin, "Delo Brodskogo;" Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 108-109.

⁸⁵ Brodsky was accused of "nationalism," an anti-Semitic euphemism, and Aleksandr Morev was charged with "pornography," according to eyewitness Eduard Shneiderman (*Slovo i slava poeta*, 13).

⁸⁶ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 488. See also Ufliand, "Nekotorye osobennosti nezavisimoi piterskoi poezii 50-60-x godov," 10.

⁸⁷ Emily Lygo argues that readings helped poets establish a reputation that might lead to publication (*Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 40). Lowen points to the "live, in concert" element of large-scale readings in Moscow in "Blurred Boundaries." Several articles in Fürst and McClellan's *Dropping out of Socialism* address the embodied dimension of alterity and dissent across the Soviet bloc.

stage and still deeply engaged with theatrical life and culture.⁸⁸ Such events also contributed to the *mouvance* discussed in the introduction to this study. Paul Zumthor drew attention to the mobility of medieval texts that spread in time and space, arguing that each version was an equally legitimate part of the text as a whole. Marilyn Desmond has highlighted the aural/oral dimension of *mouvance*, which “recognizes the inherent performativity of texts as well as seeing textuality as one set of gestures in the larger performances of a culture.”⁸⁹ Poetry readings were unique performances, each doubtlessly informed by its particular venue, atmosphere, and audience.⁹⁰ Such instances comprised part of a poem’s totality for listeners, who might further its *mouvance* by repeating aloud or otherwise recording lines or stanzas, carrying them forward to new audiences, much as the friend of a friend of Dina Shvarts who recited lines from Shvarts’s poem “In the Cathedral” to her.

At the end of the decade, opportunities to read for public audiences diminished significantly, becoming one of the defining features of the “underground” 1970s – a “deaf age,” as Olga Sedakova has it, – when Shvarts’s contemporaries waged a battle to be *heard* as much as to be read.⁹¹ Poets of the *andegraund* developed various strategies for compensating for the loss of recitation opportunities, and eventually successfully lobbied for their return through the establishment of Club-81, an organization for unofficial writers formed in 1981.⁹²

⁸⁸ Diary entries document Shvarts’s ongoing theatergoing and responses to productions. She also contemplated a career as dramaturg in the hypothetical future theater of fellow BDT “kid” Aleksandr Tovstonogov (5:325).

⁸⁹ Desmond, “Visuality of Reading in Pre-Modern Textual Cultures,” 220.

⁹⁰ The vast majority of recitations and their oral afterlives are lost as textual instances, but occasionally they were recorded. Valieva’s *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii* and *K istorii neofitital'noi kul'tury i sovremennogo russkogo zarubezh'ia* include audio recordings of numerous unofficial poets.

⁹¹ Sedakova, “Muzyka glukhogo vremeni,” 257.

⁹² Among other sources on Club-81, see *Samizdat Leningrada*, 410-413; Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*.

Regaining access to audiences was partly important because recitations enabled the printless distribution, or “oral publication” (*ustnaia publikatsiia*) of poetry.⁹³ Writing in 1974, Andrei Sinyavsky asserted, “So far we have not emerged from the ‘semi-folklore’ stage, in which literature lacks the strength to spread its wings in book publication and subsists instead on oral forms.”⁹⁴ Sinyavsky overstates the case. In 1970s Leningrad, such archivists of local culture as Boris Taigin and Vladimir Erl had long been collecting and preserving local poetry in typed or handwritten booklets.⁹⁵ Numerous other publications of literary samizdat had been undertaken. Nevertheless, the cultural practices of listening to poetry, of memorizing it, of passing along verse that was heard not only directly from the author, but also second- or even thirdhand, meant that the spoken word was a viable means of distribution. Igor Burikhin recalled, for example, that he first encountered Shvarts’s verse via Vladimir Maramzin’s recitation of it in the early 1970s.⁹⁶ Gleb Gorbovsky described the dissemination of his own early works: “Poems that were not for print – and at first that was the absolute majority of them – scattered like glowing ash [*svetiashchiisia pepel*] from a camp fire on the wind. Those unsown poems, as it were, sprouted [*prorostali*] in the domiciles of the city folk who had some connection to the poetic word.”⁹⁷ This is not to suggest that written channels were unimportant. Natalia Gorbanevskia first read, rather than heard Shvarts’s poetry, for example (5:339). Nevertheless, the turn to periodical

⁹³ Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 167. Oleg Iur’ev uses the same phrase in “Dazhe Benedikt Livshits.” See also Bobyshev, “Akhmatovskie siroty.”

⁹⁴ Sinyavsky, “The Literary Process in Russia,” 98.

⁹⁵ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 339-341; Erl, “Neskol’ko dopolnenii,” 58-63; Taigin, “Volny i skaly,” 147-149. In “Volny i skaly,” Boris Taigin relates how he came to produce tape recordings and samizdat editions of Nikolai Rubtsov’s poetry after Rubtsov, a Moscow poet, recited at an annual LITO event in Leningrad.

⁹⁶ Burikhin, “O groteske i dukhovnoi kontseptsii,” 68.

⁹⁷ Gorbovsky, *Padshii angel*, 247. See Gorbovsky, *Sizhu na narakh* (In the Clink) for a collection of such “unprintable” poetry.

samizdat that characterized the 1970s was born in part of a desire to fix in print these ephemeral literary products, to extend their life beyond pre-print culture.

Memoirs and reminiscences contain fragments of the lost folklore of this era, such as Pazukhin's "Baba" and Shvarts's "I Laughed," discussed below. Such texts are not only historical curiosities, but give us a sense of the social and acoustical backdrop of Shvarts's development. In fact, the last stanza of Pazukhin's scandalous poem "Baba" begins with lines distinctly reminiscent of later Shvarts:

Живот бы похож и на чан, и на чайник.
Я слышал: там что-то спекалось, варилось...

The abdomen resembled a tub and a kettle. / I heard: there something was baking,
boiling...⁹⁸

Politics and Mentors: "I Laughed"

Catriona Kelly has observed that "ideological concerns were muted" in the educational activities of the Palace of Pioneers when its *kruzhki* were established in the 1930s.⁹⁹ They were a relatively relaxed ideological space in the 1960s as well. Elena Pudovkina recalled a "respectfully silent" attitude to religion at the Palace of Pioneers, rather than the propaganda of atheism one might expect.¹⁰⁰ Apparently one could even recite poems about Jesus in this context with no negative repercussions, as Shvarts did. Stratanovsky's poem about Auschwitz, an Aesopian exploration of recent Soviet history, was also acceptable.¹⁰¹ Public readings were more

⁹⁸ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 36.

⁹⁹ Kelly, *Children's World*, 552.

¹⁰⁰ Pudovkina, "Klub Derzanie."

¹⁰¹ Stratanovskii, "Pamiati Viktora Krivulina," 135; Krivulin, "Sergei Stratanovskii," 262.

scripted.¹⁰² Shvarts noted in her diary that she would not be permitted to recite “I laughed” (“Ja smeialas’”) at an upcoming recitation by her *kruzhok* at the Writers’ Union (March 1963, 5:331).

The poem was not published in Shvarts’s samizdat or later collections, but it was remembered fifty years on by contemporaries who heard it from her in the early 1960s:

Ты трепался, трепался, трепался,
Я смеялась, смеялась, смеялась,
А в глазах твоих кони храпели
И монахи сжигали ведьм.

Ты трепался, трепался, трепался,
Я смеялась, смеялась, смеялась,
А в глазах твоих, диких и древних,
Подливали в бокалы яд.¹⁰³

You chattered on, and on, and on, / I laughed, laughed, laughed, / And in your eyes, steeds snorted / And monks burned witches. // You chattered on, and on, and on, / I laughed, laughed, laughed, / And in your eyes, wild and ancient, / Poison was poured into goblets.

The sexually charged atmosphere of this short poem surely accounted for its inappropriateness. Animal excitement and diabolical visions suggest an ancient and dangerous dance between the masculine talker and the feminine laugher. Abundant repetition creates an incantatorial effect to which Shvarts’s style of delivery apparently contributed. Elena Ignatova recalled the “temperamental” way she recited the lines and suggested they exemplified a *raskovannost’* (lack of inhibition) to which Ignatova and her peers were unaccustomed.¹⁰⁴

Discussion of participants’ poetry was a standard component of *kruzhok* and LITO meetings, and often part of public readings as well. Even though she did not read “I laughed” at

¹⁰² Publications that grew out of Pioneer circles were of course even more carefully vetted. Olga Sedakova, who participated in a similar literary studio at Moscow’s Palace of Pioneers, recalled that her childhood poem about a snow-drop flower was altered for an anthology of participants’ poetry (Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies*, 11).

¹⁰³ V. L. Toporov, “Lestnitsa Iakova.”

¹⁰⁴ Ignatova, *Obernivshis’*, 122. Ignatova recalled the first two lines of the poem in the opposite order from Toporov.

the Writers' Union recitation, the politics of the pieces Shvarts did read were criticized by a certain Kruglov, she reported in her diary (April 1963, 5:336). The objections may have pointed to the absence in her poems of civic commitment, party-mindedness, enthusiasm, or youthful optimism, artistic values that were gradually reaffirmed through a series of negative responses to experimental art in the early 1960s that brought an end to the cultural Thaw. Shvarts does not give many details in the diary entry, but also relates with pleasure that a rebuttal was made in her defense by poet Vadim Khalupovich. The entry thus suggests that such recitations were a site for spontaneous public debate, in which opposing positions could be articulated.

Shvarts worked with Natalia Grudinina in the poetry *kruzhok*.¹⁰⁵ It was she who forbade the recitation of "I laughed." These and other details from Shvarts's diary illuminate the influence preceptors wielded in young writers' self-fashioning and sense of legitimacy. Barbara Walker's study of *kruzhok* culture has suggested that this "informal and haphazard" institution of pre-revolutionary educated elites retained its "complex pattern of networking and clientist behavior" when it crossed into the Soviet era.¹⁰⁶ Shvarts's case provides a clear example of how the system of literary patronage persisted in the postwar period and informed relations with the young writers that the Writers' Union had busily been creating.

The success of an aspiring poet depended in no small part on mentor-patrons' judgments of character and behavior. Shvarts writes in her diary that Grudinina's condition for acceptance into the poetry section at the Palace of Pioneers was a "test" (*ispytanie*): to revise a poem in

¹⁰⁵ Grudinina is often remembered for her involvement in the Brodsky trial (still in the future), into which she was drawn because a Derzanie participant was named in the libelous article that led to his arrest for social parasitism (*tuneiadstvo*). See Pudovkina, "Klub *Derzanie*."

¹⁰⁶ Walker, "Kruzhok Culture: The Meaning of Patronage in the Early Soviet Literary World," 107.

response to feedback. No further comments are made about the improvements Shvarts made to her poem “Words” (“Slova”) but clearly the results were acceptable.¹⁰⁷ Grudinina had assessed Brodsky for participation in the *kruzhok* in 1958 and found his character lacking, as the prosecution did not fail to point out at his 1964 trial for social parasitism.¹⁰⁸ The stakes were thus not low in such situations. Shvarts makes a point of recording Grudinina’s inconsistent feedback in her diary, commenting at one meeting that she might become a poetess “like Akhmadulina – pure and powerful” and at the next “I don’t think poetry will come to you” (mne kazhetsia, u tebia stikhi ne poidut) (Dec. 1962, 5:317; Jan. 1963, 5:322).

Figures like Grudinina and Gleb Semënov, discussed below, served as talent scouts and gatekeepers for the Writers’ Union, wielding significant authority over the young people they worked with. “Softer” than other forms of public censure of alterity, their work nonetheless illustrates the Thaw-era shift from state-sponsored to collective methods of social organization and control described by Oleg Kharkhordin.¹⁰⁹ *Kruzhok* participants who did not conform to expectations were quietly pushed out, as poet Andrei Gaivoronsky recalled about his and Vladimir Erl’s experience at the Palace of Pioneers. His retrospective account fashioned the rejection as a virtue, an opportunity to get off the “pioneer carousel.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ The poem is not extant, to my knowledge.

¹⁰⁸ Vigdorova, “Trial of Joseph Brodsky;” Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 11. Lygo indicates that it was the “Narvskaia zastava” (Narva Gate) group, also based at the Palace of Pioneers, that Grudinina rejected Brodsky for (*Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 54).

¹⁰⁹ Platt and Nathans revisit and eloquently summarize Kharkhordin’s argument that “...the growing prevalence in Soviet society of such institutions as *druzhiny* and comrades’ courts and of practices such as mutual surveillance and policing among colleagues and peer groups reflects the increasing reliance of Soviet social institutions on the collective to align the behavior of individuals with the interests of society as a whole” (“Socialist in Form, Indeterminate in Content,” 309). See also Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era.”

¹¹⁰ Gaivoronskii, *Sladkaia muzyka vechnykh stikhov*, 18.

Mentors were by no means the only sources of guidance, and there were numerous circles and currents of Leningrad literature less connected to official institutions than the ones described here. Moreover, there was a spectrum of participation; some dropped by *Derzanie* or the LITOs on an occasional basis. Yakov Gordin emphasized not only the variety but “intersecting” quality of these circles.¹¹¹ Poets crossed paths at other informal spaces, including the domestic circles and salons that existed alongside the LITOs and *kruzhki* at universities and literary institutions. Often these arose around a charismatic personality, such as Leonid Aronzon, Vladimir Ufliand, Aleksei Khvostenko, or Efim Slavinsky.

“The Holy Fool”

Он размахивал хвостом,
Он притоптывал ногой
И кружился колесом,
Безволосый и нагой.

He flourished his tail,
He stamped his feet
And turned like a wheel,
Hairless and naked.

– Nikolai Zabolotsky

It is but a step from the theatricalized selves of “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” to the self-puppetry of Shvarts’s poem “The Holy Fool” (*Iurodivyi*, 1962), in which the lyric speaker presents herself as an ecstatic visionary on otherworldly strings.

Юродивый

Глаза за ниточки дёргая,
визжу и в обмороки падаю.
Я – юродивый. В снег башкой,
поматывая прядями.

¹¹¹ Gordin, “LITO: kartina byla pestraia.”

По снегу, по зелёному
 колешками, колешками.
 По вам, тупые, взглядами –
 сучочками, полешками.
 Эй, осторожные да аккуратные,
 солнце падает!
 Как мухи в муссе, туда и обратно,
 в солнце – падалью.
 Дом стоит тортом
 расступитесь,
 бейте,
 идите к чёрту!
 У меня бог есть,
 у вас – нету.
 Солнце упадёт,
 всегда будет лето.
 (5:224)

The Holy Fool

Eyes pulled by a thread / I screech and fall into faints. / I [am] a holy fool. Into the
 snow headfirst / shaking locks of hair. / Along the snow, along the green / on my
 little knees, on my little knees. / Along you, dull ones, with gazes – / by little
 branches, the little logs. / Hey, cautious and careful ones, / the sun is falling! /
 Like flies in mousse, there and back, / into the sun – with carrion. / House stands
 as a cake / step aside / beat! / go to the devil! / I have god, / you – nope. / The sun
 will fall / summer will be always.

In “The Holy Fool,” Shvarts adopts a folkloric tone, foregrounding diminutives and syntactic repetition (“Po snegu, po zelenomu / koleshkami, koleshkami”) to bring to life a traditional figure of popular Orthodoxy who speaks truth in riddles and makes enigmatic predictions with the wisdom of the “touched” without regard for the consequences. The role of the fool is to criticize the powerful and complacent, and to challenge audiences to endure the ambivalence its behavior provokes.¹¹² Shvarts’s apostrophe to the “dull ones,” the “cautious and careful ones,” who are as dynamic as “flies in mousse” is a condemnatory gesture that disdains conventionality through its imagery, to say nothing of sending listeners to the devil. Imagining the recitation of

¹¹² For an overview of the holy fool in Eastern Orthodox cultures, see Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*.

this poem for public audiences such as those described above, we might read it as a bold mockery of the poet's own position as performer for various and sundry audiences, with a concomitant judgment of those who arrange and consume those performances. The invisible threads that cause the fool to fall, roll, yell, and insult, when pulled, create a kind of social and poetic tightwire that the poet performs on.

The *iurodivyi* is both a mask and the poet's double, functioning much as the diglossic doppelgänger of Mandelstam that Kirill Ospovat perceives in "K nemetskoi rechi:" "explicitly separated from the author and his times, and yet provides a model and a vocabulary for his poetic and historical self-reflection."¹¹³ In "The Holy Fool," Shvarts remains fully in the role, the mask seemingly impenetrable thanks to a dramatic conventionality that universalizes rather than particularizes. Oleg Dark has described Shvarts as a "poet of movement," a tendency visible in the vivid plasticity of Shvarts's "The Holy Fool."¹¹⁴ The figure's jerky dance is a balancing act that teeters between authentic ecstasy and cynical performance, unsettling and less wholeheartedly ecstatic than Shvarts's later poem "Dancing David" ("Tantsuiushchii David," 1978).

Shvarts later wrote that in her early poetry she avoided markers of feminine identity, which "made [her] self-conscious for a long time" (*dolgo smushchala menia*), preferring the more customary masculine first person: "One might calmly write of another [person], but not of oneself: she came, she saw, she conquered. There is something vaguely comic in it. Before, maybe in order to avoid that *-la* [marking the feminine voice in past tense verbs], I wrote about everything but myself, and then – about nothing but myself" (3:240). The role playing we see in

¹¹³ Ospovat, "Doublespeak," 141.

¹¹⁴ Dark, "Tanets molnii," 35. See also Svitneva, "Koordinaty dukkha, ili dikopis' v ritme svinga."

“The Holy Fool” or “Monologue of the Boat” (“Monolog lodki,” 1963), another early work, was thus one strategy for speaking with the masculine inflections of the Russian poetic canon, a means to circumvent, if not escape, the confines of the role she was assigned by chance and history: a female child, a Russian Jew.¹¹⁵ “The Holy Fool” was completed, recited, preserved, and eventually printed, becoming a “literary fact,” unlike another poem mentioned in the diary: “I step out into the streets with a yellow star,” which Shvarts apparently began, but left unfinished (April 1963, 5:333).¹¹⁶ The distinctly different outcomes of the work is perhaps explained by the hesitation Shvarts retrospectively described.

Unlike most of Shvarts’s poetry, “The Holy Fool” has a place designation – Alakadze, (Georgia), where she traveled with her mother in summer 1962, as she recorded in her diary (July-Aug. 1962, 5:297-299). It is unlikely that the poem was inspired by ethnographic observation, but no doubt such a sight would have captivated Shvarts, who was attracted to marginal figures in life and in verse. She mentions meetings with *iurodivye* in her late diaries; she cultivated an interest in Petersburg’s Saint Ksenia, a fool in Christ who appears in her poetry (Dec. 2003, 5:58; 1:104, 249). Olga Sedakova points to Shvarts’s preoccupation with “pythias, sibyls, biblical prophets, saints, holy fools, alchemists, monks of all confessions, taoists, hasidim, and Theban hermits. And from the ‘simple folk’ the deformed, deaf mutes, halfwits: they are also closer to the One.”¹¹⁷ For von Zitzewitz, “the figure of the Holy Fool, who insists on looking for

¹¹⁵ See also “Iz monologov. Rasskaz proraba” in “‘V zhivuii ranu nezžno vsypat' sol'....’”

¹¹⁶ The poem is not extant, to my knowledge.

¹¹⁷ Sedakova, *Poetica*, 574.

vestiges of sacredness in that which we consider base, damaged, and revolting, can unlock some of Shvarts's most puzzling imagery."¹¹⁸

Shvarts's choice of the *iurodivyi* is prescient for a future member of Soviet unofficial culture. Holy foolishness was a pervasive paradigm of literary Leningrad in the 1970s, a multifaceted cultural model that late Soviet avant-gardes exploited in art and in life.¹¹⁹ Marco Sabbatini's study of holy foolishness in the Leningrad underground includes examples from poetry by Shvarts, Stratanovsky, Okhapkin, and Mironov. He sees the Leningrad poets' behavior as *iurodstvovanie*, a secular version of the ascetic religious practice and "performance" that theatricalizes life and art to express social and aesthetic criticism. Sabbatini argues that cultivation of absurd, popular laughter and marginality was a "theater of 'idiocy'" that provided a foundation for the literary uses of 'anti-behavior' among Shvarts's contemporaries.¹²⁰

Through the figure of the holy fool, the "second culture" dramatized its own history, the history of a literary generation. Shvarts's contemporary Tatiana Goricheva, a co-founder of the samizdat journal *Thirty-Seven*, identified their circles as "fools in Christ against their will" (*iurodivye ponevole*), who were "impoverished in all sense of the word: homeless, drifters, outcasts."¹²¹ The metonymic relationship between the poet and the fool is established through speech: speaking in riddles; status: occupying the lowest social strata; and fashion: rags (better yet, naked). The poet becomes an ascetic by association.

¹¹⁸ *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 123.

¹¹⁹ Not only in Leningrad, of course. The main character of Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow Circles, as one translation has it) is an exemplary "iurodivyi." See Komaromi, *Uncensored*, 106-110; Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction*, 72-75.

¹²⁰ Sabbatini, "Pathos of Holy Foolishness," 338.

¹²¹ Goricheva, "Iurodivye ponevole;" "'Tkan' serdtsa rassteliu...'" 199.

The fool's failure to observe proprieties, on the other hand, connects him to the apolitical and naive perspective of a child and to the absurd. As Ainsley Morse's work has shown, holy foolery contributed significantly to the "child-like aesthetic" through which late Soviet poets challenged "established notions of logic, propriety and order."¹²² Krivulin emphasizes the absurd's centrality to unofficial poetry's spiritual search, describing it as an "effective method to expose reality" and the "liminal state" (*pogranichnoe sostoianie*) of unofficial culture itself, in which "Ionesco and Beckett turned up in a context of hesychasm, and the camp life of *zeks* [was] experienced as monastic asceticism."¹²³

Acting the (holy) fool was not only a literary strategy, but an instrument of alterity and a code of behavior for the late Soviet avant-garde as a whole. It was one means of entering the underground itself, a spiritual and physical heterotopia predicated on a certain autonomy from state institutions and a co-constructed metapoetic space that was glorified through poetic life-texts. As Krivulin's emblematic poem "I Drink the Wine of Archaisms" claimed, the archetypal Underground Poet of the 1970s simultaneously occupied the catacombs of early Christianity and roamed the pharmacies and streets of Leningrad."¹²⁴

Shvarts's contemporaries did come to occupy en masse the lowest professional rungs of the Soviet social ladder, becoming the "boiler minders of new art" and "caretakers of the past," as Krivulin and Pazukhin accurately predicted in a 1960 manifesto.¹²⁵ Preemptive self-debasement was a strategy for self-protection that provided immunity from insult and injury.

¹²² Morse, "Detki v kletke," 5.

¹²³ Krivulin, "Peterburgskaia spiritual'naia lirika," 99.

¹²⁴ For an insightful study of this poem, see Walker, "Spirit(s) of the Leningrad Underground."

¹²⁵ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 29-30. More famously: the "generation of janitors and night watchmen" (*pokolenie dvornikov i storozhei*) that Boris Grebenshchikov and *Akvarium* sang of.

Kukuj identifies indifference toward status, cultivation of a-social topics, formal experimentation, and collective compositions as shared features of the left-leaning Volokhonsky and Aronzon circles and of Vladimir Erl and the *Khelenukty*.¹²⁶ These groups found common ground in the figure of the holy fool.

“The Holy Fool” opens an ascetic line in Shvarts’s poetry. Later works depict the poet as a beggar, a hungover itinerant, victim of domestic violence.¹²⁷ The grotesque imagery and naturalism of “Black Easter” (“Chernaia Paskha,” 1974), “Bliss is not attained by crude means” (“Grubymi sredstvami ne dostich blazhennstva,” 1978), and other poems connect Shvarts’s writing to a dark current in Leningrad unofficial poetry of which Oleg Grigoriev’s work is exemplary (2:77-82; 2:90-95). Gleb Gorbovsky’s orientation towards the lower depths of Russian society are also relevant. The poet seems untouched by the self-abasement of “The Holy Fool,” in sharp contrast to Shvarts’s later verse. Tatiana Goricheva and Olga Sedakova, who met Shvarts in the 1970s, both saw the victim (*zhertva*) to be the principle figure of her poetry.¹²⁸ Her subversions of the self were initially more playful, without the “circumcision of the heart” and other stigmata the poet acquired as an adult.

In her micro-essay “On Madness in Poetry” (“O bezumii v poezii,” n.d.) Shvarts wrote that poetry has its roots in a divine shamanic state, a quasi-possession resulting from the connection to other realms: “Poetry began with sacred madness – with incantations, the verse of Pythia, that is, an attempt to receive knowledge that cannot be attained through reason

¹²⁶ Kukuj, “Leningradskii avangard 1960-x godov,” 316.

¹²⁷ See “Gorod s pokhmel'ia” (*Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,”* 18); “Mechta,” (“V zhivuii ranu nezhdno vsypat' sol'...”); *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*, 2:78-79, 2:123.

¹²⁸ Goricheva, “‘Tkan' serdtsa rasssteliu,’” 209-210; Sedakova, “Muzyka glukhogo vremeni,” 265.

[*razmyshlenie*]” (3:270).¹²⁹ The holy fool is a similar seeker of irrational wisdom. Von Zitzewitz has also called attention to Shvarts’s “pearl of an unreasonable thought,” which she equates with a “pearl of holy madness,” persuasively arguing that, for the mature poet, inspiration was a painful ecstatic state that “demands an exceedingly high price.”¹³⁰ Yet the pearl of Shvarts’s essay is retrieved “from the sea of madness” by a diving creature (poetry) who brings it to the surface clutched between her teeth. The deft performance of the diver, who displays skill and determination, is overlooked in such readings.

Writing in her diary in 1963, Shvarts reasoned that it is the madness of poetry that yields clarity. “Poetry is delirium [*bred*], nets, but suddenly: lucidity, insight, prophecy” (5:368). This statement echoes the poet’s later formulation of a “poetics of what is alive.” In her 1996 essay under this title Shvarts described poetry as a means of “acquiring knowledge that cannot be obtained through other means” (4:272-275). This program, though less clearly formulated, is nevertheless visible in the diary entry: to seek knowledge through the irrational (delirium), to allow experience and emotion to settle and take shape within the poet, to retrieve the results as best she is able, and to marvel at their transformation from grit to pearl. The “pearls of unreasonable thought” must be retrieved by an able swimmer with a flexible system and structure: poetry. In that sense, the nets of her comment are equally important. Shvarts pointed to her metamorphoses and masks as one of three distinct qualities about her poetry, concluding that the lyric hero of her poetry is “*neulovim*” – elusive and uncatchable (5:278). Escaping traps becomes a metaphor that reflects Shvarts’s artful play around and through structural constraints and canonical forms. It is simultaneously a religious metaphor for the exit from earthly life and

¹²⁹ The undated text is part of the “Zapiski na nogtiakh” (Notes on fingernails), a collection of short prose essays (3:228-279).

¹³⁰ Von Zitzewitz, “Pearl of an Unreasonable Thought.”

overcoming its boundaries, as when she depicts herself as vast and powerful, but also small and energetic: “I will make myself the Neva, / I will become a smelt / In the small blue water / I won’t tire of swimming.”¹³¹

Poetic Craft and Networks

Who didn’t write in those days? Everybody went to Gleb Semënov’s LITO, everyone considered themselves better than the others.
– Irène Orlova

The strategies for professional self-realization advocated by the leaders of Leningrad LITOs were far from uniform. Sergei Dovlatov, like others, recalled that mentor David Dar encouraged his students *not* to attempt publication, insisting that literature was an “underground activity, very private, demanding a particular mentality of the artist.”¹³² This attitude contributed to the “foolish” behavior that many Leningrad poets embraced. Shvarts was well acquainted with Dar, but sought guidance from the more conservative Gleb Semënov, with whom she worked in 1963 and beyond. Semënov was a huge name in local literary affairs, and, judging by the final months of Shvarts’s girlhood diary, he devoted much mentoring attention to the aspiring poet. Elena Kumpan, a poet closer to Shvarts’s age and Semënov’s protégé-turned-wife, was also present at their first meeting. Both of them encouraged Shvarts to continue writing verse and to join Semënov’s LITO, since she needed training (March 1963, 5:329-330).

¹³¹ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,”* 47-48.

¹³² Dovlatov, *Maloizvestnyi Dovlatov*, 231-235. See also Beshenkovskaia, “Punktirnaia družhba;” *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 2A:425-460.

There was a virtual cult of Semënov, a leader of literary organizations and an advisor to aspiring Leningrad writers for some thirty-five years. “Our daily Gleb” (*Gleb nash nasushchnyi*, a play on the Russian for “our daily bread”), as he was known and remembered by some former students, made the LITO at the Mining Institute into the most prominent one in Leningrad.¹³³ *Shestidesiatniki* such as Gleb Gorbovsky, Aleksandr Gorodnitsky, Vladimir Britanishsky, and Andrei Bitov participated, helping to create the “geological fashion” of the early Thaw.¹³⁴ At the Mining Institute and other local educational institutions, Semënov largely repeated practices that he had established in his first such position at the Palace of Pioneers leading poetry circles for youth. A poet in his own right, Semënov was only moderately successful getting his verse into print. His cycle about the Leningrad blockade, written for the drawer, was only published posthumously.¹³⁵ Poems that did appear in print were his least interesting and daring, he complained in a letter to scholar and critic Tatiana Khmel'nitskaia.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, wherever he went, Semënov converted young people to the “religion of poetry.”¹³⁷

At their second meeting, Semënov invited Shvarts to participate in his LITO, in which Krivulin, Kushner, and Gorbovsky were active.¹³⁸ In her diary, under the heading “Remeslo” (Craft), she put down the practices they discussed:

Ремесло.

Craft.

¹³³ See Semenov, “Ostanovis' v potoke;” Koroleva, “Nash uchitel' poet Gleb Semënov”; Britanishskii, *Peterburg-Leningrad*; Mochalov, “Gleb-gvardiia Semënovskogo polka”; and Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*.

¹³⁴ Many participants composed poems about the geological expeditions that they went on for training and work. Kumpan was another geologist-poet participant. The group’s self-made anthology, which resulted in Semënov’s dismissal and the LITO’s disbanding in 1957, was burned in the Mining Institute courtyard. Somewhat later, Semënov led LITOs at the House of Culture of the First Five-Year plan (the one Shvarts attended) and later still at the House of Scholars.

¹³⁵ Semenov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, 19-20; 89-113.

¹³⁶ Semenov and Khmel'nitskaia, *Govorit' drug s drugom*, 450.

¹³⁷ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 45.

¹³⁸ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 327.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Идти от того, что видела,
от точной детали, а там
куда угодно. 2. Делать ритм. 3. Спираль. Нашёптывание. 4. Мешать жанры. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Go from the thing you observed,
from the specific detail, and from
there anywhere you like. 2. Maintain the meter. 3. Spiral. [Charm]-whispering. 4. Mix genres. |
|---|--|

(March 1963, 5:331)

Shvarts recorded that it was her poetic intonation that Semënov apparently liked best, with its “charm-whispering, muttering, incantation” (*nasheptyvanie, nabarmatyvanie, zaklinanie*), “like early Tsvetaeva.” Semënov was known to promote Tsvetaeva’s poetry to LITO participants, and his comparison to her poetics would have been most welcome by Shvarts, who would take Tsvetaeva explicitly as a model in the 1966 prose piece “Definition” (“Opredelenie”), discussed in Chapter Two (5:394-395).¹³⁹

Through the literary network she established via the Palace of Pioneers and Semënov’s LITO, Shvarts was drawn into the “construction zone” of the city’s nascent independent cultural scene. Her diary indicates that her discovery of people, places, and literary endeavors occurred in rapid succession. She attended Palace of Pioneer and LITO sessions (March 1963, 5:330-333). She met Viktor Krivulin and they heard each other’s poetry, inspiring mutual admiration. Krivulin invited her to his salon for young poets who do not print “on principle” (April 1963, 5:334). She went to the Poets’ Café with him and Evgeny Pazukhin, where she recited alongside older, better known poets (she names Brodsky and Bobyshev) to a “wildly enthusiastic” crowd (April 1963, 5:334). Grigory Kovalëv, the “walking tape recorder” who went on to co-compile the *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, was in the crowd listening. At the café

¹³⁹ According to her diary, Semënov gave Shvarts a copy of Tsvetaeva’s long essay about Andrei Bely, “A Captive Spirit,” some months later (5:345). Reminiscences about Semënov’s Palace of Pioneers *kruzhok* and LITOs frequently mention his sharing of texts by poets who were far out of favor in the late 1940s, when his pedagogical work began: Gumilëv, Khodasevich, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Zabolotsky, Shalamov. See Valieva, *Vremia i slovo; Britanishskii, Peterburg-Leningrad*; Britanishskii, “Studencheskoe poeticheskoe dvizhenie;” Koroleva, “Nash uchitel’ Gleb Semenov.”

she learned of an “underground press” (*podpol'noe izdatel'stvo*) that was printing books by young poets such as Elena Kuman, and was invited to become one of them. The density of these experiences is striking, leading Shvarts to declare that “at last” she had found friends (April 1963, 5:335).

It did not last long. Shvarts’s own accounts and those of her contemporaries generally confirm her later statement that she “provoked a wild irrational annoyance in some people in [her] youth” (3:208). The early stages of her friendship with Natalia Gorbanevskaia were a short-lived exception. The young woman who went on to become one of the iconic figures of dissent through her work on the *Chronicle of Current Events* and Red Square protest of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, was already a recognized poet who had been published in Ginzburg’s samizdat periodical *Syntax*. The twenty-seven-year-old Gorbanevskaia had just graduated from Leningrad State University. Shvarts already knew about the “very famous Moscow poetess” thanks to Krivulin (June 1963, 5: 340). Shvarts’s reputation also preceded her. Gorbanevskaia befriended Shvarts and stayed with her several times in 1963. The two wandered the city and talked about poetry. On one of their first excursions, they went to the Peter and Paul Fortress, climbing up the Zotov rampart, and with the Admiralty and Winter Palace in sight, Gorbanevskaia recited Brodsky’s “Christmas Romance” (5:339-45, 5:388-93). Their closeness was seemingly short-lived. Gorbanevskaia came to identify with the “Akhatova school” as a poet and in emigration cultivated close ties with Brodsky and Bobyshev, among others of their generation, while Shvarts’s literary network came to be dominated by fellow *semidesiatniki*.

Meeting Akhmatova, Choosing Tsvetaeva

One path across the cultural “abyss” of Stalinism lay through literary domesticity, as has been suggested above. Many aspiring poets cultivated personal connections to the bearers of late Imperial and early Revolutionary culture who had survived the 1930s and 1940s. Yakov Gordin described the meeting of generations that occurred when members of his circles paid visits to scholars once associated with Formalism:

There were people of the older generation, such as Lydia Ginzburg ... We read to them, they told us about their youth ... Speaking briefly, this connection between two ages that had been broken was forged again ... I managed, for example, to be a guest at Eikhenbaum’s place; Brodsky would visit the Tomashevsky family... In that way there arose links, not only via books, but via a private acquaintance with those people of the 10s and 20s [...] It was all as if behind the back of Soviet culture’s major players. We were connected with people who had gone for ages into the shadows ... who had been covered by the shadows....¹⁴⁰

They did not limit themselves to Leningrad. Evgeny Rein recounted a sortie to Moscow with Dmitry Bobyshev to meet Boris Pasternak.¹⁴¹ Brodsky described his own “literary pilgrimages” to Nadezhda Mandelstam’s Moscow kitchen in 1962-63.¹⁴² *Derzanie* club participants were socialized into this ritual when they visited Nadezhda Mandelstam, Konstantin Paustovsky, and Ariadna Efron in Tarusa.¹⁴³ Even without formal institutions and introductions, poets sought audiences with Pasternak, Aleksei Kruchenykh, and Nadezhda Mandelstam in Moscow; they visited Maria Voloshina in Koktebel.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ From an interview with Gordin in MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse*, 21. Transliteration adapted for consistency.

¹⁴¹ Rein, *Mne skuchno bez Dovlatova*, 103-106.

¹⁴² Brodsky, *Less than One*, 148.

¹⁴³ Pudovkina, “Klub *Derzanie*.”

¹⁴⁴ Vladimir Ufliand, Mikhail Erëmin, and Lev Losev also visited Pasternak, after which they paid a call to Ilya Selvinsky. Losev recalled perceiving the day as the most significant one of his 18-year-old life. (Losev, *Meandr*, 239, 247.) Vladimir Erl and Aleksandr Mironov visited Kruchenykh in May 1965 (Nikolaev and Erl, “Ot

Forging these connections was an early step in the broader project of cultural recuperation with which Leningrad unofficial culture came to identify itself. Anna Akhmatova's presence was, from Krivulin's perspective, "the presence of history itself." He met her in 1960 through a Palace of Pioneers acquaintance, when "it wasn't even clear whether she was alive."¹⁴⁵ Many aspiring poets went to the Fontanny dom, where she lived in Leningrad, or to her "booth" in Komarovo to meet Akhmatova, share their verse, and hear her *Requiem* or other poems that could not be published.¹⁴⁶ Akhmatova's tutelage of Brodsky, Naiman, Rein, and Bobyshev has been well documented. The "magical chorus," or "Avvakumovtsy," as she is reported to have dubbed them, are but the best known of her young literary acquaintances.¹⁴⁷

Shvarts, too, sought an audience with Akhmatova. Her first and only meeting with the legendary figure of Russian modernism was a legendary disaster, as Krivulin, who curated local literary gossip, liked to recount.¹⁴⁸ There is no record of the encounter in Akhmatova's voluminous notebooks, but we have two versions of the event from Shvarts's perspective, one recorded the day of their meeting for her diary (August 1963, 5:346), one composed by the mature author (3:190-92). In the diary account, Akhmatova interpreted Shvarts's poem dedicated

publikatorov," 292). Shvarts visited Voloshina in Koktebel c. 1967 (3:193). Lev Druskin describes his Koktebel visit in *Spasennaiia kniga*, 307.

¹⁴⁵ Krivulin, *Anna Akhmatova: poslednie gody*, 11. See also Krivulin, "Poeziia – eto razgovor samogo iazyka." Compare to Brodsky's comment about Nadezhda Mandelstam in 1962: "I didn't know she existed" (*Less than One*, 146).

¹⁴⁶ Bobyshev describes his and Rein's first meeting with Akhmatova in "Akhmatovskie siroty." See also *Anna Akhmatova: poslednie gody*.

¹⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of Akhmatova's relationship with this group, see Rosen, "The Independent Turn."

¹⁴⁸ Shvarts presented herself directly, without accompaniment. Krivulin apparently derived pleasure from theatrical retellings of the meeting. See Sabbatini, "K istorii sozdaniia *Severnoi pochty*," 13. Krivulin also mentions the meeting in "Vospominaniia ob Anne Akhmatovoi," 20.

to her as “mean” (*zlye stikhi*) – not the spirit it was intended in.¹⁴⁹ The misunderstanding led to Shvarts’s hasty departure, tears, and a firm rejection of the figure she had so “believed in.” She determined to be, instead, “like Tsvetaeva” (5:346).¹⁵⁰

Before showing Akhmatova the ill-fated poem, Shvarts presented her short essay about Tsvetaeva written some two months prior.¹⁵¹ She approached her first foray into literary criticism on her own terms. As Shvarts herself acknowledged at the end of her text, there is more intuition than method in “About Marina Tsvetaeva” (“O Marine Tsvetaevoi,” 1963), a passionate paean to a spiritual warrior that begins abruptly:

When a person is burned on a pyre, he feels agonizingly, clearly alive, feels that the self is flesh. Tsvetaeva [spent] her whole life on the fires of conscience, hatred, love. Her poetry could catch about anything on fire. Dry firewood should be kept far away from them. And because she burned, she saw everything so tangibly, so visibly. A soul, licked by fire. (Mystics are often cold people.)

Second is that her skin has been torn off. Before birth they tore it off. For future sins? And because of that, touching the soul, the body – burns. Because of that the thirst for and the impossibility of closeness with the trees, with the sky, with people. In her poems grow trees pulled not out of the earth, [but] out of the self, having scratched the heart with barbs and touched the soul (from which the skin is torn) with its leaves. All her life she tore out of herself everything: sky, stars, soldiers. Because she herself is: a world, a forest, an armed force. (5:228)

The poet Shvarts describes in the remainder of her text is a powerful androgyne with the biology, patience, and blood of a “broad” (*baba*); with regard to work, duty, strength, she is “not a woman, but a warrior.” Isolated, but self-sufficient, she is the “Tsar-Maiden” and “Joan of Arc without a king” who “gives birth” to poems, rather than perceiving them through sight or sound.

¹⁴⁹ In her later account, Shvarts says she burned the poem the same day (3:192).

¹⁵⁰ Shvarts nevertheless attended Akhmatova’s funeral service, in which the poet’s protégés played a prominent role. Volkov gives an account in *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, 510-511. On Shvarts’s presence, see Druskin, *Spasennaia kniga*, 186. Note also Evgeny Venzel’s satirical poem about the funeral, in which Shvarts and Akhmatova’s “Orphans” make incognito appearances: “V grobu lezhala mertvaia starukha” (Venzel’, *Stikhi*, 44).

¹⁵¹ This surely did not improve her poem’s reception, as Shvarts’s mentor Yulia Berezhnova pointed out (5:346).

In its intensity, Tsvetaeva's poetry is an "attack" (*nalet*); in its breadth, a sea, "practically an ocean" (*okean pochti*).

Shvarts's amalgam of folkloric, Christian, historical, and literary figures in this text is noteworthy, anticipating her fusion of Classical, Judeo-Christian, and other mythologies in the 1970s. The appeal of glorious martyrdom for Shvarts is well visible in the diary entries from this period: Christ, Joan of Arc, and Girolamo Savonarola are her most admired personages and the subject of her creative writings (Oct.-Nov. 1963; 5:363, 374, 377-78, 383). Shvarts's later list of "Who captivates [me]" includes similar figures associated with bold existential exploration and suffering for heavenly causes: Job, Francis of Assisi, and the same Savonarola. In this text, as in the diary, religious martyrs are mixed with creative ones: Tsvetaeva, Khlebnikov, Bely, Meyerhold, van Gogh (3:230). Significant overlap between the admired figures of youth and maturity suggest tremendous continuity of existential and artistic values through adulthood, as well as the strength of aesthetic affinities established in Shvarts's early stages of creativity.

Tsvetaeva remained firmly enshrined in Shvarts's personal pantheon of saints, artists, and thinkers, and her role in Shvarts's oeuvre is a broad topic that scholars have only begun to address.¹⁵² Shvarts's weaving of global histories, cultures, and faiths into her poetry is akin to a "synthesizing impulse" that Catherine Ciepiela and Alexandra Smith discern in Tsvetaeva's poetics, connecting it to modernist tendencies to draw widely on world culture and a Dostoevskian idea of an "all-inclusive" Russian spirit.¹⁵³ Tsvetaeva's high romanticism and role playing are visibly akin to Shvarts's, and both draw deeply on the folktale and folkloric speech alongside European modernism. Both poets boldly took up taboo topics, sexuality, feminine

¹⁵² See, for example, Trubikhina, "On the Poetics of Elena Švarc: Poets with and without History" and Ichin, "Orfei Eleny Shvarts v kontekste poeticheskoi traditsii."

¹⁵³ Ciepiela and Smith, "Cvetaeva and Her Readers," 495-496.

identity and the female body, even as they pursued androgynous poetic voices and personal legends. For both, Classical myth is a source of models and encounters that serve as theatrical scripts that the poet revises to clarify her position to herself and contemporaries.

Captive Lion

Shvarts's ambivalent response to efforts to shape her talent is reflected in an extraordinary diary entry in which Gleb Semënov plays a metaphorical lion tamer and she a caged animal, filtering the encounter with her mentor through a theatrical lens. Her extended metaphor suggests another homage to Tsvetaeva, who likened herself to a captive lion in the poem "Homesickness" ("Toska po rodine"). Shvarts's theatrical presentation of the meeting in her diary makes it impossible to disentangle fact from fiction:

"Who," he says, waving the whip and yet stepping back a bit further, "who stuffed your head with the notion that you're a genius? Forgive me, I don't think so. You have done nothing in the last eight months. You go around reading, everybody gasps – what a brilliant child, a wunderkind! Let's applaud Lena Shvarts." But then he grew kind [*umilostivilsia*] and shoved into my toothy maw the following hunk of meat: my heart aches for you. Because you are a truly talented person and within you, you carry a God that is called the Poet, and so on. (Nov. 1963, 5:372-73)

Reflecting on their relations at the end of the diary entry, she declares her desire for autonomy, "to chew through the branches" of the cage created by Semënov and others.

A spiritual quest was also in progress. Alongside socio-literary battles, Shvarts's diary entries of late 1963 show a pell-mell pursuit of faith. Her search for spiritual models brought her under influence of the fifteenth-century friar Girolama Savonarola, who condemned the liberties and luxuries of Renaissance Italy and called for ascetic renewal and church reform, famously igniting the original "bonfire of the vanities." Study of the martyr-poet's biography and sermons unleashes a flood of mixed up claims in Shvarts's diary and seems to cement the fact, if not the

details, of her faith in a higher power: “To even ask the question – is there a God? – seemed blasphemous to me, I was certain that there is, I was as if afire, my face was burning” (5:377). Semënov is no longer needed, and she can “enclose [herself] externally and internally in God.” Her only concern, as she explains in her diary, is the *smirenie* (humility/meekness) from which she was “so distant, in any of its guises, from birth.” In a logical move that anticipates her future gnostic leanings, Shvarts declares the devil is the dark part of God, and therefore *is* God. She resolves this theological problem by declaring *smirenie* a revolt against the devil, that is, “against God, and against one’s very self.” The reconciliation of conflicting selves in favor of an unsubmitive authenticity prompts merriment: “Suddenly my head felt light and distracted, as if there were lemonade in it. Suddenly I felt cheerful [*veselo*]. And that’s fine [*pust*]” (5:377).

Conclusion

Shvarts’s girlhood diary ends in January 1964.¹⁵⁴ For Leningrad intelligentsia, the trial of Joseph Brodsky would soon make clear that the Thaw had waned. Shvarts was incredulous to think he might be sent into exile (Jan. 1964, 5:392). She was also uncertain what the future held for herself. In one of the last entries, she recalled her mother’s words about the “lightning of genius” and the imaginative vision they prompted:

A long time ago, when I was about six, Mom said – I don’t remember why: Genius is like lightning, you never know whose house it will strike. And for some reason, I thought: lightning flies into houses along stovepipes, straight into the room, of course they know where to fling it. And it seemed to me that I flew in along the pipe and flew out [the end] black with soot and cinders. I still don’t know who I am. But what if I’m the strongest? (5:392)

¹⁵⁴ She continued to keep a diary, parts of which were preserved and await publication.

This mythopoetic birth plot reconstructed by Shvarts in her diary clearly recalls the poem “Birth,” cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which the poet arrives on the earthly scene via a “hot crimson pipe.” It is similarly embedded in the poem “Live Lightning” (“Zhivaia molniia,” 1982), in which this fire takes up residence in the spine:

Бродила Дева по Заливу
 И не заметила – как вмиг
 Лицо пространства исказило
 И начался небесный тик.
 Молния в нее вонзила
 Взгляд, малиновым пером
 Чиркнула, заскользила
 Спинным хребтом.
 Но не сожгла, а оживила,
 И в муках молния сама
 Живою стала и светила,
 Переливалась, воздух жгла.
 (1:143)

The Maiden wandered along the Gulf / And did not notice how, suddenly / The face of the expanse contorted / And a celestial tick began. / Lightning stabbed into her / A gaze. With a raspberry quill / It scratched, began to glide / Along the backbone. / But it didn't incinerate, it animated, / And in agony the lightning herself / Came alive and glowed, / Overflowed, burned the air.

In both texts, the poet suggests that her poetic energy has a cosmic origin endowed by chance, as lightning that happened to strike her Maiden. This chapter has shown that it was Shvarts's literary environment that fueled her powerful start. Her career began early: at the age of fifteen she was as much in the spotlight of Leningrad poetry as Joseph Brodsky himself, known as a promising poet to major cultural figures across generations. In the early 1960s, organizations for young writers and a local culture of literary domesticity and poetic exchange provided Shvarts and her peers with platforms to perform and share their poetry, and they became players in a vibrant and dynamic literary environment. Their activities established a shared history and their relationships laid the groundwork for the informal networks of the *andeground*.

Shvarts was self-confident, energetic, and made an intimidating impression on some peers. Critic and translator Viktor Toporov later recalled: “I first heard Elena Shvarts in early spring 1963. She was fourteen. Miniature, outrageously pretty, outrageously arrogant, outrageously – that was clear immediately – talented.”¹⁵⁵ Shvarts’s connections to the Bolshoi Drama Theater and opportunities to travel in her youth were formative, fostering experiences that the author revisited and rewrote in various genres and guises. She eagerly engaged contemporary models to cultivate an authentic voice, like that of Holden Caulfield, the anti-hero of *The Catcher in the Rye*. She simultaneously sought models among poets, saints, and heretics of the past, such as Savonarola and Tsvetaeva, and her early poems exemplified a bold, challenging tone and keen interest in experimental poetics.

¹⁵⁵ V. L. Toporov, “Lestnitsa Iakova.”

Chapter Two: Behind the Scenes 1965-1971

This chapter describes Shvarts's literary environment in the second half of the 1960s and discusses, against this background, her selected statements and poems from a period of apprenticeship and experimentation. Shvarts was a prominent participant in Leningrad literary life and hailed a *wunderkind* in her youth, but she cultivated a Romantic conception of the poet as an asocial outsider during her university years (1965-1971). She avoided the local café scene that attracted her contemporaries, and as a result appears all but invisible in the publications and histories of Leningrad's informal literary networks in the late 1960s. She later stated that she "didn't seek any acquaintances whatsoever" at this age, although she was far from isolated.¹

Shvarts published more prose written during this period than she did poetry, seemingly filing many poems away in the "green notebook" that was only published after her death.² Yet in a literary environment where handwritten copies, samizdat, and "oral publication" flourished, it is impossible to know which of Shvarts's poems circulated and which remained in her private notebooks. It is certain, though, that her experiments led to key statements of poetic values and style, including "Imitation of Boileau" ("Podrazhanie Bualo" 1971), discussed at the end of this chapter.

For Shvarts's generation, children in the postwar years, the end of the Khrushchev era (1953-1964) roughly coincided with the end of their primary education. As young authors matriculated to university, many joined seminars similar to the formal *kruzhki* (circles) and

¹ Shvarts, "Gorlo sam sebe protknul....".

² See volume 4 of *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts* for prose texts in multiple genres, many written 1967-1971. Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi."* "Green notebook" is the editors' (factual) designation, not Shvarts's.

literary organizations (LITOs) described in Chapter One, through which they developed relationships with mentor-patrons such as Dmitry Maksimov, Tatiana Gnedich, and Elga Linetskaia. Sporadic opportunities to publish their work in journals and almanacs suggested that they were making progress, in fits and starts, toward literary “adulthood” and official recognition. Cafés provided space for less structured literary exchanges and enhanced a flourishing oral culture. These formal and informal venues facilitated exploration and revival of suppressed prerevolutionary and early Soviet avant-garde culture, making the aesthetic divide created by the Stalin era visible. “I was raised,” Shvarts said in 1990, “on the notion of a kind of cultural abyss, a gulf between the start of the twentieth century and us.”³ Writing in the 1970s, Andrei Sinyavsky used the same metaphor as Shvarts – *propast'* (abyss) – to describe the Stalin era, the “thirty-year night” of Russian letters, in his polemical article “The Literary Process in Russia.”⁴

Many writers on the margins of official literary structures in Leningrad and Moscow crossed this gulf to claim their cultural heritage.⁵ Viktor Krivulin described the reestablishment of continuity with modernism as “the task of our generation.”⁶ Moscow poet Mikhail Aizenberg similarly observed: “It was up to us to reinvent poetry from scratch. In search of some kind of foundation we looked reluctantly back to...the 1920s when poetry was in its ‘Silver Age.’”⁷ The first-person plurals – “our,” “us,” “we” – of Krivulin and Aizenberg’s statements emphasize their shared experience, however unsystematic and idiosyncratic the individual paths of writers of the

³ Shvarts, “Kholodnost' i rational'nost',” 201.

⁴ Siniavskii, “Literaturnyi protsess,” 157.

⁵ Brodsky, “Nobel Lecture.”

⁶ Krivulin, “Peterburgskaia spiritual'naia lirika,” 100.

⁷ Johnson and Ashby, *Third Wave*, 203.

time. The recuperation of artistic avant-gardes saw expression in the creative work of young poets and artists, but was also a goal unto itself that fueled what some *andegraund* leaders later described as a “cultural movement” that encompassed neglected traditions of previous generations as well as the products of the “second culture,” which did not yet recognize itself as such.

Biographical Highlights

Compared to the rich documentation of her daily experience in childhood and early youth, sources of biographical information about Shvarts in this period are sparse. Her last published diary entries date to January 1964, and her mother Dina Shvarts’s published diary contains but three entries between 1964 and 1976.

Shvarts was a university student 1964-1971, initially in the philology division of Leningrad State University (LGU), where she applied for entrance to the Italian department (5:170).⁸ Many of her former and future literary acquaintances were also LGU students around this time: Krivulin, Tamara Bukovskaia, Elena Ignatova, Tatiana Nikolskaia, Evgeny Pazukhin, Sergei Stratanovsky, and Viktor Toporov. Shvarts fit poorly into the culture of the institution, later suggesting that she could not tolerate the requisite Marxist-Leninist elements of the curriculum, nor refrain from airing her anti-Soviet political views (3:198-200). There were more mundane reasons, too: her acquaintances mention required physical education classes as a source of her disaffection.⁹ Her chronic lateness to class also seems to have played a role.

⁸ It is not clear if she was accepted into the Italian department or another one.

⁹ V. L. Toporov, “Lestnitsa Iakova;” Ignatova, *Obernivshis'*, 123.

In 1966, Shvarts transferred to the Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music, and Cinematography (LGITMiK), where the atmosphere was more familiar, even familial: “like home” (*po-domashnemu*), as Shvarts recalled (3:199).¹⁰ Dina Shvarts was an alumna of LGITMiK, and many of her colleagues at the Bolshoi Drama Theater (BDT), other professional acquaintances, and family friends had ties to the Theater Institute (*Teatral'nyi institut*), as it was commonly referred to.¹¹ Shvarts had even participated in a poetry recitation at there a few years earlier (5:375).

The Theater Institute was comfortable not only because it was closely connected to the artistic circles Shvarts had known from childhood. As alumna and theater scholar Nadezhda Tarshis recalled, it was a more tolerant, less ideologically straightjacketed institution than LGU.¹² Yury Kublanovsky later asserted that Shvarts was more “in her element” in the theatrical world than in the realm of philology, but the topic and the seriousness of her undergraduate thesis on Carlo Gozzi’s *Tales for the Theatre* and the Commedia dell’Arte, discussed briefly below, suggest that she was able to combine the two in this accommodating atmosphere.¹³

The change seems to have encouraged Shvarts’s notion that she might follow in her mother’s professional footsteps as a dramaturg. Whether for this reason, from longstanding habit, or because the prestige and daring of the BDT continued, she regularly saw the theater’s

¹⁰ Shvarts wrote that she and Nikolai Tovstonogov, her childhood friend from the BDT, transferred to the extension school (*zaochnyi*); technically, both graduated from the night school (*vechernii*), according to a 2009 volume listing LGITMiK past graduates (Kuzovleva, *Stranitsy istorii*, 236).

¹¹ Georgy Tovstonogov directed plays by its students, for example (Starosel'skaia, *Tovstonogov*, 402-404).

¹² Nadezhda Tarshis, interview with the author, May 2018. Tarshis graduated from the Theater Institute in 1971, the same year as Shvarts and Nikolai Tovstonogov. Aleksei Khvostenko, Konstantin Kuzminsky, and Igor Burikhin were also students at the Theater Institute (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 122, 238, 353).

¹³ Kublanovskii, “Pamiati peterburgskoi poetessy Eleny Shvarts.”

productions. In the second half of the 1960s, Tovstonogov directed Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Gorky's *The Philistines* (*Meshchane*), Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Vera Panova's *It's Been Ages!* (*Skol'ko let, skol'ko zim!*), and a revival of *The Idiot* with Innokenty Smoktunovsky once again in the lead.¹⁴ Tovstonogov was famous for being able to walk the line between political daring and compromise, but one of his productions, Leonid Zorin's *Roman Comedy* (*Rimskaia komediia*), was shut down by the review board after a single performance in 1965.¹⁵ This did not prevent the BDT from going on tour in 1966, when they took *The Idiot* to London and Paris.¹⁶ Unlike the "local" tours to Kiev and Tbilisi described in Chapter One, neither Shvarts nor her mother accompanied the theater to Western Europe, though Dina Shvarts traveled to Prague and other cities of the Eastern Bloc with the BDT.

Shvarts had freedom of movement within the USSR, but there is no evidence of trips in early adulthood that had the impact of the ones taken in her youth. Her later autobiographical writings mention trips to Kiev, Crimea, and Tallinn, and frequent visits to Komarovo, the literary dacha community north of Leningrad. Her recollections also describe scrapes with the police and with death in a period Shvarts characterized as "unruly" (*buinyi*) (3:192, 201, 214, 218).¹⁷ Violent episodes characterized her relationship with Evgeny Venzel, whom she married "for unknown reasons" (*neizvestno pochemu*) (3:209). A fellow poet, Venzel was much more visible

¹⁴ For Dina Shvarts's impressions of Smoktunovsky's performance, see *Dnevnik i zametki*, 186-187. (English translation available in Senelick and Ostrovsky, *The Soviet Theater*, 565-566.) For a list of BDT productions, see <https://bdt.spb.ru/o-teatre/spektakli-bdt-1956-2013-rr/>.

¹⁵ Starosel'skaia, *Tovstonogov*, 399-406. See also Dina Shvarts, *Dnevnik i zametki*, 191; Senelick and Ostrovsky, *The Soviet Theater*, 565, 567.

¹⁶ Veller, *Druz'ia i zvezdy*, 113; Iurskii, "To, chto zapomnilos'."

¹⁷ Shvarts describes several such incidents in her memoirs, indicating more than once that they happened when she was nineteen. Given her general imprecision with dates, we take such references as approximate.

in the local literary scene and a regular fixture at the cafés that his wife avoided. The two did not live together, and the marriage seems to have been a kind of lark, one of the many misadventures that contributed to Shvarts's scandalous, bohemian reputation.

The Blok Seminar and Blok Conferences

Like Krivulin and Aizenberg, Joseph Brodsky credited his peers with the revival of Russian poetic culture.¹⁸ He described the process as an intuitive one, but young writers in Leningrad were also guided by scholars and witnesses of prerevolutionary literary culture, as we saw in Chapter One. University study brought opportunities to expand this network. Dmitry Maksimov offered a seminar on poet Aleksandr Blok at LGU that was particularly valued by Shvarts's contemporaries. She did not participate, but Krivulin, Stratanovsky, Nikolskaia, and others acknowledged the role the seminar played in their development.¹⁹ Stratanovsky singled out Maksimov as an important teacher and the seminar as a “wonderful” and “unique” phenomenon that connected participants to Blok, to modernism, and to each other, establishing a common intellectual genealogy for those who passed through it.²⁰ Another described it as “an oasis of true culture, of intellectual refinement, of knowledge,” suggesting a legitimacy that was

¹⁸ Brodskii, “Nobel Lecture.”

¹⁹ Iezuitova and Prikhod'ko, *Dmitrii Evgen'evich Maksimov*, 156-157, 171-175; Stratanovskii, “Polnost'iu zacherkivat' sovetskuiu poeziiu nepravil'no.” See also Sabbatini, “Dmitrii Maksimov – samosoznanie i put' filologa-poeta v kontekste sovetskoi ideologii.”

²⁰ Stratanovskii, “Polnost'iu zacherkivat' sovetskuiu poeziiu nepravil'no.”

lacking in mainstream Soviet culture.²¹ Krivulin similarly emphasized that Maksimov was “not a Soviet intellectual,” but “a slightly different breed.”²²

Much as the Palace of Pioneers and LITO mentors, Maksimov took an active interest in young talent and cultivated personal relationships with seminar participants. Krivulin recalled visiting Maksimov at his apartment at Turgenev Square, where the seminar had also met a decade earlier, when the university administration was even less amenable to the study of Blok than it was in the 1960s.²³ The seminar was thus part of the local culture of literary domesticity, and reflected its blurred public-private boundaries. Maksimov was not only a preceptor, but also became a participant in unofficial literary circles. His poetry appeared in Leningrad samizdat journals of the 1970s and 1980s under the pseudonym Ivan Ignatov.²⁴

The Blok Seminar also connected participants to the University of Tartu in Estonia (then the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic). Blok scholar Zara Mints, who had participated in the first iteration of Maksimov’s seminar, was invited as a guest lecturer.²⁵ Mints had left Leningrad for Tartu, where she and Yuri Lotman laid the foundations for the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics. Mints, Lotman, and Maksimov’s scholarly exchange found expression in voluminous correspondence and in the series of Blok Conferences launched in 1962 and organized at the

²¹ Lavrov, “Neskol’ko slov o Zare Grigor’evne Mints,” 19.

²² Krivulin, “Vystuplenie na vechere, posviashchennom 90-letiiu D. E. Maksimova,” 156.

²³ “Our Blok Seminar, a very suspicious name for those times, was little appreciated by the leadership of the department, and therefore we never had a particular room for the classes: throughout almost all the fifth year we struggled to find a place. Apparently for this reason, from the beginning of the fourth year the seminar finally moved to Dmitry Evgyenevich [Maksimov]’s home” (Kamenskaia and Mints, “Pervyi blokovskii,” 13).

²⁴ V. N. Toporov, “Stikhi Ivana Ignatova,” 22-43.

²⁵ See, for example, Maksimov’s letter to Mints of March 1961: “Zara, when you finally come [to Leningrad], can you please bring your talk on Tolstoy and Blok, to read it at the Blok seminar?” (Egorov, “Iz perepiski D. E. Maksimova s Iu. M. Lotmanom i Z. G. Mints”).

University of Tartu, in which members of the Blok Seminar participated. Stratanovsky, for instance, attended the Blok Conferences twice as a result of his involvement with the seminar. At later Blok Conferences, the seminar itself became the subject of papers that were given and later published in the *Blokovskii sbornik* series.²⁶ This progression – seminar, conference, the publication of talks – was not unique to the Blok Seminar, but it provided a valuable model for participants. Unofficial culture established and documented itself through similar means in the late 1970s, when the Gumilëv Readings, Oredezh Readings, and Conferences of the Unofficial Cultural Movement were held.

Though she did not attend either the Blok Seminar or the Blok Conferences, Shvarts was also invited to the University of Tartu to participate in a poetry reading. At age nineteen, she went on her first “literary tour,” as she later called them, with Aleksandr Kushner, Elena Kumpan, Yakov Gordin, and Samuil Lurie.²⁷ Shvarts’s mentor Gleb Semënov, living in nearby Elva, Estonia, appears to have organized the December 1967 reading and invited Shvarts. Semënov’s correspondence with Tamara Khmel'nitskaia, who requested a report, gives us a glimpse of the event. His response betrays ambivalent fascination at Shvarts’s self-presentation: “she simply chokes on her roiling little soul, and her poems are the stuff of spasms.”²⁸ Perhaps Shvarts recited “The Holy Fool” (“Iurodivyi,” 1962), discussed above, in which the lyric speaker imagines herself the puppet of otherworldly forces, disdaining social decorum and earthly relations for the sake of a higher wisdom. Semënov’s comment clearly applies to more than a

²⁶ Volume 9 of the *Blokovskii sbornik* was dedicated to Maksimov’s memory.

²⁷ The second Blok Conference also took place in 1967, but the poetry reading was apparently a separate occasion. Shvarts mentions the trip in “Pervye literaturnye gastroli” (4:224).

²⁸ Semenova, *Govorit' drug s drugom, kak s soboi*, 381.

single work and, furthermore, he seemingly approved of the poet's dramatic delivery and emotional excess. Her recitation was, he wrote to Khmel'nitskaia, "more after his own heart [*bol'she mne po dushe*]" than that of others.²⁹

Theatrical Undertakings

Meanwhile, Shvarts had completed her own study of Blok. She would have read his canonical writings as part of the primary school program, and as a poet had "passed through" a Blok phase, or so she later suggested, before turning to Tsvetaeva (5:69, 265, 335). Doubtless she revisited and expanded her acquaintance with Blok's writings during her studies at the Theater Institute. Her knowledge of Blok's *Balaganchik* (*The Little Showbooth*, 1906) and other modernist adaptations of street-fair theater informed the only traditional drama that Shvarts wrote: the 1968 tragicomedy *The History of the Russian Emperor Ivan Antonovich, about which comes first, the rebellion or the rebel, and also about two young people usual in appearance, Vasily Mirovich and his friend Apollon Ushakov, and how badly it all went for them* (4:106-164). As Thomas Epstein has written, the play demonstrates the young Shvarts's "mastery of dramatic form and her (post)modern penchant for quotation, paradox, and collisions of meaning."³⁰ As the long, stylized title suggests, *The History of the Russian Emperor Ivan Antonovich* drew not only on eighteenth-century history, but also its dramatic conventions.

She made but quick mention of Blok in her undergraduate thesis, completed in 1971, which was tightly focused on Carlo Gozzi's *Tales for the Theater* and the *Commedia dell'Arte*.³¹

²⁹ Semenova, *Govorit' drug s drugom, kak s soboi*, 381.

³⁰ Epstein, "Masked and Unmasked: Elena Shvarts's Historical Drama about Vasily Mirovich and Emperor Ioann Antonovich (Ivan VI)," (forthcoming).

³¹ I am grateful to Kirill Kozyrev for sharing the text of Shvarts's thesis with me.

Shvarts's study of eighteenth-century Italian theater gave her direct knowledge of the sources, traditions, and disputes about the *masques* that so enchanted Russian modernists in the early twentieth century. Her choice of topic may have been informed by a recent film adaptation of Gozzi's *The Stag-King* (*Korol'-olen'*, 1969), a fantastic visual feast starring her BDT acquaintance Sergei Yursky. The esthetic preferences Shvarts indirectly revealed through her fifty-page study are noteworthy. Gozzi's infamous dispute with his contemporary Carlo Goldoni about the future of the Italian theater led him to write plays that preserved the traditional improvisational and symbolic patterns of the Commedia dell'Arte characters, while Goldoni more aggressively scripted and modernized roles to reflect the social changes inaugurated by the Enlightenment.³² In her study, Shvarts sides with the "archaist" Gozzi, who innovated in a different way, bringing the Commedia dell'Arte masques into fairy tale settings and plots in his ten *Fiabi* (Tales), which include such well-known works as *The Love of Three Oranges*, *Turandot*, *The Stag-King*, and *The Green Bird*. The plays' exotic locations, fanciful costumes, and fantastic transformations required elaborate staging; masked actors moved with exaggerated plasticity to convey emotion and to perform *lazzi* (gags, "laughs"). Gozzi's begrudging innovations led to a "new style of fairy-tale mixing comedy, tragedy, satire, and philosophy," as Mike Griffin describes the syncretic result.³³

Shvarts's study of Gozzi is connected to her broader interest in Symbolist drama and experimental modernist theater in the early twentieth century, when Saint Petersburg saw a revival of Commedia dell'Arte motifs generally, and a heightened interest in Gozzi in particular. Reception of Gozzi's *Tales* was central to the work of Blok, Mikhail Kuzmin, and Vsevolod

³² For a recent overview of their rivalry, see Griffin, "Goldoni and Gozzi: Reformers with separate agendas."

³³ Griffin, "Goldoni and Gozzi," 336.

Meyerhold, among others. Meyerhold's theatrical journal *Love for Three Oranges* took its name from Gozzi's well-known play. Kuzmin's play *The Venetian Madcaps* (1914), which explicitly takes place in "the Venice of Goldoni, Gozzi, and Longhi," was part of the "plethora of Commedia dell'Arte productions" that followed Meyerhold's staging of Blok's *Balaganchik*.³⁴ Some of these productions were part of the history of the Bolshoi Drama Theater itself.

Shvarts immersed herself in the plays and theoretical writings of these and other figures whose work and esthetic programs had been denigrated and suppressed in the Stalinist era.³⁵ The impact of her studies is visible in Shvarts's poetry of the late 1960s and the 1970s, characterized by fantastic transformations, hybrid creatures, hybrid genres, and the "conceit of the diabolical puppetmaster," touched on below in connection with Shvarts's gnostic worldview and the poem "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull."³⁶ More broadly, Shvarts's study of Gozzi seemingly fueled her interest in eighteenth-century literary genres and conventions.

Though she was immersed in theatrical life, Shvarts did not entirely spurn her literary acquaintances. She regularly received guests at the apartment that she, Dina Shvarts, and Berta Rubina moved to in the early 1960s. Allotted a single-family unit in a new "*khrushcheba*" (a punning and derisive term for Khrushchev-era apartment buildings), they left the Egyptian House *kommunalka*.³⁷ Both Krivulin and Ignatova were frequent visitors at Shvarts's apartment in the Novaia Derevnia neighborhood. Ignatova emphasized the theatrical environment Shvarts created at home: "...the gatherings of our circle frequently recalled plays, the author and director

³⁴ Clayton, "Commedia dell'Arte in Russia," 365.

³⁵ Dobrenko and Tihanov, *History of Russian Literary Theory*, 175-77.

³⁶ Clayton, *Pierrot in Petrograd*, 11.

³⁷ Comments in the diary suggest they moved in 1962 (5:289). Berta Rubina was Shvarts's great-aunt, Dina Shvarts's maternal aunt (see Chapter One).

of which was Lena [Shvarts].”³⁸ There were real domestic theatricals as well. Venzel directed rehearsals of Shvarts’s 1968 play about the emperor Ivan Antonovich at the apartment, with Shvarts playing empress Catherine II and Evgeny Pazukhin as Ivan Antonovich, who was proclaimed emperor of Russia in 1740, when he was two months old, soon overthrown, and kept in prison until the age of twenty-three, when he was killed by a guard during an alleged attempt to free him. The plot to liberate him, Krivulin nostalgically recalled, was “doomed, absurd, which is what attract[ed] us to it.”³⁹

Shvarts’s ostensible interest in the “dark arts” also provided opportunities for dramatic domestic happenings. “Once she showed us a pot with some plant in it,” Ignatova recalled, “and announced that it was an enchanted mandrake, and if you fed it the blood of an innocent, it would turn into a miniature man and woman [*v muzhchinku i zhenshchinku*]. Not much blood was needed, not more than half a cup, but hers was no good, because she was sinful – and looked expectantly at us.”⁴⁰ Occasionally Shvarts’s domestic theatrics found literary expression, such as “Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin,” discussed below, which was inspired by attempts at table-turning with her acquaintances.

The Café Era of Russian Literature

Тут вам, конечно, встретится Кривулин,
И ждущий, кто заплатит, Топоров,
И старый Дар на колченогом стуле,
И Ширали в компании двух коров,
Порой — стукач Куклин на карауле
(Свисток в кармане, говорят, готов),
Порой заходит Свяцкий с гостем польским,
И Гнедич Т. со мной и с Антокольским...

³⁸ Ignatova, *Obernivshis'*, 123.

³⁹ Krivulin, “Buddistskie ptitsy i zhertvenye zivotnye.”

⁴⁰ Ignatova, *Obernivshis'*, 123.

There, of course, you'll meet Krivulin,
 And Toporov, expecting someone to pay,
 And old Dar on a rickety stool,
 And Shirali in th' company of two heifers,
 Now and again – the informer Kuklin is on duty
 (Whistle in his pocket, they say, at the ready),
 Now and again Sviatsky stops by with a Polish guest,
 And T. Gnedich with me and Antokolsky...

– Vasily Betaki

In the mid-1960s several informal cafés equipped with espresso machines appeared in downtown Leningrad, thereby initiating the “café period of Russian literature,” as Konstantin Kuzminsky dubbed it.⁴¹ Local literary youth made itself at home in the new spaces, turning them into hubs for networking and textual exchange. Shvarts kept her distance, even mocked the regulars, but many of her older, predominantly male contemporaries had the opposite attitudes, and retrospectively considered the cafés essential to their formation as artists and free thinkers.

Histories and memoirs of unofficial culture in Leningrad are filled with descriptions of “Malaia Sadovaia,” “Saigon,” “White Nights,” and other spots that supplanted the LITOs in importance as laboratories of poetic self-invention. For Krivulin, the new type of space was at least as important as the caffeine that came with the “great coffee revolution.”⁴² Centrally located, less crowded and restrictive than domestic venues, and less formal than LITOs, seminars, universities, or workplaces, the café s sheltered Leningrad’s post-war youth, which was “oriented toward life outside of ‘Home,’ near ‘Home,’ but not in any case at home.”⁴³ The

⁴¹ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4A:150.

⁴² Krivulin, “Nevskii do i posle velikoi kofeinoi revoliutsii.”

⁴³ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 50 (capitalized as such). Lev Lurie likewise connects the appeal of the cafés to the lack of space in Leningrad (Rogov, *Rossia/Russia: semidesiatye kak predmet istorii russkoi kul'tury*, 19).

“radical change”⁴⁴ permitted informal socializing, allowing young authors such as Andrei Gaivoronsky to “escape the narrow confines of the communal apartments, acquire listeners, interlocutors, and discriminating judges; enter a literary circle, feel a part of free culture.”⁴⁵

Official policies were behind the appearance of these informal eateries, as Catriona Kelly has pointed out, which literally and metaphorically fed the growing alternative literary scene.⁴⁶ Kuzminsky traced their start to the Poets’ Café on Poltavskaiia Street, where Krivulin and Shvarts went in 1963 (5:334).⁴⁷ A different café on Malaia Sadovaia Street seemingly had no designation other than its location. The loosely affiliated poets who congregated there starting in 1964 referred to the café as “Malaia Sadovaia,” and to each other as “*Malasadovtsy*” – the ones from Malaia Sadovaia. According to Vladimir Erl, the literary community that had formed around the café numbered in the hundreds by the mid-1970s.⁴⁸ Some of the most prominent names in Leningrad unofficial culture were among its regulars: Aronzon, Brodsky, Krivulin, Kuzminsky, Shemiakin, and many others. Shvarts remained distant from Malaia Sadovaia even after her marriage to Venzel, one of its most visible figures. Her absence postponed her acquaintance with, among others, Aleksandr Mironov, who became an important poetic interlocutor for her in the 1970s.

The most legendary of the literary cafés was unquestionably Saigon, “a purely Leningrad phenomenon” according to singer Boris Grebenshchikov, and the “Mecca of the *semidesiatniki*

⁴⁴ Krivulin, “Nevskii do i posle velikoi kofeinoi revoliutsii.”

⁴⁵ Gaivoronskii, *Sladkaia muzyka vechnykh stikhov*, 8.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Saint Petersburg: Shadows of the Past*, 254-60. See also entries on individual locations in *Samizdat Leningrada* and Lur’e, *Leningrad Dovlatova*.

⁴⁷ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4A:150. See also *Sumerki* “Saigona,” 167-168.

⁴⁸ Gaivoronskii, *Sladkaia muzyka vechnykh stikhov*, 6.

[seventies people]” that opened in autumn 1964.⁴⁹ Lev Khalif saw Saigon as an extension of the Palace of Pioneers circles and the *Derzanie* club, where “all of Nevsky spent time,” including Krivulin, Viktor Shirali, Nikolai Beliak, Boris Kuprianov, and the “street Mercutio” Venzel, “acting like a holy fool [*iurodstvuiushchii*].”⁵⁰ Khalif’s characterization of Venzel is telling. The cafés and the paths between them provided stages for creative enactment of the cultural paradigm that gave spiritual weight to the intoxication and buffoonery that the *Malasadovtsy* and *Saigontsy* engaged in.⁵¹ Nikolai Gol’s reminiscence of the “Saigon era” emphasizes the itinerant quality of the subculture that formed around the café: “In those years I first heard about the peripatetics from the Saigon philosopher E. V[enzel]. We were indeed peripatetics. [...] Moving, we conversed. We were people who wrote, but in Saigon we existed in a primarily oral culture.”⁵² Saigon even had a “spoken newspaper” (*ustnaia gazeta*) with epigrams and anecdotes about the community, a striking extension of the oral culture examined in Chapter One.⁵³ Yulia Valieva sees this as a distinctive feature of Saigon, where the spoken word flourished, in contrast to “textological and bibliographical” orientation of Malaia Sadovaia.⁵⁴

Malaia Sadovaia’s physical proximity to the main branch of the State Public Library contributed to the profile that Valieva points to. Nikolai Nikolaev recalled that Mironov first

⁴⁹ Grebenshchikov, “Saigon.”

⁵⁰ Khalif, *TsDL*, 103-104.

⁵¹ See Sabbatini, “The Pathos of Holy Foolishness” for in-depth discussion of this dimension of the cafés and of unofficial literature in Leningrad more broadly.

⁵² Gol, “Kontsentricheskie krugi.”

⁵³ Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 120, 136, 171. Shirali, *Zhenshchiny i drugie puteshestviia*, 164.

⁵⁴ Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 5. This monumental volume contains reminiscences about Leningrad café culture by Kuzminsky, Krivulin, Erl, Mironov, Tamara Bukovskaia, Tatiana Goricheva (whose essay gave the volume its name), Viacheslav Dolinin, Viktor Shirali, Oleg Okhapkin, Arkady Dragomoshchenko, Lev Lurie, Evgeny Venzel, Evgeny Pazukhin, Elena Ignatova, and many others.

found his way to the café via the Library.⁵⁵ He and Erl became acquainted when Mironov requested the same book from the stacks as Erl, who led him to the café from there. The café's most visible members were particularly interested in avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s. Andrei Gaivoronsky recalled spending many hours with Erl at the Library researching the Russian Futurists.⁵⁶ Kuzminsky's acquaintance with Erl apparently began through an impromptu conversation at Malaia Sadovaia about Kuzminsky's search for a rare tome of Khlebnikov – an edition of twenty copies published in Baku in 1922.⁵⁷

The café goers' rediscovery and sharing of Velimir Khlebnikov, Daniil Kharms, and Aleksandr Vvedensky inspired literary experimentation. Their mutual appreciation for the provocative behavior of the OBERIU (*Ob"edinenie real'nogo iskusstva*, or Association for Real Art) clearly emboldened the citational “carnavalesque forms of self-representation” that characterized their most literate and outrageous stunts. Ilja Kukuj's study of Leningrad avant-gardes in the 1960s shows this to be one of several commonalities across groups and generations.⁵⁸ The “Khelenukty” (Erl, Mironov, Khvostenko, and others) established themselves in 1966, and performed a comic-absurd alterity that grew directly out of their recent acquaintance with the OBERIU. As Boris Ivanov observed, leaders of such informal groups were likely to be daring and creative types who were the “organizer[s] of games, adventures, outrageous actions, combatants against the dictatorship of rules.”⁵⁹ Shvarts's “Chimposium”

⁵⁵ Volchek, “‘Ubityi chernoï vesnoi.’”

⁵⁶ Gaivoronskii, *Sladkaia muzyka vechnykh stikhov*, 16.

⁵⁷ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4A:196.

⁵⁸ Kukuj, “Leningradskii avangard 60-x godov i ‘Leningradskii tekst’,” 316.

⁵⁹ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 540.

(*Shimpozium*) of the 1970s, in which Erl and Ivanov gave talks on Russian poetry and history masked as primate participants, was undoubtedly informed by these earlier experiments.

Mid-1960s Leningrad cafés thus fostered a lively and loquacious creative culture. Like the *kruzhki* and LITOs that ran concurrently, these public venues were conceived with the goal of advancing Soviet values for youth, but they inadvertently contributed to the growth of youth counter-culture by providing the public stages for the performance of nonconformity. Moving between these and other favored sites, the city's literary youth walked, talked, and enacted poetic license, as latter-day flâneurs.

Urban Poetics and Oral Culture

The French *poètes maudits* who celebrated deplorable modernity and propelled the European symbolist movement – Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine – were appealing models for Leningrad poets. For poet Boris Konstriktor, the “living embodiment” of the “accursed poets” in his youth was Evgeny Venzel.⁶⁰ Shvarts pointed to Rimbaud and Verlaine as her most important European poetic predecessors, whose verse she knew from youth through the translations of Benedikt Livshits (3:266). Masquerading as Estonian poet Arno Tsart, Shvarts would later write “I love, I love – Rimbaud, Rimbaud” (*Liubliu, liubliu – Rembo, Rembo*), a confession both sincere and ironized through the Tsart mask (2:36). Her poem “Incoherently We Mutter Vowels” (“Nevniatno glasnye bormochem...”, 1978) seems clearly indebted to Rimbaud's famous “Voyelles” (1:92). Her contemporaries also paid homage to the

⁶⁰ Konstriktor, “Venzel' i Akseľ'bant.”

French Symbolists. Evgeny Rein's narrative poem "Artiur Rembo" was a favorite at local poetry recitations, for example, and prose writer Rid Grachev wrote about Verlaine.⁶¹

The model of the disaffected, degenerate poet who sees the city and its outskirts through a surreal lens was well familiar to Shvarts and her contemporaries through the poetry of Blok, Bely, and other Russian Symbolists. Their decadent visions of prerevolutionary Saint Petersburg were indebted to the urban and pastoral *paysages* of Rimbaud and Verlaine, but infused with a swampy atmosphere and swarms of unclean spirits that had their origins in the Petersburg text and Russian folklore. Shvarts's "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism," discussed below, draws on these currents of Russian and French poetry.

Taboo language and subject matter that would hardly be acceptable in original works in Russian sometimes made their way into print via translation. Modernist translations were one source of a broader, more inclusive poetic language that counteracted the conservatism of Soviet letters. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine's translators included Livshits, Innokenty Annensky, Nikolai Gumilëv, and Boris Pasternak. Through such texts, the translation seminars discussed below acquainted participants with ecclesiastical, erotic, and other registers of Russian they would not encounter in Soviet literature, which permitted "neither God, nor asses," as Krivulin pithily put it.⁶²

Their study of European modernists in translation informed young poets' experiments with the language of the streets, the lower bodily stratum and the urban theater of prostitutes, drunks, and beggars.⁶³ Much as she had experimented with the profane voice of Salinger's

⁶¹ Rein, "Vsia zhizn' i eshche 'Uan buk,'" 167; Grachev, "Pol' Verlen," 560-567.

⁶² Krivulin, "Interv'iu s Viktorom Krivulinym."

⁶³ See, for example, Eduard Bagritsky's 1930 "Parizh zaseliaetsia vnov'," a translation of Rimbaud's "L'Orgie Parisienne ou Paris se repeuple."

Holden Caulfield, the anti-hero of *The Catcher in the Rye*, in her early youth, Shvarts tried out the tones of the French Symbolists and the Russian translators and poets who engaged their poetry and mythology. A striking example of her experiments in this vein is her poem “Memory of the Tauride Garden” (“Vospominan'e o tavricheskom sade,” 1972), an “elegy” that closes with an old man’s nostalgic exclamation, “Oh you, piss of happy days, / You fumed more, you were greener!” The lines are reminiscent of Rimbaud’s infamous “Oraison du Soir” (“Evening Prayer”), the monologue of a bourgeois type who releases a tall stream of urine into the sunset with the assent of the nearby heliotrope.⁶⁴

Another powerful force against the prudishness of official Soviet poetry was oral culture. Chapter One described poems of Shvarts’s immediate circles – peers from the Palace of Pioneers who indulged in the occasional “slap in the face of public taste,” a Futurist tradition they embraced, with poems that challenged mores. The poems and songs of Shvarts’s older contemporaries also incorporated taboo linguistic and social realia in “unprintable” works that spread by word of mouth. Gleb Gorbovsky, as mentioned above, drew liberally on the “lower depths” in his early poems, with a lyric speaker who now pines in prison, now roams the streets, loiters at beer stands, and quarrels with fellow *kommunalka* residents.

Shvarts was not immune to these antisocial tendencies, as we see. She knew Gorbovsky from Semënov’s LITO, and recorded in her diary his approval of her own bold poetics (5:369-370, Oct.-Nov. 1963). In her posthumously published “Eighty-Proof Songs” (“Sorokagradusnye pesni,” 1972, 1976), she depicted the poet’s and other bodies and spirits buoyed up and degraded

⁶⁴ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,”* 43-44. Livshits’s rendering (“Vecherniaia molitva”) was one of several poems by Rimbaud in his 1934 book of translations from the French, *Ot romantikov do surrealistov*.

by alcohol, experimenting with language and imagery rarely used in Russian poetry, especially by women.⁶⁵ This work left its trace in “Hunchbacked Moment,” discussed at the end of Chapter Three, and other *poemas* that reflect the zeitgeist of mature socialism. Boris Kudriakov, Boris Smelov, and other unofficial photographers similarly captured inebriated public scenes and dilapidated courtyards in Leningrad in the 1970s. In Moscow, this impulse informed the paintings of Oskar Rabin and the poetry of Igor Kholin, Genrikh Sapgir, and Vsevolod Nekrasov, who advanced the “baroque” (*barachnyi*) aesthetics of Evgeny Kropivnitsky and the Lianozovo school.⁶⁶

Shvarts designates her high-proof poems “songs,” a nod towards the oral culture that helped normalize taboo themes and lexicon in informal contexts. As mentioned in Chapter One, many of Gorbovsky’s early lyrics were never printed or even retained by the author, but spread by word of mouth, in handwritten copies, and through song.⁶⁷ Poetry and musical culture were intertwined in the domestic literary practices of the Volokhonsky-Khvostenko circle and “Verpa,” the informal artistic group they led in Leningrad 1962-1967. Their activities included poetic competitions, collective compositions, amateur films, and “*malen'kie khepeningi*” (little happenings), Khvostenko recalled.⁶⁸ He described how a body of songs grew out of these domestic artistic activities:

They appeared spontaneously, on the spot, not with the explicit goal of writing songs or in a specific genre. They were mostly composed during some sort of merrymaking, even drunken, and were for the most part little songs for a particular occurrence. Nonetheless, they were memorable and friends who heard

⁶⁵ Part of this cycle was published in samizdat and *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*, two poems stayed in the “green notebook.” See *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*, 1:55; *Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,”* 45-46.

⁶⁶ On the “baroque” school, see Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata;” Limonov, “Gruppa ‘Konkret’,” 44-45.

⁶⁷ See Gorbovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:418.

⁶⁸ Khvostenko, 1982 BBC radio appearance. Audio recording at https://vtoraya-literatura.com/publ_1117.html.

them asked us to repeat them.⁶⁹

The late 1950s had seen the rise of guitar poetry and its distribution via *magnitizdat*, the audio equivalent of samizdat. The increased availability of consumer tape recording technologies enabled the informal recording and reproduction of oral culture in various forms.⁷⁰ In the songs of Bulat Okudzhava, Vladimir Vysotsky, Aleksandr Galich, and other bards, as they came to be known, the text was perceived to be primary, rather than the music. Many songs that circulated clandestinely expressed political resistance; others drew on the argot of the criminal world. In some instances, original lyrics were put to existing melodies, such as Volokhonsky and Khvostenko's popular song "Rai" (Paradise) was.

Performing Nonconformity in 1968

Recalling the regulars at Malaia Sadovaia, Tamara Bukovskaia described the "strange, phantasmagorical figures who wandered the city's shortest street."⁷¹ Though their flamboyant behavior challenged Soviet norms, participants in the urban café circles were not engaged in politics per se. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, however, had the potential to politicize nonconformist youth, including the twenty-year-old Shvarts. The trial of Joseph Brodsky four years earlier had surprised and concerned her, as we saw in Chapter One, but the Soviet military suppression of the Prague Spring, which had fostered hopes of liberalization in the Soviet Bloc, outraged the poet. Speaking in Prague years later, she recalled the "terrible

⁶⁹ Khvostenko, 1982 BBC radio appearance. A selection of songs by Khvostenko and Volokhonsky was published in *Ekho* 8 (1979).

⁷⁰ With millions of reel-to-reel audiotape recorders produced and purchased in the 1960s and 1970s, the scale of *magnitizdat* is impossible to quantify, as Brian Horne points out (Horne, "The Bards of *Magnitizdat*," 178).

⁷¹ Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii*, 223.

shock”⁷² of the invasion that put an end to Czechoslovak “socialism with a human face.” It was a watershed moment for the *semidesiatniki*.⁷³ Shvarts happened to be on a riverboat and spent the day surreptitiously listening to the BBC on a fellow passenger’s radio. There she learned of the protest that followed on Red Square in Moscow, in which Natalia Gorbanevskaja, the poet and founder of the *Chronicle of Current Events* human rights bulletin, was a participant.⁷⁴ Shvarts recalled that she would have liked to protest as Gorbanevskaja did, but could only phone her friend to express admiration for Gorbanevskaja’s brave act and regret that she was not in Moscow at the time.

According to Elena Ignatova’s memoir of the era, Shvarts did consider a similarly public protest. Ignatova describes being summoned to a gathering at Shvarts’s apartment, where plans were discussed to carry signs decrying the Soviet invasion to Leningrad’s symbolically charged Palace Square. Ignatova described her thoughts when Krivulin asked if she would go with them: “This was unexpected, to put it mildly, but I understood that to refuse meant to betray my friends, and therefore I agreed. Viktor [Krivulin] laid out the plan [...]. While they discussed the texts for the signs, I thought with sorrow [*s toskoi*] about what would happen to my mom, to Volodia [...].” The bold idea, however, came to naught; first Shvarts, then Krivulin, announced they would not be able to go, citing the same concern for family that Ignatova kept to herself. “Lena [Shvarts],” Ignatova continues, “said that she was prepared to go to the protest, but her

⁷² Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiu, vspominat’ o lune.”

⁷³ Lev Lurie argues that the invasion gave specificity to their generation, marking the division between the *semidesiatniki* and *shestidesiatniki* (Rogov, *Rossia/Russia: semidesiatye kak predmet istorii russkoi kul'tury*, 17).

⁷⁴ Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiu, vspominat’ o lune.” Soviet troops and tanks arrived in Prague days earlier, as Shvarts surely knew already. For media and eyewitness accounts of the Red Square protest, see Gorbanevskaja, *Polden': delo o demonstratsii 25 avgusta 1968 goda*, translated into English as *Red Square at Noon*.

mother would be dismissed from the theater, which she would not survive.” Krivulin similarly cited his father’s Party membership. Ignatova and Pazukhin were apparently supposed to carry out the protest without them. It was only the next morning that they both dropped the idea, leaving Ignatova relieved but resentful of the part her comrades assumed she would play in an action that would likely have radically altered the fates of each poet-participant.⁷⁵

Had Shvarts happened to be in Moscow rather than on the *Nikolai Gogol* riverboat on August 25, 1968, she might have gone to Red Square with Gorbanevskaia; the bonds of friendship, as Ignatova’s narrative attests, obliged a certain solidarity.⁷⁶ The arrest that was likely to follow might set the person on a path to state surveillance, harassment, incarceration, even emigration, as it did in Gorbanevskaia’s case. Shvarts and most of the people in her circles did not consider themselves dissidents and mostly avoided public confrontation with the authorities. As Oleg Okhapkin, whose own arrest arguably ruined his life, observed: “We did not court danger.”⁷⁷ Shvarts, too, emphasized her lack of political engagement in a different interview, perhaps recalling this very episode:

I was never engaged in politics directly, unlike, say, Natasha Gorbanevskaia. This is not to my credit in any way, it’s simply not my nature. Although I did have feeble impulses to go and demonstrate, too, but it turned out – thank God, maybe – that nothing came of it, and I was occupied only with poetry.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ignatova, *Obernivshis'*, 132.

⁷⁶ Pëtr Vail and Aleksandr Genis see the emergence of public acts of protest as a logical extension of the criticism of the state that friendly intelligentsia circles engaged in privately. Citing dissidents Andrei Amalrik and Evgeny Kushev, they present friendship ties as a significant source of social pressure to engage in political protest, “as if Timur and his squad stood up against the regime” (*60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 180). The reference here is to Arkady Gaidar’s *Timur and His Squad* (1940), an extremely popular work of literature for youth that gave rise to a whole youth movement of “timurovtsy” (Timurovites).

⁷⁷ Okhapkin, “Interv'iu 1.”

⁷⁸ Shvarts, “Festival' russkoi podpol'noi kul'tury.”

Samizdat editor and literary historian Sergei Dediulin similarly emphasized he wanted to be free to pursue literary interests, not go out on the street to decry the Soviet government.⁷⁹ Tatiana Nikolskaia wrote of Aleksei Khvostenko, known as “*Khvost*” (tail) and his domestic circle, “Most of Khvost’s guests were creative people whose notions of life and conduct did not fit with traditional systems of social relations. As a rule, they were not active fighters [*aktivnye bortsy*], they just wanted to be left in peace and free to express themselves.”⁸⁰ Venzel claimed to be “apolitical and indifferent to all bureaucratic and official nonsense [*ko vsiakoi kazenshchine i oftsial'shchine*],” but also acknowledged that the ubiquity of Soviet ideology affected even “bohemian types” such as him.⁸¹

Their disinclination to engage the political arena was not unique to Leningrad *bogema*. Moscow Poet Sergei Gandlevsky described himself and his circle as “merely dissenters, not dissidents.”⁸² Lydia Ginzburg’s essay on the intelligentsia and its compromises with Stalinism, “At One with the Legal Order,” suggests the roots of these “opposing impulses” had their origins in nineteenth-century intelligentsia models of behavior, issuing “from the nexus of modernism, individualism and elitism in intellectual life,” on the one hand, and “from the nexus of populist traditions and commitment to social justice for all” on the other.⁸³ In the 1930s these impulses “criss-crossed with one another,” Ginzburg argues. Clearly, many members of subsequent generations also felt torn between these value systems as they came of age.

⁷⁹ Sabbatini, “K istorii sozdaniia *Severnoi pochty*,” 3.

⁸⁰ Nikol'skaia, “Krug Alekseia Khvostenko,” 275-276.

⁸¹ Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii*, 240.

⁸² Gandlevskii, “Dlia lirika ia kak-to podozritel'no kholoden.”

⁸³ Van Buskirk and Zorin, *Lydia Ginzburg's Alternative Literary Identities*, 389.

The failed protest, with what seems a cowardly conclusion, is of interest not merely as intelligentsia gossip. The situation described by Ignatova provides an opportunity to distinguish cultural from political nonconformists in the late Soviet era. Cold War paradigms promoted a binary division – as much in the United States and Europe as in the USSR itself – of Soviet society into conformists and dissidents, rather than a spectrum of political engagement that also included maximal disengagement from the state and its institutions. Moving forward, Shvarts and her small circle of could-be-protesters did not publicly confront injustices perpetrated by the state, but expressed their rejection of Soviet values through their creative works, nonconformist behavior, spiritual seeking, and seemingly esoteric preoccupations. Relatively few engaged in both literary activities and provocative political actions, Gorbanevskaja being one of the best-known exceptions. In Shvarts’s circles of the 1970s, Yulia Voznesenskaia similarly pursued a dual agenda, which led her into exile, prison, and “the West.”

Publication: Venues and Opportunities

...в “Костре” работал. В этом тусклом месте,
вдали от гонки и передовиц,
я встретил сто, а может быть, и двести
прозрачных юношей, невзрачнейших девиц.

...I worked at *The Campfire*. In this dim spot,
far from deadlines and the front page,
I met a hundred, maybe even two,
transparent young men, nondescript maidens.

– Lev Losev

The self-published human rights bulletin *Chronicle of Current Events* (*Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*) was established in the same watershed year of 1968 through Gorbanevskaja’s efforts, but it would be several years before regularly issued samizdat literary journals came into being; they

will be the subject of discussion in Chapter Three.⁸⁴ In the meantime, poetry continued to pass from hand to hand in handwritten copies (*spiski*) and to spread through oral (re)citations. Episodic print miscellanies grew out of seminar, university, and café circles. Absent from these spaces and their accompanying socio-literary networks, Shvarts was likewise not present in the publications that grew out of them. Her 1963 visit to the Poets' Café resulted in the inclusion of her poetry in Kuzminsky's 1964 *Anthology of Soviet Pathology*, but she was not a part of the Malaia Sadovaia volume *Fioretti* (1965), which included works by Aronzon, Erl, Mironov, and Venzel, among others.⁸⁵ Nor did her work appear in the ill-fated LGU student compilation *Zven'ia* (*Links*, 1966), which included poetry by a number of her acquaintances, such as Krivulin, Pazukhin, and Toporov.⁸⁶

The religious symbolism of her poems, meanwhile, meant that it was not suitable for publication in official journals. Such was the ostensible explanation for her non-inclusion in an annual *Poetry Day* (*Den' poezii*) almanac. As Shvarts recalled the incident, "When I was just eighteen, I was invited to publish [my] verse in the Leningrad *Poetry Day*. And they almost printed it. They asked me just to take out one word. That word was 'soul.' I refused. And that was it. That was enough."⁸⁷ Given that the word *dusha* (soul) appears dozens of times in late-1960s editions of *Poetry Day*, the refusal must have had another basis. Given the timing, anti-semitism could have played a role in the rejection; following the June 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt, writers with Jewish surnames faced renewed hostility and skepticism.

⁸⁴ While not literary, the samizdat bulletin of Leningrad's first jazz club, *Square* (*Kvadrat*), is a noteworthy exception. See *Samizdat Leningrada*, 86, 408-409.

⁸⁵ On *Fioretti*, see Gaivoronskii, *Sladkaia muzyka vechnykh stikhov*, 33-34; Erl', "Neskol'ko dopolnenii," 58-59.

⁸⁶ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 406.

⁸⁷ Shvarts, "Festival' russkoi podpol'noi kul'tury."

Shvarts suggested that her publication in *Poetry Day* was hindered by her refusal to “work with” the editor of the volume, to change objectionable elements of her poetry that were incompatible with official values. Such requests were not unusual, and every aspiring author had to establish the limits of her flexibility. In her retelling, Shvarts cast any changes as unacceptable conformism. Her Romantic conception of the poet and poetic inspiration are visible in this stance, which saw poetic expression in “Imitation of Boileau,” discussed below. Shvarts later wrote in the micro-essay “Ray” (“Luch,” n.d.) that she came to faith around this time when a ray of light pierced her left temple, as a result of which she acquired a “line to the invisible” (*nit' v nevidimoe*) (3:229-230). The poet, as she conceived of it, is a visionary and *zhrets* (priest, oracle) who connects to the otherworldly source of poetry when inspired. She came to see accessing that source as a sort of cosmic theft, a Promethean metaphor that figures in “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull” and other poems of the 1970s.

Her elder contemporary Aleksander Kushner was also frustrated by the rejection of Shvarts’s poetry. Emily Lygo quotes a discussion of the 1968 edition of *Poetry Day* at the secretariat of the Leninrad branch of the Writers’ Union. Comments made by Kushner, who was a member of the editorial board, suggest that it is the same incident that Shvarts later recalled. According to the meeting transcript, Kushner criticized the secretariat’s decision not to include Shvarts as “another example of our shortcomings as an editorial committee” that demonstrated their failure to recognize that “this is a new poet.”⁸⁸ Kushner’s comments point to the importance of getting published in one of the annual almanacs as a step forward in the process of

⁸⁸ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 103. Kushner mentions that the name of the poem was “Dusha” (Soul) and that it was written in memory of Vladislav Khodasevich. Shvarts’s posthumously published “Dush bestelesnykh mnogo na zemle...,” dated 1966, does not include this title or any dedication, but other details of Kushner’s description suggest it is the same poem (5:248).

official authentication. *Poetry Day* in particular was a stepping stone for aspiring poets in Leningrad, which had its own local annual edition put together by the Leningrad branch of the Writers' Union.⁸⁹ The 1967 issue featured original poetry by Brodsky, Bobyshev and Aleksandr Morev, suggesting they were in the good graces of the editorial boards and other legislators of Soviet literary life. Brodsky's poetry had appeared the previous year in another prominent almanac: *Young Leningrad (Molodoi Leningrad)*, an annual collection of verse and prose by young authors. The same 1966 issue featured verse by Morev and Vladimir Ufliand. Such publications would logically have fed hopes of younger writers such as Shvarts that they, too, might soon advance to the next stage of achieving full "literary citizenship."⁹⁰

While such almanacs were intended as a print space for young authors, the scrutiny to which texts were subjected suggests that the bar for initial publication of a "new poet" was higher than for an established one. In his book on censorship in post-war Leningrad, Arlen Blium has argued that the standards for publication in these almanacs, whose intended audience was the "mass reader," were stricter than for publications for niche audiences, even at the height of the Thaw.⁹¹ Rid Grachev, a young author who had managed to get published and even to join the editorial board of *Young Leningrad*, blamed other members' generational politics in a fiery statement that spelled the end of his career just as it was beginning:

A catastrophe has occurred with *Molodoi Leningrad*. At first it did not succeed in becoming that which it should have, and later it stopped being that which it could be. ... The leaders of literary circles and associations, as well as the compilers of the almanac, continued the traditions of the '50s into the '60s. No revolution occurred in their moral consciousness. ... None of the people, directing the almanac, freed himself from a pedantically pedagogical approach to its authors, one based on complete disrespect towards the person of the young writer, to his possibilities for development, no one overcame the temptation in himself "to

⁸⁹ Margo Rosen discusses *Poetry Day* publication standards during the Thaw in "The Independent Turn."

⁹⁰ Brian Baer uses this expression in *Translation and the Making of Modern Russian Literature*, 118.

⁹¹ Blium, *Kak eto delalos'*, 140.

watch over” the young writer, in spite of the obvious superiority of his abilities over the abilities of the “guardian.” ... As a result the whole literary phenomenon, represented by *Molodoi Leningrad*, became a kind of “game playing.” No one takes it seriously any longer.⁹²

Lygo’s work has shown how the Writers’ Union’s efforts to reinvigorate lyric poetry increased opportunities for young people to develop and share their work.⁹³ As a result, several poets of the preceding generation had “squeaked through” to join the Writers’ Union: Gorbovsky, born in 1931; Aleksandr Gorodnitsky, born in 1933; Kushner, Sosnora, and Nonna Slepakova, all born in 1936.⁹⁴ They had participated in LITOs and public readings; their poems had appeared in journals and almanacs; and their first book-length publications had begun to appear – the ultimate sign of acceptance and future access to readers. It was not yet clear to Shvarts and others born during and after the war that Writers’ Union support for young authors was diminishing and with them opportunities to publish. By 1972, when Oleg Okhupkin’s submission for *Poetry Day* was rejected – ostensibly for an abundance of soul, much as Shvarts’s had been – the window of opportunity for innovative young poets had firmly closed.⁹⁵ Lygo speculates that this process began as early as 1967, taking the rejection of Brodsky’s poetry collection *Winter Post (Zimniaia pochta)* as an early sign of the trend that stymied younger generations.⁹⁶

⁹² Ueland, “Unknown Figure in a Wintry Landscape,” 364. Translation by Ueland, who explains that Yakov Gordin read the speech on Grachev’s behalf at a March 1967 discussion of *Molodoi Leningrad*.

⁹³ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*; see also “The Need for New Voices” by the same author.

⁹⁴ See Appendix 3 in Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 331-333 for statistics about Leningrad Writers’ Union admissions 1953-75. Lev Lurie also points to the *shestidesiatniki* who “squeaked through” and those who did not, including Akhmatova’s “Orphans,” Vladimir Ufliand, Oleg Grigoriev, Sergei Dovlatov, and Vladimir Maramzin. (Lur’e, “Kak Nevskii prospekt pobedil ploshchad’ proletarskoi diktatury.”)

⁹⁵ Okhupkin, “Interv’iu 1,” Okhupkin’s poetry had appeared in *Molodoi Leningrad* in 1970.

⁹⁶ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 93. Lygo observes that the politics of the 1967 Six-Day War played a key role in the fate of Brodsky’s collection.

Watching their older contemporaries successfully advance through the official literary ranks, it may have seemed their turn was coming, but in fact young authors were “stranded,” as Lygo puts it, in the pre-print venues – readings and conferences, seminars and LITOs – that had been created to foster their success.⁹⁷ Eduard Shneiderman later characterized these and other Writers’ Union initiatives in the late 1960s and early 70s, such as “Saturdays with Writers,” “Poetry and Music,” and “Evenings by the Fireside,” as “seductive traps” (*soblaznitel'nye lovushki*) into which young poets were lured and caught.⁹⁸ The occasional print publications of their contemporaries were a last gasp of the Thaw, anomalies that obscured the shift that had taken place.

Shvarts had tried to place her poetry in *Youth (Iunost')* with no success when she was quite young, as mentioned in Chapter One. And in spite of Kushner’s objections, her work was not accepted for *Poetry Day*. She did manage to get published in *The Campfire (Kostër)*, a monthly magazine of the Pioneer organization: two five-line poems, each accompanied by a colorful illustration, appeared in the June 1970 issue, under the heading “Limericks (‘Irish folk verse’)” and attributed to E. Venzel. One of Brodsky’s first publications was in this classic Soviet publication for youth as well. His 1962 “Ballad of the Little Tugboat” (“Ballada o malen'kom buksire”) was an original work, while Shvarts’s was ostensibly a translation, and one which did not even bear her name. Nonetheless, the publication is listed first in a bibliography of Shvarts’s works compiled with her input in the early 2000s.⁹⁹

Shvarts’s limericks were published in a “magazine within the magazine,” a section for *The Campfire*’s youngest readers called “Ugolëk” (little ember). The poems themselves are of

⁹⁷ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 92.

⁹⁸ Shneiderman, “Puti legalizatsii neofitsial'noi poezii,” 196.

⁹⁹ Elena Shvarts, conversation with the author, January 8, 2007.

little interest, but one wonders how Venzel's name came to appear under the lines and why they were attributed to him. Perhaps the lines were co-authored or Venzel arranged the publication through his Malaia Sadovaia or Saigon connections.¹⁰⁰ *The Campfire* featured other unofficial poets frequently in the late 1960s and early 1970s: Brodsky, as mentioned above, also Vladimir Ufliand, Mikhail Erëmin, Oleg Grigoriev, and Oleg Okhapkin.¹⁰¹ Muscovites Igor Kholin and Genrikh Sapgir also published on its pages. *The Campfire* had a print run of around 400,000 copies (depending on the month and year), and it is intriguing that the work of non-members of the Writers' Union could reach so many impressionable readers.¹⁰² The explanation was simple: Lev Losev (then known as Lev Livshits) worked there from 1962 to 1975. Having himself proposed the "Ugolëk" section, he proceeded to fill it with works composed by friends and acquaintances, helping his literary coevals to earn commissions and honorariums.¹⁰³

Thus, Shvarts's limericks in *The Campfire* were not an anomaly, although she was not friendly with Livshits-Losev. While it ostensibly provided an opportunity to become known to readers and editors, composing poems, translations, and riddles for *The Campfire* garnered young authors little recognition. One might say that in writing for children, young authors' entrance into the adult literary world was further delayed. At the same time, children were a

¹⁰⁰ Elena Dunaevskaia suggests that Palace of Pioneers mentor Irina Maliarova helped to place her protégés' poetry in *Leninskie iskry* and *Kostër* (Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii*, 265).

¹⁰¹ A rich compilation of publications in *The Campfire* by these and other writers can be found at: <http://lukomnikov-1.livejournal.com/898904.html?thread=7053400>.

¹⁰² While it is a mainstream Soviet publication, *The Campfire* has a somewhat complicated political history. Founded by Samuil Marshak, the magazine was closed during the Zhdanov years, soon after the end of the war, and reopened after Stalin's death. Like *Inostrannaia literatura* (Foreign Literature), it was part of the Thaw era revival of print culture.

¹⁰³ Losev described in a 2004 interview how his father got him the job, thereby ensuring a meager source of income for him and his many literary acquaintances (Gronas and Sherr, *Lifshits / Losev / Loseff*, 20-21).

desirable audience for experimental writings, and children’s literature had been a haven for Daniil Kharms, Aleksandr Vvedensky and other admired literary outsiders. Some unofficial writers cultivated long careers in children’s literature as they simultaneously wrote adult works “for the drawer” or for samizdat, among them Oleg Grigoriev and Genrikh Sapgir. Their writings for seemingly distinct audiences intermingled and influenced each other, as Ainsley Morse has shown in her studies of the childlike aesthetic in late Soviet literature.¹⁰⁴ Although neither Krivulin nor Stratanovsky wrote for children, scholars have pointed to the *detskost’* (childishness) of their works and poetic voice, suggesting that the aesthetic Morse describes is more broadly present in unofficial literature.¹⁰⁵

The Translation Seminar

И мы немели возле чуда,
 Нам открывалась речь твоя
 Семейным кладом из-под спуда,
 Хотелось крикнуть: “Я оттуда!..”
 Но кто я и откуда я...

And we grew silent at the miracle,
 Your speech was revealed to us
 As an ancestral trove from a hidden place,
 One wanted to shout: “That’s where I’m from!..”
 But who am I and where am I from...

– Aleksandr Soprovsyky

Translation, as we have suggested, was another sphere that attracted young people interested in literature. The renewed internationalism of the Thaw, together with the return of

¹⁰⁴ Morse, *Word Play: Experimental Poetry and Soviet Children’s Literature*, 3-17.

¹⁰⁵ Eliseev, “Klerk-solovei,” 121-123; Goricheva, “*P’iu vino arkhaizmov...*,” 61; Kovaleva, “O Viktore Krivuline.”

lyric poetry, meant that poetic translation was a needed and therefore officially encouraged activity, leading to a “golden age of poetry translation,” as Efim Etkind described it.¹⁰⁶ Poetry in translation began to take up more pages of literary journals, including in *Inostrannaia literatura* (Foreign Literature), which had been revived and renamed in 1955 after a twelve-year hiatus.¹⁰⁷ The *Masters of Poetic Translation* series was another result of this push; the thin volumes, published annually 1963-1980, showcased translations by Anna Akhmatova (1965), Boris Pasternak (1966), Marina Tsvetaeva (1967), and Benedikt Livshits (1970), among others.¹⁰⁸ The series brought world poetry to Soviet readers, but also contributed to the rehabilitation of Russian modernism, expanding readers’ access to Russian poetry even as it presented other poetic traditions.

Much as the perceived lack of lyric poetry and a “need for new voices” had facilitated the rise of the LITOs after Stalin’s death, a renewed focus on translated literature led the Writers’ Union to establish seminars in poetic translation in the late 1950s. Many members of the incipient unofficial culture, including Shvarts, participated in the dozen or so seminars that were offered by the literary translation section of the Leningrad division of the Writer’s Union.¹⁰⁹ The top-down measure had beneficial effects on young writers in the short and the long term. Indeed, translation became the primary occupation of some seminar participants; like children’s literature, translation provided legitimate employment for otherwise non-publishing writers and

¹⁰⁶ Etkind, *Barselonskaia proza*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Its predecessor, *Internatsional’naia literatura* (International Literature), had been shut down in 1943. For the role of the journal in the prewar era, see Safiullina and Platonov, “Literary Translation and Soviet Cultural Politics in the 1930s.”

¹⁰⁸ Not to be confused with the two-volume *Mastera russkogo stikhotvornogo perevoda* (Masters of Russian Poetic Translation, 1968), later reissued as *Mastera poeticheskogo perevoda* (Masters of Poetic Translation, 1997).

¹⁰⁹ Iasnov, *El’ga L’vovna Linetskaia*, 137.

poets.¹¹⁰ The seminars included a venue for public readings and discussions of translations at “In Russian for the first time,” an “oral almanac of poetic translation” (*ustnyi almanakh poeticheskogo perevoda*) that took place at the House of Writers in over forty iterations.¹¹¹ There were also competitions for the best translation. Vladimir Vasilyev recalled that experienced professionals like Ivan Likhachev participated alongside rising stars like Gennady Shmakov to produce the best translation of a poem by Baudelaire, for example.¹¹²

Efim Etkind, a student of the translation seminars, became a seminar leader himself prior to his forced emigration in 1974. Etkind’s fall from favor was itself partly the result of his scandalous assertion in print that translation provided a crucial outlet for poets whose original work was unpublishable.¹¹³ Children’s poet and translator Mikhail Yasnov recalled that it was Etkind who first directed him to Elga Linetskaia’s seminar in the early 1970s. Shvarts had been a participant in this group somewhat earlier. There is little mention of it in her later autobiographical prose, but Shvarts dedicated her programmatic “Imitation of Boileau” to Linetskaia, who translated poetry, prose, and drama from various European languages. Linetskaia is best remembered for her translations of French classicists, including Boileau’s “Art Poétique,” a wide range of French lyric poetry, and of the Enlightenment *philosophes*.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ On the role of translation in Joseph Brodsky’s formation and his 1964 trial for social parasitism, see Klots, “Poetics and politics of Joseph Brodsky as a Russian poet-translator.”

¹¹¹ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 115. Efim Etkind, who established the series, describes Brodsky’s recitation of his translations of Polish poet Konstanty Gałczyński in *Zapiski nezagovorshchika*, 114. See also Dolinin and Severiukhin, *Preodolenie nemoty*, 25.

¹¹² Yasnov, *El’ga L’vovna Linetskaia*, 136.

¹¹³ Etkind’s defense of Solzhenitsyn also contributed to his forced departure. On the scandal over his introduction to the *Masters of Poetic Translation* volume, see Etkind’s *Notes of a Non-Conspirator*.

¹¹⁴ See Linetskaia, *Iz frantsuzskoi liriki*, for a book-length collection of Linetskaia’s poetry translations.

Several of Shvarts's contemporaries have written with admiration and affection about Linetskaia and her translation seminar, one of the longest running in Leningrad.¹¹⁵ A description by Yasnov, who made particular efforts to preserve Linetskaia's legacy, reflects the tenor of many participants' recollections:

A child of the Silver Age, she was forced to read such poets as Gumilëv and Khodasevich, Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova in secret. She was reared on that culture and, most importantly, passed on her love for it to all of us as best she could. For that reason [...] almost all the lessons of the seminar began with the reading of poetry – both Russian classics and the forbidden poetry that was already hovering in the air.¹¹⁶

The seminar fostered awareness of the literary culture of the target language (Russian) as well as training in translation practices, connecting young writers and poets to the history of Russian poetry translation and to the pre-revolutionary texts that participants needed to be aware of in order to make competent translation choices. Doubtless this is one reason why such groups attracted not only aspiring poet-translators, but also poets with no professional interest in translation, including Vasily Betaki, Viktor Shirali, Yulia Voznesenskaia, and Oleg Yuriev.¹¹⁷

During “official” meetings with Linetskaia at the House of Writers, students learned about French Classicism and the other European traditions of which she was a specialist and discussed Russian renderings. More contemporary texts were discussed at informal gatherings that followed at Linetskaia's home:

There, over tea, the conversation continued at full voice, as they say. We read aloud that which was highly undesirable to discuss within the walls of the House of Writers, which had eyes and ears. It was there I once heard [Mandelstam's] *Fourth Prose* – in one of the first copies delivered from Moscow.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Iasnov, *El'ga L'vovna Linetskaia* brings together testimonials from Linetskaia's former students, a comprehensive bibliography, and biographical material.

¹¹⁶ Iasnov, “Akhmatova russkogo perevoda.”

¹¹⁷ Ben, “Tat'iana Gnedich, perevodchitsa Bairona,” 94; Iur'ev, “Gorlitsa sovetskoi nochi.”

¹¹⁸ Azadovskii, “Ogliadyvaias' nazad,” 123.

Clearly, the translation seminars were nodes in the second literary economy, like the cafés, and part of the era's culture of literary domesticity.

Like Lydia Ginzburg, Dmitry Maksimov, Tatiana Gnedich, and David Dar, Linetskaia was an elder figure, born into pre-revolutionary culture and active participant in the culture of literary mentoring in 1970s Leningrad. All were members of the Writers' Union,¹¹⁹ and the translation seminars, like formal *kruzhki* and LITOs, were state-sponsored enterprises for which the leaders were officially responsible.¹²⁰ We see that Linetskaia's role as a preceptor was not strictly official, though. She and her students crisscrossed public-private boundaries in their literary socializing. It is thus not surprising that retrospectives about the translation seminars focus on personal relationships more than the substance of literary translation. Linetskaia's own biography impressed her students powerfully. A student of the famous Tenishev School and of LIFLI (Leningrad Historical-Philological Institute), she was arrested in 1933 for her participation in a *kruzhok* studying Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Released in 1934, she struggled to find work, and in 1937 she joined her husband, a fellow participant in the Kant circle, who was sentenced to exile in western Kazakhstan. She returned to Leningrad as a teacher after the war, taking up the translation seminar in 1954.¹²¹ Tatiana Gnedich, a translator of Byron, Shakespeare, Walter Scott

¹¹⁹ Bakhtin and Lur'e, *Pisateli Leningrada: biobibliograficheskii spravochnik 1934-1981*, a directory of Leningrad Branch members, has entries on all of them but Dar, who surrendered his Writers Union membership card when he emigrated to Israel (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 168).

¹²⁰ Lygo points out that such figures could be members of the Writers' Union even if they were not members of the Communist Party (Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 35).

¹²¹ Iasnov, *El'ga L'vovna Linetskaia*, 11-14. The volume includes photographs and documents related to her arrest.

and also a survivor of the 1930s Terror, led another popular translation seminar and became close with a number of members of the 1970s literary *andegraund*.¹²²

Shvarts's contemporary Yakov Gordin has described the "meeting of generations" that followed the Khrushchev-era amnesty, when young people encountered the "poets, translators, men of letters" who returned from exile and labor camps.¹²³ Poetic tradition was passed on through this community, thanks to which, in combination with the period's abundant translations, an "atmosphere of awakening" characterized the late 1950s in Leningrad, as Gordin recalled.¹²⁴ It was not only access to modernist literature that such figures offered; they shared a speech culture that had mostly disappeared from the public sphere. Students of Linetskaia's seminar frequently mention the distinct speech of their mentor.¹²⁵ Konstantin Azadovsky described the monthly events held at the House of Writers, at which seminar leaders read and discussed their own translations: "People presented whose brilliant speech and old-fashioned appearance amazed us, the young ones. People from the old, pre-revolutionary times. The ones who had returned from the camps and exile. Having survived by a miracle, 'in spite of everything.' People of genuine culture [*podlinnoi kul'tury*]." ¹²⁶ Philosopher Lev Druskin described the voice of Maria Voloshina, the widow of poet Maximilian Voloshin, in similar

¹²² Gnedich's translation of Byron's *Don Juan*, her magnum opus, is a legend in its own right due to the circumstances under which it was undertaken: a solitary confinement cell of the prison, where she was kept during the investigation. Following her death in 1976, an obituary appeared in the October-December double issue of the samizdat journal *Thirty-Seven*; the following issue, comprised largely of excerpts from a book of condolence (*kniga pamiati*), was dedicated to her memory and included poems by Krivulin dedicated to Gnedich.

¹²³ MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse*, 23. See Jones, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, for a recent study of the amnesty and its impact.

¹²⁴ MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse*, 23.

¹²⁵ See for example, Iasnov, *El'ga L'vovna Linetskaia*, 150.

¹²⁶ Iasnov, *El'ga L'vovna Linetskaia*, 122.

terms: “Immediately – even before getting the sense of it – the lexicon astounded one: refined, well-bred, noble. People don’t talk like that these days.”¹²⁷

Shvarts’s apprenticeship as a poet-translator was short-lived. She had, apparently, neither the stomach nor the aptitude for it, as she learned through the seminar:

I’ve always hated to translate poetry, literally to the point of vomiting. To do the impossible. Once in my early youth, Elga Lvovna Linetskaia invited me to her translation seminar, so that I might with time earn my daily bread. [My own] verse seemed unthinkable to print then. But my reading of an excerpt supposedly from Browning ended with Elga Lvovna saying: [why don’t you] read some of your verse instead, Lenchka. (3:254)

Her involvement in Linetskaia’s seminar was impactful in spite of its brevity, much like the Palace of Pioneers circles and Gleb Semënov’s LITO. Not only did Shvarts develop a long-term personal relationship with her mentor, but she apparently derived professional benefit from the seminar, as Linetskaia intended. Prose translation became Shvarts’s primary official occupation and source of income following her graduation from university. Moreover, her acquaintance with Linetskaia in particular enhanced her study of eighteenth-century literature during this period, visible in Shvarts’s undergraduate thesis on the Gozzi and the *Commedia dell’Arte*, her play about doomed emperor Ivan Antonovich, and her poem devoted to Linetskaia, “Imitation of Boileau.”

The range of Shvarts’s interests expanded in her university years as a result of her involvement with formal and informal institutions. She explored multiple genres, writing prose and drama alongside poetry. In the texts discussed below, she took up the question of “how to be a poet” in her time and place.

¹²⁷ Druskin, *Spasennaia kniga*, 307.

Alchemy of the Verb: “Definition” (1966)

Душа моя, округлая реторта,
И солью всех веществ она полна.
Что ни родит она: хоть ангела, хоть черта,
Она для опытов чудесных рождена.

My soul, a rounded retort,
Is filled with the salts of all matter.
Whatever she gives birth to, be it angel or devil,
She was born for marvelous experiments.

– Elena Shvarts

Shvarts claimed to have written her impromptu “Definition” (“Opredelenie”) in “the attic” of Leningrad State University in 1966.¹²⁸ Describing her poetic ideals, she expresses determination to devote herself to the poetic craft and to master the arcana that will bring it to life.

Definition

A poem as such (having the right to be so called) is muttering organized according to the rules of unearthly architecture with a flash of insight at the end.

A poem that is alive is a higher being, born of person and sky, breathing, smiling, and mortal like everything else.

One, two, three poems can’t remain of a poet. Only in his entirety, his rhymed soul, his brilliant and mediocre lines. It’s so odd, people write verse, not having mastered from birth the marvelous science of poetics [*poetika*] (true, one has to recall it).

Oh, miraculous heartrending sounds, the flesh of a poem. But I will forget it all for the sake of awkwardly stumbling insight that often comes as a cripple, on wooden crutches in torn clothing.

And why, myself having barely learned, do I teach others? And I still can’t say it calmly, it’s all exclamations.

I love erudite poems, intent ones, examining the earth. Experiments. Experiments. But that is also an escape from poetry. Real [poetry] is different – with swan wings. But there is also alchemy – the purification of words and thoughts. I would like to bring words to such heights of embodiment, the light flesh of angels, light and fiery, that they [might] inhabit the sky, if it is empty.

Who knows what I am writing all of this for, not out of inspiration, sitting in the attic, kicked out of class for being monstrously late. Today is the twentieth of

¹²⁸ The text, labeled “Entry from 1966” (“Zapis’ 1966 goda”), was published posthumously as a postscript to Shvarts’s girlhood diaries and poetry in volume 5 of *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*.

April, and soon I'll turn eighteen. And I want them to kick me out of the university and to be able to write poetry and only write poetry. O God, help me, and I will spend my youth in a stuffy room at the flasks and retorts. And I will turn stone to gold, words into poems that are alive and blinding. (5:394-395)

“Definition” exhibits stylistic and metaphorical features that are consistent with much of Shvarts’s later writing. The aphoristic tone, overall economy, and indeed the title anticipate the much later essays of *Definition in Foul Weather*, *Notes on Fingernails*, and *The Visible Side of Life*, which similarly feature marvellous visions described in a matter-of-fact manner. She begins not by defining poetry as a whole, but focuses on its primary unit, the poem, which she describes as sound incarnate, a living creature of mixed human-heavenly parentage. In her 1963 note “About Marina Tsvetaeva,” discussed in Chapter One, Shvarts emphasized that the poet gives birth to her poems, rather than seeing or hearing them (5:229). Here she literalizes the metaphor, likening the birth of a poem to miraculous incarnation. She anthropomorphizes and “angelo-morphizes” the individual poetic work, which acquires materiality and ideally attains the “light and fiery flesh of angels.” The poem emerges as a winged creature, potential inhabitant of the heavens, and angel made of sound that the poet co-parents with a heavenly realm.

Shvarts’s attention shifts quickly: from the poem (alive, a higher being) to the “marvelous science” of poetics back to the poem, made of sound-flesh. Poetry is presented as a birthright and evidence of the poet’s “rhymed soul.” This hubris is tempered by the stumbling arrival of insight in the guise of “a cripple, on wooden crutches in torn clothing.” The figure’s humble appearance and bodily infirmity recall the fool in Christ, who neglects his earthly well-being for the sake of higher knowledge. The *kaleka* (cripple) is not vitally exuberant, as Shvarts’s “The Holy Fool,” but the depiction similarly affirms a humanist attention to the vulnerable and neglected. If we generalize this character as a humble itinerant, its feminine hypostases would include the

vernacular saint Ksenia of Petersburg, who appears in Shvarts's poetry several times, and Makhadevi Akka, a twelfth-century poet-saint that Shvarts translated.¹²⁹ Shvarts's own muse has similar attributes, as will be seen in "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism" and "Imitation of Boileau" below.

The arrival of insight in unexpected guise returns us to the opening of Shvarts's "Definition": if crowned by insight, mumbling – verbal stumbling – may rightfully claim the name of poem and come to life. Hinting at her future "poetics of what is alive," the figure likewise affirms a poetics of the unexpected. In her poem "Notion of Poetry at Age 18" ("Predstavlenie o stikhakh v 18 let," n.d.), meanwhile, Shvarts asked the same question – "What is poetry?" – and reiterated the response formulated in "Definition:" "muttering with a flash of insight at the end." Music speaks truthfully through humble subjects, claims "Notion of Poetry at Age 18," which ends with a wish similar to that of Shvarts's "Definition":

Я бы хотела, чтоб сияли,
Легкой плотью снащены,
Чтобы ангелами стали,
Если ангелы больны.¹³⁰

I would like for them to shine, / Fitted out with light flesh, / That they might
become angels, / If the angels are sick.

In both texts, poems are to become angels, winged creatures who mediate between earthly and heavenly realms. Shvarts's lyric speaker also takes on these qualities when she takes flight, as in the conclusion to the *Works and Days of Lavinia* cycle discussed in Chapter One. As Olga

¹²⁹ The Makhadevi translation appeared in issue 17 of *Chasy*.

¹³⁰ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi,"* 67.

Sedakova has pointed out, birdsong is another means to transcend earthly confinement in Shvarts's poetry.¹³¹

The alchemical metaphors for the poet's craft that appear at mid-point and in the last lines of "Definition" became prominent in Shvarts's poetics, as scholars have noted.¹³² In the poem "Sonata of the Dark" ("Sonata temnoty," 1975), a "Prince of the world" burns human coffins to collect the dark sediment of souls in his retorts, so it can be blown back into the world for rebirth (1:50-52). The long story "Explosions and Homunculi" ("Vzryvy i gomunkuli," 1979) traces the short lives of characters Karl, Klara, Mercury, and "Sera" (Sulphur), who are brought to life by one Peter Creatorov, an amateur alchemist (4:32-64). Shvarts's thematic engagement with alchemy has its fullest expression in the small *poema* "Hume-be" ("Kh'iumbi," 1982), subtitled "A Practical Sketch of Evolutionary Alchemy" (2:125-133). The medieval science of transmutation suits Shvarts not merely for its superficial attributes. It became central to her thinking about the poetic mission, the "transformation of the soul by the verbal material" that was her "primary spiritual task" (3:274). Alchemy also provided a metaphorical framework for her poetics of transformation. "My direction," she later said, "is a kind of metamorphism, because everything in my poetry [*u menia*] is interwoven with everything. This is alchemy, in a certain sense. That is, the constant transmutation of everything, and through that the unity of the world."¹³³

¹³¹ Sedakova, "Elena Shvarts: vtoraiia godovshchina."

¹³² See Dais, "Mifologiiia v sovremennoi russkoi poezii" for additional discussion of alchemy in Shvarts. Julia Trubikhina has described the function of pain and grief in Shvarts's poetry in alchemical terms ("On the Poetics of Elena Švarc," 137).

¹³³ Shvarts, "Poetika zhivogo. Beseda s Antonom Nesterovym," 319.

Lydia Ginzburg later criticized Shvarts for cultivating the image of an isolated Romantic figure, but in “Definition” the poet casts herself not as an antisocial Holden Caulfield or Byronic outsider, but as a solitary mage of the Middle Ages.¹³⁴ Her expression of ambition and humility is nominally addressed to God, but she assigns herself much of the work and by all indications takes the task seriously. Her near absence on the social scene of this period thus also acquires a meaning.

Summoning the Unofficial Pushkin: “Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin”

Мы все гадаем – кто на чем:
На воске кто, кто – на Шекспире.

We all tell fortunes, each as they wish:
Some with wax, some – with Shakespeare.
– Elena Shvarts

Shvarts found a generic home for her eerie imaginings in the ballad. It was not by chance that she recited (or so she recalled) Zhukovsky’s “Ballad, Depicting How One Old Woman Rode a Black Horse and Who Sat in Front” at an exam in Russian literature that she sat for with Dmitry Maksimov at LGU.¹³⁵ Zhukovsky brought the ballad into the Russian poetic tradition through his rendition of Robert Southey’s “The Old Woman of Berkeley: A Ballad, shewing how an old woman rode double, and who rode before her” and other English Romantics. Shvarts’s reading of Zhukovsky is visible in two of her poems from the late 1960s: “Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin” (“Ballada o spiriticheskom seanse i teni Aleksandra

¹³⁴ Ginzburg, “On Elena Shvarts.”

¹³⁵ The Russian title is “Ballada, v kotoroi opisivaetsia, kak odna starushka ekhala na chernom kone vdvoem i kto sidel vperedu.” The literature exam is described in *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*, 3:198-199.

Pushkina,” 1968) and “A Ballad, Seized by Paralysis at the End” (“Ballada, kotoruiu v kontse skhvatyvaet paralich,” 1969).¹³⁶

The ballad was one means by which Shvarts engaged the past during this period. Vignettes such as “The Old Age of Princess Dashkova” (“Starost' kniagini Dashkovoi,” 1967) and “The Invention of the Steam Engine” (“Ob izobretenii parovoi mashiny,” 1967) are imaginative depictions of historical curiosities, much different in tone.¹³⁷ Her ballads are more folkloric, their plots more whimsical, as Sedakova observed of “A Ballad, Seized by Paralysis at the End.”¹³⁸ In this sense, the ballads are a precursor to the “small *poema*” that Shvarts developed in the 1970s, a genre which she later distinguished from the *poema* (long narrative poem) proper by virtue of “the extremely discontinuous development of its plot” (2:62). Through both genres, she built on the traditions of Russian narrative poetry.

Shvarts’s “Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin” is the most playful of them, depicting a visitation from the immortal Pushkin, summoned by students hunched over a ouija-style board with a saucer through which a flighty spirit speaks.

Баллада о спиритическом сеансе и тени Александра Пушкина

- 1 И, как ленивый вол,
- 2 Луна взойдет над Тарту,
- 3 И посредине марта
- 4 Поставлен круглый стол.
- 5 Три бедных студента
- 6 Склонились над столом,
- 7 И алфавит и цифры
- 8 На столике мелком.

¹³⁶ Note also “Ballad of Makhno” (“Ballada o Makhno,” n.d.) (*Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,”* 64-65).

¹³⁷ See also “Boliarynia Morozova” (“The Boyar Morozova,” 1964), “V Bolezni – Navarin” (“During Sickness - The Battle of Navarino,” 1974), and “V otstavke” (“Retired,” 1979), to which the explanatory subtitle “(Mamonov and Catherine)” was appended in later editions. The 1994 “Pokhod iurodivykh na Kiev” (“The Holy Fools’ March on Kiev”) likewise includes an explanation under the title: “real occurrence - see Pryzhov.” A number of historical figures appear in “Rasprodazha biblioteki istoriki” (“Sale of the Historian’s Library,” 1970s).

¹³⁸ Sedakova, *Poetica*, 571.

9 Там духов вызывают,
10 И так глаза блестят,
11 И духи прилетают
12 И правду говорят.
13 Нет, в блюдце воплотиться
14 Не хочется ему – и хочется –
15 Как птица, как девка в терему –
16 Так он трепещет в блюдце,
17 Уже полуживой,
18 Ему не улыбнуться
19 И не взмахнуть рукой.
20 И вот оно фарфорово
21 Теплеет и дрожит,
22 Над буквами летает
23 И правду говорит.
24 В муках блюдечко дрожит,
25 Тень по свечке вниз сбежала,
26 Ну, фаянсовую жизнь
27 Начинай теперь сначала.
28 «Это ты или не ты,
29 Или вечный и шальной
30 Дух назвался вдруг тобой?»
31 «Что, Александр Сергеевич,
32 Будет ли война?»
33 А он не понимает
34 И скок на мягкий знак.
35 «Чегой-то я не понял,
36 Будет ли война?»
37 А он им отвечает:
38 «Не будет ни хрена».
39 «Вы, Александр Сергеевич,
40 Любите собак?»
41 А он им отвечает
42 На это: «Еще как!»
43 В муках блюдечко дрожит,
44 Тень по свечке вверх бежит.
45 Или вечный и шальной
46 Дух назвался вдруг тобой?
47 Чтоб увидеть блеск свечи,
48 Как ладони горячи,
49 Боль стекающих минут
50 Ты забыл и бросил тут?
51 Электричество зажгли...
52 Так неловко стало вдруг,
53 Будто кто-то нас обидел,
54 Будто кто из темноты

55 Видит нас, а мы не видим.
 56 В муках блюдечко дрожит...
 (1:34-35)

Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin

And like a lazy ox, / The moon will rise over Tartu, / And mid-March, / A round table is set up. / Three pale students / Leaned over the table, / And alphabet and numbers / [Are] on the little table in chalk. / There spirits are being summoned, / And so eyes shine, / And spirits fly in / And speak the truth. / No, to materialize into a saucer / Is not his wish – but wished for – / Like a bird, like a maiden in the *terem* – / So he trembles in the saucer, / Already half-alive, / Not for him to smile / Nor to wave his hand. / And now it porcelainly / Warms and quivers, / Over the letters [it] flies / And speaks the truth. / In agony the little saucer quivers, / A shade runs down the candle, / So, a porcelain life / Start over again now. / “Is it you or not, / Or is an eternal, stray [*shal’noi*] / Spirit posing now as you?” / “Well, Aleksander Sergeevich, / Will there be a war?” / But he does not understand / And hop to the soft sign. / “I didn’t get that, / Will there be a war?” / And he answers them: / “There won’t be squat.” / “Do you, Aleksandr Sergeevich,” / Like dogs?” / And he answers them / To that: “You bet!” / In agony the little saucer quivers, / The shade runs up the candle. / Or is an eternal, stray [*shal’noi*] / Spirit posing now as you? / In order to see the candle’s shine, / How hot the palms are, / The pain of waxing minutes / You forgot and abandoned here? / The electricity is turned on... / How awkward it suddenly feels, / As if someone offended us, / As if someone out of the dark / Sees us, but we don’t see. / In agony the little saucer quivers...

In this poem, Shvarts evokes a folkloric Pushkin in a mock *h*ômage that draws on the poet’s own folkloric writings. The repetition, with small variations, of key lines reinforces the spoken quality that is a hallmark of the ballad, as is the supernatural subject matter.

The round lettered table attracts spirits who “tell the truth” (lines 12, 23). Shvarts’s phrasing recalls Pushkin’s learned cat, who produces songs and fairy tales at the beginning of *Ruslan and Liudmila* by tracing circles around a gold-chained oak tree. The spirit is hesitant initially, then seemingly trapped in the body of the saucer, likened to a bird, or a maiden in the *terem*, the female quarters of noble households, as it “quivers in agony” in its new porcelain form. The “three poor students” hunched over the board are uncertain they have the right ghost as the séance unfolds, though, and their conversation with the spirit is framed by the medium’s

repeated question: “Is it you or not, / Or is an eternal, stray [*shal’noi*] / Spirit posing now as you?” (lines 27-30, 45-46).

Gently mocking the “table talk” with the poetic otherworld, Shvarts also hints at the Pushkin studies advanced by Yuri Lotman, a prominent professor at the University of Tartu, and his students. Shvarts evokes not the canonical figure, but the “unofficial” Pushkin, as Catherine Nepomnyashchy referred to him, the irreverent hero of Andrei Sinyavsky’s *Strolls with Pushkin* and Soviet-era *anekdoty*, who might easily express himself with colloquialisms as the summoned spirit does (“ni khrena,” “eshche kak!”).¹³⁹

Throwing the lights on at the end of the poem, the poet belatedly includes herself in the scene. This is fully appropriate; apparently Shvarts did summon Pushkin and others at domestic séances. She described her efforts to contact the spirit world in the short sketch “Table-turning” (“Stoloverchenie,” 1996), which she filed under the rubric “Marvelous Happenings and Mysterious Dreams” (3:304-308). Evgeny Venzel fashioned a table for the purpose of contacting the dead, and:

By candlelight, five people sat around the table, with sensitive, quaking fingers on the saucer, pinkies and thumbs touch the neighbors’, a light electricity passes through [*legkii tok probegaet*], the saucer is immobile, nervous tittering, shining gazes meet, and suddenly it – until now heavy as a stone – lightly takes off, and then how it whirls suddenly, barely slowing down at the needed letter – just try to keep up.... Everybody always suspected each other of cheating [*podozrevali v plutovstve*], of purposely moving the saucer. We summoned Pushkin, Calioastro, the Archpriest Avvakum, dead acquaintances (there were so few of them then). (3:304-305)

¹³⁹ Sinyavsky, *Strolls with Pushkin*, liii. Although it is contemporary to the poem, Shvarts had no access to Sinyavsky’s text, written in 1966-68 during his imprisonment in the Dubravny special labor camp (Dubravlag) and sent in fragments in letters to his wife.

As an addendum to her essay about the experiments with spiritualism, Shvarts attached a transcript of the group's conversation with the Italian occultist Calioistro (dated 29 January 1970), and the text of "Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin," which she declared a "sufficiently accurate" record (3:304-305).¹⁴⁰

"Ballad of a Séance and the Shade of Aleksandr Pushkin" surely circulated in broader social contexts than the domestic one it drew on through Shvarts's recitations, and eventually it appeared in samizdat, reaching audiences unfamiliar with the poem's origins.¹⁴¹ Moreover, summoning the *shal'noi* Pushkin in a poem did have a political dimension. A comment by Aleksandr Kushner suggests that Shvarts's poem came to emblemize the bounds of official and unofficial literatures. Boris Ostanin, editor of the samizdat journal *Chasy*, recalled that Kushner once described the difference between *Chasy* and official Soviet journals as follows: "Your tables turn, while ours do not" (*Vashi stoliki vrashchaiutsia, a nashi – net*).¹⁴² Shvarts's irreverent treatment of Pushkin, the "sun of Russian poetry" whose image was sacrosanct, would doubtless have caused as much discomfort for Soviet editors as the depiction of a séance.

Appear the Muse: "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism"

Shvarts's experiments in a Romantic key continued in "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism" ("Rondo s primes'iu patriotizma," 1969), which has a similar uncanny air and features winged creatures and the undead. The atmosphere is less fantastic and more threatening

¹⁴⁰ The inside joke continued in a late poem entitled "One More Séance" ("Eshche odin spiriticheskii seans," n.d.), and in a prose coda to "Ballad of a Séance," "Unearthly Reward" ("Nezdeshniaia nagrada," 2001), in which Pushkin's shade returns, summoned by the jury of a literary prize to help to select a winner, putting a fantastic end to a mundane task (3:13; 4:299-302).

¹⁴¹ It was included in Shvarts's first book of poetry, *The Host Chasing Out Demons* (1976), which circulated in samizdat in the mid-1970s.

¹⁴² Boris Ostanin, conversation with the author, March 14, 2018.

than the séance with Pushkin, conjuring imprisonment and poverty. Given the date, and the poet's strong feelings about the events of August 1968, it is tempting to read "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism" as a response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and its consequences for the people of her circle. Natalia Gorbanevskaja was arrested and subjected to psychiatric incarceration following her participation in the Red Square protest.¹⁴³ Six other participants were convicted under article 190 of the Soviet criminal code for disturbing public order, disrupting traffic, and promoting "intentionally false fabrications discrediting the Soviet state and society."¹⁴⁴ Another of Shvarts's friends, translator and philologist Efim Slavinsky, known to some as Leningrad's "number one beatnik," was arrested in 1969 on trumped-up drug charges.¹⁴⁵ Shvarts's diaries, when published, may shed light on the poem's potential biographical dimension. As the title suggests, though, the motif of patriotism is but an admixture to Shvarts's portrait of the muse.

Рондо с примесью патриотизма

Бред бесстыдный,
 Лепет сонный,
 Муза – вот чем ты даришь,
 А я так тебе молилась,
 А я так тебя ждала.

Как двое незрячих
 Со склеенным ртом,
 Шатаюсь и плача,
 Стоять под окном,
 А вос-поминанья
 Совсем ни к чему –

¹⁴³ Gorbanevskaja was arrested in December 1969 and committed to a "special" psychiatric hospital by order of a Moscow court.

¹⁴⁴ Gorbanevskaja, *Polden'*, 345-346; *Red Square at Noon*, 225.

¹⁴⁵ Bobyshev, "Bitnik No 1." Shvarts mentions Slavinsky numerous times in her diary (5:341, 342, 345, 357-358, 367, 381, 389, 391). The *Chronicle of Current Events* reported the arrest in issue 8 (June 30, 1969). Digital edition available at <http://hts.memo.ru/>.

Огоро-женную
Лутче бы тьму.

Тьма же вокруг
Холодна, беспредельна,
С крыльями, как
У подруг милосердных,
Тех, что с зеленой
Отметкой во лбу,
Рваным укрывшись
Крылом на дубу, –
В общем – вороны.

Лутче бы тьма
Поклонялась Венере.
Домик какой-то,
Четыре листа из фанеры.
– Ты осторожней,
Там кто-то уж спит.
– Злая собака
Сладко храпит.
– Видно, уж некуда,
Да и пора мне. –
Слабые светятся
Блеклые камни.

– А вот на Западе, говорят,
Дома свиданий есть, говорят...
– Да уж, слышали... –
Где мне найти беспредельнее тьму?
Чуять так близко тюрьму и суму?
Где в телогрейке горюет упырь?
Тоже и я не чужая ему.
Все же отсюда,
Из запредельных
Дальних краев,
Неба, быть может,
Откинув
Легкий покров, –
Муза.
Она ведь несчастненьких любит,
Нищим она подает,
Красны глаза у нее,
Лошадиные зубы,
Черен запекшийся рот,
Вот она, тяжело ступая,

Идет –
Толстая дева,
Перекинувши на живот
Сумку.

Бред бесстыдный,
Лепет сонный,
Муза – вот чем ты даришь,
А я так тебе молилась,
А я так тебя ждала.
Может, ты меня и любишь,
Только странною любовью,
Раз усохшие чернила
Развела моею кровью.
(1:22-24)

Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism

Shameless delirium, / Sleepy babble, / So this is your gift, Muse, / And I prayed to you so / And I waited for you so. // Like two sightless ones / With sealed mouth, / Staggering and crying, / To stand under a window, / And re-membrance / Has absolutely nothing to do – / Fenc-ed off / Obscurity would be better. // The obscurity around is / Cold, limitless, / With wings, like / The merciful girlfriends have, / The ones with a green / Mark in the forehead, / Covered up with a ragged / Wing on the oak, – / In a word – crows. // Obscurity would do better / To bow to Venus. / Some little house, / Four sheets of plywood. / – You be careful, / Someone is already sleeping there. / – A vicious dog / Is snoring sweetly. / – Looks like there’s nowhere, / And it’s time for me anyway. – / Faded stones / Weak, glowing. // – And in the West, they say, / You can get a room, they say... / Yeah, yeah, we’ve heard... – / Where can I find a more boundless obscurity? / Sense so closely the prison and beggar’s bag? / Where in his quilted jacket does the undead mourn? / I’m not a stranger to him, either. / Still, from here, / From faraway / Distant regions, / Having perhaps thrown off / The light mantle / Of the sky, – / [Comes] the Muse. / She does love the wretched, / Gives to the poor, / Red are her eyes, / Horse teeth, / Mouth caked black, / Stepping onerously, here / She comes – / A stout maiden, / A satchel / Thrown across her waist. // Shameless delirium, / Sleepy babble, / So this is your gift, Muse, / And I prayed to you so / And I waited for you so. // Perhaps you do love me, / Just with a strange love, / Since the dried-up ink / You reconstituted with my blood.

An air of futility hangs over Shvarts’s poem, framed by the repeated quatrain “Shameless delirium, / Sleepy babble, / So this is your gift, Muse, / And I prayed to you so / And I waited for you so.” The gifts of the long-awaited muse – delirium and incoherent murmuring, or babble (*lepet*) – recall the “muttering” (*bormotan'e*) that figures in the 1966 “Definition” and “Notion of

Poetry at Age 18” discussed above. Through the mix of allegorical images, commentary, and dialogue, the poet asserts a lack of control of visions perceived on the edge of consciousness, suggesting that the poem is the record of a reverie or a sort of automatic writing.¹⁴⁶

Shvarts’s “Rondo” is inconsistent with the standards for this fixed form, whose modifications are abundant in Russian modernist poetry.¹⁴⁷ Her poem is longer than the traditional rondo and its refrains do not follow an expected pattern. The polymetric verse that became a hallmark of Shvarts’s poetics already stands out prominently. She later connected her experiments with constantly shifting rhythmic patterns to modernist music: “[F]or me the complex, broken, and shifting [*perebivchataia*] music of poetry (like the music of the beginning of the [twentieth] century, but without lapsing into the acoustic disintegration of the latest music)” (4:275). Disapproving of *vers libre*, she affirmed her commitment to meter, albeit one “that would change with each shift in my line of thinking, with each new feeling or sensation” (4:275).

The trochaic tetrameter of the first stanza evokes at once two equimetrical poems by Pushkin: “Lines Composed at Night during Sleeplessness” (“*Stikhi, sochinennye noch’iu vo vremia bessonnitsy,*” 1830) and “Vain gift, chance gift,” (“*Dar naprasnyi, dar sluchainyi,*” 1828). Shvarts’s metric citationality suggests thematic links to these poems as well. In Pushkin’s poem of insomnia, the lyric speaker also searches for sense in the dark, listening for the murmuring of the Fates (*Parki bab’e lepetan’e*) among the nighttime sounds. In “Vain gift, chance gift,” the

¹⁴⁶ The framing of this poem is similar to the later “During Illness – The Battle of Navarino” (“*V bolezni – Navarin,*” 1974), which includes the refrain: “Tell me, Muse, why do you show me Navarino?” (*Stikhi iz “Zelenoi tetradi,*” 72-73).

¹⁴⁷ Gasparov, *Russkie stikhi 1890-x – 1925 godov v kommentariakh*, 184-187.

poet is called into being by a force opposed to *vlast'* (power, authority) that instills passion and skepticism that find no outlet in mundane reality. The amphibrachs of the second stanza, meanwhile, evoke Pushkin's "Captive" ("Uzник," 1822), with its amphibrachic tetrameter, even though Shvarts's lines are half as long.¹⁴⁸ The lyric speaker of that poem describes his only companion in captivity: a young eagle, who seems to silently suggest the two escape their common cage. The crows of Shvarts's third stanza bear little resemblance to this creature, however, growing out of the endless *t'ma* (obscurity, darkness) itself.

The dialogue of the wandering pair in Shvarts's poem suggests the perpetual homelessness experienced by Leningrad's literary youth, who roamed the streets and drank in courtyards at night for lack of their own space. The "dead end" of such an evening is presented in the dialogue – "Looks like there's nowhere [to go], / And it's time for me [to go] anyway." The comparison to the West and its *doma svidaniia*, where rooms may be rented by the hour, meanwhile, suggests modes of representation of capitalist decadence in Soviet propaganda. The conversation thus acknowledges the freedoms that exist there and gives those freedoms a morally ambivalent tint, all in a tone that creates distance between the poet and the voices in the poem.

Shvarts's diction changes suddenly after this exchange. The dialogue trails off in an ellipsis, and the poem turns into a monologue. Her speaker asks three questions whose rhetorical pitch is in sharp contrast with their meaning: "Where can I find a more boundless obscurity? / Sense so closely the prison and beggar's bag? / Where in his quilted jacket does the undead mourn?" The intonation of these lines would fit perfectly the glorification of the country, yet the words do not suit the cause, giving a twist to the poem's expression of "patriotism."

¹⁴⁸ The first two lines can be read, in combination, as a single line of trochaic tetrameter.

This cluster of foreboding associations leads seemingly to the muse, whose appearance is in harmony with the gloomy environs. Red-eyed, horse-toothed, a heavysset maid, she moves ponderously. There is something of the soldier in this image – the heavy step, the bag worn across the body – an unfeminine figure, independent, itinerant. She is less warrior-like than Shvarts’s admired Joan of Arc, and bears some resemblance to the Blessed St. Ksenia, the holy fool who wandered the streets of Saint Petersburg in the uniform of her dead husband.¹⁴⁹ The poet sees herself similarly in other poems, such as “Below shone like an underfoot moon,” part of the “Staircase with Rickety Landings” (1978) cycle:

[...]
 Среди созвездий я металась долго
 Туда-сюда, без смысла и без толка,
 В одежде грязной,
 С кепкой нечесаных волос,
 С глазами красными, клыками изо рта
 [...]

Among the constellations I cast about a long while / Back and forth, senselessly and
 pointlessly, / In dirty clothes, / With a cap of uncombed hair / With red eyes, fangs from
 my mouth... (1:76-77)

Shvarts’s unfeminine muse also brings to mind Tsvetaeva, whose poem “Muse” (1921) describes her as “Not mean, not kind, / But so-so: distant.” Shvarts’s muse hails from distant lands, but the poem brings us up close to her, showing a muse with red eyes whose mouth is black and *zapekshiisia* – parched or clotted. Frequently collocated with *krov’* (blood), this word anticipates the poem’s conclusion, in which the poet’s blood is let, and underscores the muse’s shared origins with the *upyr’*, a vampiric figure.

¹⁴⁹ Shtrykov, “The Unmerry Widow,” 282.

The vision closes and the opening stanza is repeated: “Shameless delirium, / Sleepy babble, / So this is your gift, Muse, / And I prayed to you so / And I waited for you so.” The direct address continues in a commentary on the muse’s methods: “Perhaps you do love me, / Just with a strange love, / Since the dried-up ink / You reconstituted with my blood.” The “strange love” (*strannoiu liubov'iu*) as a qualifier of the muse’s feelings for the speaker cannot but recall to Russian readers Mikhail Lermontov’s “Motherland” (“Rodina”), an ambivalent portrait of the poet’s native land that begins: “I love the fatherland, but with a strange love! / My intellect will not conquer it” (*Liubliu otchiznu ia, no strannoiu liubov'iu! / Ne pobedit ee rassudok moi*.) Repurposing the phrase from Lermontov’s famous poem finalizes the ironic nod toward “patriotism” promised by the title.

In the concluding lines of “Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism,” the poet’s blood gives new life to old ink when the muse mixes them together. Shvarts does much the same through her combination of surreal vision with citations from canonical texts. In the midst of gloom, the muse empowers the poet, but takes the poet’s blood for writing. The bloodletting in her poem is textual; nonetheless, it is worth pausing over the metaphor. Shvarts came increasingly to insist on the corporality of poetry, its origins in the body of the poet and its dependence on the poet’s physical state. Poetic production is, accordingly, dependent on bodily sacrifices that are not fully in the poet’s control.

“Imitation of Boileau”

Shvarts wrote the programmatic “Imitation of Boileau” (“Podrazhanie Bualo”) in 1971, the year she graduated from the Theater Institute. Her “imitation” recasts the normative poetics of neoclassicism, of which Boileau’s *L’Art Poétique* (1674) is a prime example, as experimental

poetics. Yet Shvarts acknowledges her indebtedness to tradition even as she claims her right to poetic idiosyncrasy, holding contradictory impulses in orchestrated tension.

Подражание Буало

Э. Л. Линецкой

Мне нравятся стихи, что на трамвай похожи,
Звеня и дребезжа, летят они, и все же –

Хоть косо – в стеклах их отражены
Дворы, дворцы и слабый свет луны,

Свет слепоты – ночного отблеск бденья
И грубых рифм короткие поленья.

Поэт собой любим, до похвалы он жажен,
Поэт всегда себе садовник есть и садик.

В его разодранном размере, где Дионис живет,
Как будто прыгал и кусался несытый кот.

Неистовство и простота всего в основе,
Как у того, кто измышлял составы крови.

Родной язык как старый верный пес.
Когда ты свой, то дергай хоть за хвост.

Но, юный друг, своим считаю долгом
Предупредить, что Муза схожа с волком.

И если ты спознался с девой страшной,
То одиночества испробуй суп вчерашний.

Поэт есть глаз, узнаешь ты потом,
Мгновенье связанный с ревушим божеством,

Глаз выдранный, на ниточке кровавой,
На миг вместивший мира боль и славу.
(1:40)

Imitation of Boileau

to E. L. Linetskaia

I like verses that resemble streetcars, / Ringing and rattling, they fly, and yet – / If only crookedly – in their panes are reflected / Courtyards, palaces and weak moonlight, / The light of blindness – gleam of a night vigil / And the short logs of rough rhymes. / The Poet is beloved of self, thirsty for praise, / The Poet always is his own gardener and little garden. / In his torn meter, where Dionysus lives, / [It's] as if a hungry cat jumped and bit. / Fury and simplicity underpin everything, / Like the one who thought up blood's components. / Native language is like an old faithful hound. / If one of your own, you can even pull it by the tail. / But, young friend, I consider it my duty / To warn that the Muse is like a wolf. / And if you come to know the terrible maid, / Then taste the day-old soup of solitude. / The Poet is an eye, later you'll learn, / Connected for an instant with a howling deity, / An eye torn out, on a bloody thread, / Holding for a moment the pain and glory of the world.

In *L'Art Poétique*, Boileau articulated expectations that would inform, if not govern, poetic ideals from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the Romantic era in Europe. Shvarts would have had the chance to discuss his influential treatise at the translation seminar with Linetskaia, whose Russian rendering of Boileau's canonical text was published in 1957 and soon became a classic in its own right. The French literary legislator's primer for poets and other aspiring writers was appropriately – by neoclassical standards – imitative, asserting through its title its indebtedness to Horace's *Ars Poetica* and drawing on the authority of antiquity to justify the poetic values Boileau espoused: clarity, symmetry, restraint, and strict adherence to generic conventions.

These qualities would seem to have little to do with Shvarts's verse, and to those acquainted with her work the poem's title may have created ironic expectations. Comprised of eleven couplets of rhymed five- and six-foot iambs, "Imitation of Boileau" does approximate neoclassical models through its versification. An advocate of clarity, rationality, and predictability, Boileau stands for the Apollonian, explicitly in his own poem and implicitly in

Shvarts's.¹⁵⁰ The poem's meter and rhyme are thus appropriately consistent and restrained, until stanza five, when Dionysus appears and the meter is compared to a jumping biting cat. Here Shvarts realizes the "torn meter" she attributes to the poet with the metric scheme broken by several unstressed syllables in both lines and the addition of an extra foot in the first one.

Like a number of younger poets in her circle, Shvarts sought an escape from the marching iambs and "brick-like quatrains" that dominated official poetic production.¹⁵¹ Rejecting the formlessness of free verse, Shvarts likewise disparaged the steady, predictable beat of traditional meters that had long been the norm in Russian-Soviet poetry, as suggested above in the discussion of "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism."¹⁵² Her metrical restraint is a device that provides a necessary contrast to a less restrained poetics, exemplified by stanza 5, which shows how a contemporary poet might break free from rigid metrical patterns.

Pavel Uspensky and Artyom Shelya have singled out this poem as an "early manifesto" exemplary of Shvarts's successful "rapprochement of the lyrical-confessional mode of modernism with the prescriptive inclinations of a poet-classicist, of the irrational with the rational."¹⁵³ "Imitation of Boileau" presents a neoclassical frame through its title, but the image of poetry offered in the opening lines, indeed, signals the co-presence of the modern via the "ringing and rattling" tram, whose windows crookedly reflect the palaces and courtyards of Petersburg-Leningrad. Streetcar lines had taken root in the city and its poetic mythology early in

¹⁵⁰ Apollo is mentioned in the opening lines of Boileau's "L'Art Poétique."

¹⁵¹ David MacFadyen attributes this phrase to Aleksandr Kushner. Note also his quote from Vladimir Ufliand, who observed that Brodsky "... was bored with all those dactyls, anapests, and amphibrachs ... He knew that if you have to read in one meter, in the same iambs, then in the end it'll lull you to sleep" (*Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse*, 14, 20).

¹⁵² See Lygo, "Free Verse and Soviet Poetry in the Post-Stalin Period" for discussion of poetry translation as a driver of contemporary debates about versification.

¹⁵³ Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 10.

the twentieth century, thanks in part to Nikolai Gumilëv's famous poem "The Wayward Streetcar" ("Zabludivshiisia tramvai," 1919). Anyone taking the streetcar from the city center to the islands or the Vyborg side of the city and beyond, as Shvarts often did, would have passed the monumental architectural ensembles built by the Tsars and aristocracy in the eighteenth century, including the Hermitage/Winter Palace and nearby Summer Garden. Through this vehicle, Shvarts suggests that the poem will run a familiar local route on the backdrop of the Petersburg text using noisy contemporary means.¹⁵⁴ The organization of the poem into couplets, meanwhile, supports the streetcar metaphor graphically as the twin lines her poem runs along. The form recalls the paired alexandrines of French poetry that eighteenth-century Russian poets imitated by transposing them into rhymed iambic hexameters with a caesura, the tradition Shvarts bases her meter on.¹⁵⁵

Boileau's authority led Russian poets to translate, transpose, and imitate his works copiously in the eighteenth century, when the future of the literary language and poetic system was hotly debated. Mikhail Lomonosov, Vasily Trediakovsky, and Aleksandr Sumarokov, among others, saw themselves as the legislators of a new secular literature, and their search for a normative poetic system inevitably led them to Boileau for models.¹⁵⁶ Their translation-imitations of the French poet's statements and epistles was the very forum in which debates over style and lexicon played out.

¹⁵⁴ The noise of the tram is a recurrent acoustical motif in Shvarts's poetry. In "To a Newborn" ("Novorozhdenomu," 1968), life begins to the accompaniment of the tram's ring and proceeds along its predetermined route. Its noise also figures in "The Cat Conductor" ("Koshka-dirizher"), "The City Changes Colors" ("Meniaet gorod svet"), and "The Birth of Zeitgeist" ("Rozhdenie dukha vremeni").

¹⁵⁵ Gasparov, *Ocherk istorii russkogo stikhoslozheniia*, 64-65.

¹⁵⁶ Zhivov, *Language and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, 190-191.

Shvarts's declaration of a noisy poetics is not idle. She later described attending to poetic inspiration as "waiting for *ringing* words." (3:187, emphasis mine). The poet's preference for "ringing and rattling" poetry also challenges Boileau directly, who warns "Of jarring sounds avoid the odious noise, / The fullest verse, and the most labored sense, / Displease us if the ear once take offense" (Sozvuchnye slova slivaite v stroinyi khor: / Nam otvratitelen soglasnykh grubyi spor. / Stikhi, gde mysli est', no zvuki ukho raniat, / Ne slushat', ni chitat' u nas nikto ne stanet) (Canto I, lines 110-113).¹⁵⁷ The clustered consonants of Shvarts's poem are not necessarily acoustically infelicitous, and her alternating feminine and masculine rhymes are unusually exact in this poem. In stanza seven, though, she "pulls the tail" of neoclassical mandates by rhyming *pēs* (hound) and *khvost* (tail), stylistically low material by classical standards and an example of the "rude rhymes" lauded at the beginning of the poem. Another way to read Shvarts's metaphor of a noisy poetics is as the "rattling" that results when incompatible elements clash in her poems.

Having laid out the kind of poetry she prefers, Shvarts turns to the figure of the poet. In "Rondo with a Pinch of Patriotism," she had gotten to know the muse; in this poem the poet advances to the role of preceptor, entitled like Boileau to give literary advice. Her apostrophe to a "young friend" does not provide instruction about generic purity and rhyme, but warns that poetry is a solitary and ascetic activity requiring servitude to a demanding master. Here Shvarts affirms her Romantic notion of the poet as an isolated outsider who cultivates an individual

¹⁵⁷ The English translation is William Soame's (Cook, *The Art of Poetry*, 165). The Russian translation is Elga Linetskaia's (Bualo, *Poeticheskoe iskusstvo*, 60).

vision, her own garden, rather than reproducing the impersonal ideal of Versailles, as Boileau might have her do.¹⁵⁸

The poet's unique vision is graphically affirmed and the Dionysian element returns in the poem's final lines. Its neoclassical trappings are overwritten by the striking image of the poet as a torn-out eye hanging by a bloody thread that allegedly connects him with the divinity. This all-seeing eye attains an ideal vision as the witness and vessel of the "pain and glory of the world" (*mira bol' i slavu*). Through this gruesome image, the poet adopts and duplicates the "fury and simplicity" (*neistovstvo i prostota*) of the unnamed Creator who "came up with the blood's components" (*izmyshlial sostavy krovi*) in stanza six to attain the "light of blindness" (*svet slepoty*) of stanza three. The rigid formal values that Boileau advocated, together with their claim to reign eternal, recall the literary dogmas of Shvarts's own time. Her assertion of a unique vision is the antithesis of such prescriptive literary programs. True poetry, Shvarts declares in the coda, has otherworldly origins in the form of the "roaring divinity" (*revushchee bozhestvo*) to which the poet is momentarily connected.

Conclusion

During the early Brezhnev years, Shvarts and her circles came to embrace linguistic and literary traditions that had been suppressed in Soviet culture. Seminars led by elder scholars and translators provided aspiring writers and poets paths to professionalization and access to early twentieth-century traditions in a context of literary domesticity. These figures indirectly

¹⁵⁸ The gardens at Versailles were built after Boileau's time; still, their designer André Le Nôtre was guided by the principles that Boileau helped to instill.

contributed to the “revolution of poetic language” with which Krivulin later credited Leningrad’s postwar poets.¹⁵⁹ Relationships with older intelligentsia survivors of Stalinism allowed Shvarts’s generation and the one that preceded it to embrace an alternative vision of the past to the one offered by the state. Indeed, through their contact with such mentors, they came to see the artistic culture anathematized in Soviet times as superior in aesthetic and moral terms. This groundwork – reappraisal of the literary past – appears in retrospect a *sine qua non* for the establishment of the alternative cultural paradigm that was yet inchoate, paving the way for a modernist revival. As the Soviet government’s response to the Prague Spring settled any doubt the Thaw was over, innovative young writers’ access to the Writers’ Union and to mainstream publication closed, just as Shvarts and her literary generation came of age. Many would spend the 1970s in the *andegraund*, the subject of Chapter Three.

Rather than to wait for official acknowledgment and publications, Shvarts declared herself a poet and pursued her own vision in the second half of the 1960s. She cultivated a poetics of contrast and modernized archaic forms, engaging a variety of epochs and traditions simultaneously. Her experiments in the “alchemy of the word” resulted in innovative stylistic and formal hybrids.

¹⁵⁹ Krivulin, “Dvadtsat’ let noveishei russkoi poezii,” 38.

Chapter Three: *Andegraund*
1971-78

Нас всех сплотила неудача.

We were united by failure.

– Leonid Aronzon

Стоит ли петь, где не слышит никто,
Трель выводить на дне?

Is it worth singing where no one hears,
To turn out warbles on the seabed?

– Elena Shvarts

When asked about the 1970s, the core samizdat years, Shvarts declared that “there were by definition very few events. All unofficial literary life took place in the depths, hidden [*v glubine, pod spudom*], and there no external events happen.”¹ In comparison with the post-Soviet years, her assessment of the era is not unjustified. Shvarts’s poetry was accessible only through live readings for private-public audiences and amateur self-publications (samizdat) until 1978, when it began to appear in Western publications (tamizdat).² Shvarts regained the public stage for poetry readings with the establishment of Club-81, named for the year of its establishment, but her work was largely invisible and inaudible to mass readerships until the early 1990s, which saw successive publications of her old and new writings in Russian and other languages; stage productions and scholarly attention to her work; international and local creative awards; and literary tours and international travel to places she had longed to visit during her years in the *andegraund* (underground). With minimal access to audiences, Shvarts and her peers mostly

¹ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 180. Viktor Krivulin similarly described the 1970s as “eventless” (Krivulin, “Belyi svet nad Chernoi rechkoj,” 221).

² A minor exception is her publication in the “Russian page” of the University of Tartu newspaper, described below.

parted ways with state-sponsored institutions and largely abandoned illusions of official professional acceptance. Equipped with mentors, models, and networks of like-minded acquaintances, they established their own seminars and salons, allowing literary domesticity (*domashnost'*) and circles (*kruzhki*) to flourish in ways new and traditional.

The 1970s were a highly sociable and productive period for Shvarts “in the depths.” Some of her contemporaries assessed these years as the peak of her career, an idea she rejected.³ Even in 1978, the end point of this study, Shvarts doubted that she would ever see her work officially published in her home country.⁴ Yet she was “widely known in narrow circles” as one of the best poets writing in Russian and exemplar of the neomodern Leningrad school of Russian poetry.⁵ Two books of her poetry had been collected and distributed by admiring readers and participatory scribes of samizdat. As she came to poetic maturity and became recognized by her peers as a leading talent of her generation, the overlapping circles of Leningrad’s unofficial arts scene coalesced into a cultural movement in which Shvarts played a prominent role. When her unofficial contemporaries emigrated from the Soviet Union, the Leningrad school became a transnational network with numerous publication outlets.

Political Backdrop

In our liberal times, they don’t shoot writers.
– Aleksandr Gladilin, in 1978

³ Eliseev, “Triumf dlia Eleny.”

⁴ Shvarts, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (1999), 5.

⁵ “Shiroko izvesten v uzkih krugakh” is poet Boris Slutsky’s phrase, the opening line of a 1961 poem.

Bracketed by the 1960s and the 1980s, eras of turbulent social and political change, the long Soviet 1970s might appear uneventful, even a period of *zastoi* (stagnation), as Mikhail Gorbachev retrospectively described the eighteen years Leonid Brezhnev was in power (1964 - 1982).⁶ The stagnation paradigm has dominated Western and Russian perceptions of the period, “gloss[ing] over political, social, and cultural developments,” as Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovsky have argued.⁷ The *andegraund* institutions described below, which fostered spiritual, philosophical, and literary exploration and innovation, offer further proof that “these years were, on the contrary, a very productive, stormy [*burnoe*], even merry time” among young Leningrad intellectuals, as Sergei Stratanovsky described them.⁸

The Soviet human rights movement started in the late 1960s; the 1970s saw the rise of the dissident as a social figure and force on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Encouraged in part by the United Nations’ declaration of 1968 as the International Year of Human Rights, Soviet dissidents brought international attention to systematic human rights violations in the USSR and made efforts to help targeted individuals and groups. One group of western observers described their overt non-conformism as “one of the most amazing phenomena in the post-war history of the Soviet Union.”⁹ The provocative essay of physicist-turned-rights defender Andrei Sakharov, “Thoughts on Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom,” began to circulate in samizdat in 1968; in July the *New York Times* gave three pages over to excerpts from it. The same year,

⁶ Gorbachev described the Brezhnev era as the “epoch of stagnation” at the 27th Communist Party Congress in 1986, pointing to such indicators as declining dynamism at work and the growth of bureaucratism (Fainberg and Kalinovsky, *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era*, vii).

⁷ Fainberg and Kalinovsky, *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era*, vii.

⁸ Stratanovskii, “Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha.”

⁹ *The Soviet Union 1973*, 30. *The Soviet Union* was a (West) German yearbook and interdisciplinary review of domestic affairs, economics, and foreign policy developments in the USSR, compiled by the Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien in Cologne.

Shvarts's acquaintance, poet and activist Natalia Gorbanevskaja founded the samizdat *Chronicle of Current Events* (*Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*), as mentioned in Chapter Two, which documented house searches, arrests, trials, and the sentencing of nonconformists to exile or imprisonment. The Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR was founded in 1969, followed by the Committee on Human Rights in the USSR in 1970. The Soviet state launched media campaigns against its members for their outspoken criticism of human rights abuses, which were broadcast by international media. Psychiatric incarceration was another tool the state used to suppress *inakomyслиe* (dissent; literally, "thinking differently"). Thus, in 1971-1972, Gorbanevskaja spent over a year in a psychiatric clinic where she was placed against her will. Finally, the government started to force "undesirable" people to leave the country. In June 1972, Joseph Brodsky, one of the most prominent figures of Leningrad unofficial literature, was forced to leave and deprived of Soviet citizenship. In 1973, the KGB seized Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's manuscript of *The Gulag Archipelago*, a massive record of the Soviet prison camp network, leading Solzhenitsyn to authorize translations that were published abroad in millions of copies. In 1974 he was also forced to emigrate. Prominent intellectuals who voiced objections to his exile faced reprisals, including exclusion from the Soviet Writers' Union, as in Lydia Chukovskaia's case.

Emigration soon became a mass phenomenon, thanks to the repatriation to Israel that was gradually granted, although by no means automatically, to Soviet Jews, many of whom would end up in the United States. Dubbed the "third wave" of emigration, these departures impacted Shvarts's immediate circles, unofficial culture, and Soviet society in myriad ways. As a Jew, Shvarts might have pursued emigration to Israel or the United States, but there is no indication in published sources that she considered it. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Jewish writers

faced renewed hostility in the wake of the Six-Day War (1967), in which the Soviet Union supported Egypt and its Arab allies in the conflict with Israel. It should also be noted that, while everyday life for Shvarts differed little in language and custom from her non-Jewish contemporaries in urban Leningrad, she would have been constantly reminded of her Jewish otherness. Jewish identity was assessed in Soviet society informally on the basis of name and appearance, formally through the “nationality” line in the Soviet internal passport, indicating the holder’s official ethnic identity. Official antisemitism was reinforced by its everyday, unofficial counterpart.

The Soviet Writers’ Union was increasingly intertwined with the Communist Party and the Committee for State Security, better known as the KGB, in the 1970s.¹⁰ Vadim Nechaev, who was a member of the Leningrad branch of the Writers’ Union until his unofficial activities got him into trouble, pointed to the “ideological atmosphere,” in which “[a] writer depends on the opinion about him of those top ideological secretaries in the Regional Committee (*obkom*) and the Central Committee – even more so than on the opinion of the Secretariat of the Writers’ Union.”¹¹ While the “organs” of state security were more tolerant of cultural endeavors than explicitly political ones in the mid-1970s, “prophylactic conversations” with the KGB were common, along with surveillance, searches, and arrests. For Shvarts’s circle, the end of the decade was more trouble than the beginning. Sergei Dediulin pointed to 1979 as a time of “screw tightening” in preparation for the 1980 Olympic Games held in Moscow. His assessment is borne out by the KGB’s heavy-handed response to the feminist almanac *Woman and Russia*

¹⁰ John and Carol Garrard argue that the Writers’ Union became a “party clone” in the Brezhnev era in *Inside the Soviet Writers’ Union*, 85. Arlen Blium also points to increased coordination between the KGB and Leningrad literary organizations in the 1970s. See *Kak eto delalos’ v Leningrade*, 79-104.

¹¹ Garrard and Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers’ Union*, 99.

(*Zhenshchina i Rossiia*, 1979), a samizdat project Shvarts contributed to, and to *Community* (*Obshchina*, 1978), a religious journal that Oleg Okhapkin participated in.

The production and distribution of samizdat and tamizdat carried real risks, and the KGB actively interfered. Sergei Stratanovsky emphasized that overcoming fear was one of the major accomplishments of unofficial culture.¹² Stratanovsky recalled the KGB's entrapment efforts (*provokatsii*) during his work on *Bypass Canal* (*Obvodnyi kanal*), a samizdat journal named for the artery of the industrial neighborhood it passed through.¹³ He attributed the journal's survival to the conspiratorial system that he and co-editor Kirill Butyrin developed, but others did not escape KGB surveillance. Vladimir Maramzin and Mikhail Kheifets were arrested in 1974 for the "preparation, keeping, and distribution of anti-soviet materials" while putting together a samizdat collection of Brodsky's early poetry.¹⁴ In Shvarts's own circle, the cases of Oleg Okhapkin, Igor Burikhin, Tatiana Goricheva, and Yulia Voznesenskaia offer instructive examples of the hazards of cultural resistance in the Brezhnev era. Okhapkin was subjected to interrogations and psychiatric hospitalizations that essentially ended his literary career.¹⁵ Burikhin, Goricheva, and Voznesenskaia were forced to emigrate under KGB pressure.¹⁶ Reprisals for everyday nonconformism were often less dramatic. The KGB honed its methods in the 1970s, working on an individual basis to effect micro-repressions that did not require

¹² Stratanovskii, "Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha;" conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

¹³ Sergei Stratanovsky, conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

¹⁴ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 265, 191; Kononova, "Litso Peterburga," 66-68; Blium, *Kak eto delalos' v Leningrade*, 85-86.

¹⁵ Okhapkin, "Interv'iu 1."

¹⁶ Burikhin was expelled from graduate school for his article on Brodsky for the Maramzin-Kheifets collection mentioned above (Burikhin, *Moi dom slovo*, 20). Goricheva and Voznesenskaia were involved with the *Woman and Russia* samizdat almanac that caused a furor.

recourse to the legal system, working with employers and other institutions to deny uncooperative people advancement or privileges, such as defending a dissertation, publishing an article or book, or traveling abroad.¹⁷ Informants were known to be ubiquitous. Shvarts acknowledged that mutual suspicion infected the atmosphere of her own domestic salon, the “Chimposium,” as it did most such ventures: “We simply knew that there couldn’t not be one. If there is a society, there must be an informant [*donoschik*]” (3:285). Konstantin Kuzminsky recalled his suspicions about Viktor Krivulin, and Krivulin’s own suspicions about him, adding that nearly everyone was the subject of such speculation: “Rumors circulated about many people, practically everyone, but what help was there in that?”¹⁸

Roles, Reputation, Professional Contexts

Shvarts remained aloof from the social realm of Leningrad poetry, emphasizing that she was not once at the bohemian literary café known as “Saigon” and that she did not participate in seminars and study groups.¹⁹ She also noted that she did not pursue publication, entrusting her poetry to admirers and literary acquaintances, some of whom were well placed to advocate for her, including Aleksandr Kushner, Bella Akhmadulina, and Andrei Voznesensky. Their efforts to persuade editors to include her in Soviet literary journals were unsuccessful.²⁰ Her unofficial acquaintances, many of whom she had known since youth (Krivulin, Stratanovsky, Evgeny

¹⁷ Il’ia Kukulin describes the method as *blokirovki* (roadblocks) in “Zastoi, dissidentstvo, andegraund i tret’ia volna emigratsii,” 19:00-20:30.

¹⁸ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4B:182.

¹⁹ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts.” 181; Shvarts, “Gorlo sam sebe protknul dlia peniia.”

²⁰ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 180; Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 103; Voznesenskii, “Muki muzy (Zametki poeta),” 5; Shvarts, “Triumf dlia Eleny.”

Pazukhin), eagerly included her writings in the thick samizdat journals that they established in the second half of the decade.

The most important events, Shvarts later said, were the writing of certain poems and readings that took place “somewhere in the studio of some artist.”²¹ She created a theatrical atmosphere at her occasional appearances. Poet Genrikh Sapgir described her self-staging at Ilya Kabakov’s Moscow studio: “...with her small hands she kept straightening and lighting the candles burning before her on the lectern. The candles would fall and go out. And overall made it hard to listen. But that naïve entourage clearly was necessary to the poetess. It seemed so eccentric, as something forgotten and provincial.”²²

Following her 1971 graduation from the extension program (*zaochno*) of the Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music, and Cinematography, Shvarts continued her self-education. Thanks to her mother Dina Shvarts’s position with the Bolshoi Drama Theater (BDT), she had access to Writers’ Union library (3:215-216) and to typewriters and other writing supplies that could be hard to come by.²³ Beginning in her mid-20s, Shvarts translated plays for the BDT to maintain a minimal level of employment, but essentially became a social dropout with no professional status, which was typical of the circles to which she belonged. She did not work as a tour guide, as several literary acquaintances did.²⁴ Nor did she take a blue-collar job as an elevator operator or boiler room minder, alternative occupations that offered solitary and

²¹ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 180.

²² Streliaanyi, Sapgir, Bakhtin, and Ordynskii, eds. *Samizdat veka*, 603.

²³ Kirill Kozyrev, conversation with the author, March 12, 2017.

²⁴ Ignatova and Pazhukhin worked for excursion bureaus, giving tours of the Peter and Paul Fortress and other monuments. Stratanovsky was a guide at the Hermitage and at the Aleksandr Pushkin apartment-museum (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 205, 300, 336).

undemanding work conditions in semi-private spaces with a near absence of managerial oversight. This niche was so common that it became the label for late Soviet slacker-artists, the “generation of night watchmen and boiler minders,” as singer Boris Grebenshchikov of the rock band Akvarium put it.²⁵ The *Mitki* (Little Mityas) artistic collective embraced and parodied this role through their own life-art in the 1980s.²⁶ In Shvarts’s circles, Okhapkin, Vladimir Erl, Boris Ivanov, Aleksandr Mironov, Boris Ostanin, Elena Pudovkina, and Evgeny Venzel held such positions.²⁷

The *lumpen intelligent*, as some nonconformists jokingly referred to themselves, took jobs that offered the greatest freedom and fewest political strings attached.²⁸ Occupying the lower depths of Soviet occupational prestige offered significant advantages, the most important of which was abundant time at and away from the workplace. Krivulin later described his stagnation era job with relish:

I found an even better job [than minding a boiler] – I found an office. I worked as an editor in the House of Public Health Education. My annual plan consisted of one printed page. I had my own office. A telephone. [...] For nineteen years that’s how I worked. I came at 9:00, stuffed myself full of coffee, started to write poetry, to read, say, Plato, to memorize who knows what [*khren znaet chto*]. People came to see me.... Towards the end we were already publishing the journal and whatnot. I stole paper by the ton, on which we printed samizdat.... It was a marvelous job.²⁹

²⁵ See Prozorov, *The Ethics of Post-Communism*, esp. Chapter Three, “The Janitor Generation,” on late Soviet drop-out culture in the music of Akvarium.

²⁶ The nonconformist collective Little Mityas (plural short form of the name Dmitrii) cultivated a transgressive personal politics of failure and foolishness in Leningrad. See Mihailovich, *The Mitki*.

²⁷ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 298, 382, 272, 295, 312; Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii*, 215, 326.

²⁸ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 2B:12. See also Pazukhin, “Antisotsium,” 163-64; Nikolaev, “O poezii Aleksandra Mironova,” 266.

²⁹ Krivulin, “Ne tolk’ko Brodskii.”

Shvarts's translation work was presumably more demanding than this and took place at home, in the apartment she occupied with her mother and her great-aunt Berta Rubina until the mid-1980s at 8 Shkol'naia Street in the Novaia Derevnia neighborhood. The two women freed Shvarts of domestic duties; she did not learn to cook, clean, or do laundry until late in life, after their deaths.³⁰ She did learn to drive, however.³¹

She had other jobs, apparently short-lived, that are not mentioned in her life writings. She worked at *Kostër (The Campfire)*, the youth journal where her limericks had appeared in 1970, a post that she occupied with disdain.³² She was also a "literary secretary" (*literaturnyi sekretar'*) for children's writer Nina Gernet for an unknown period of time.³³ Some members of the Soviet Writers' Union were allowed to employ such assistants. The number of them in Shvarts's circles shows the ongoing entanglement unofficial and official literary realms, partly a result of the mentor-protegé relations that developed in the 1960s during the search for "new voices" described in previous chapters. Elena Ignatova was appointed to work with Natalia Grudinina, whom she knew from the Palace of Pioneers, later acknowledging that the post did not actually require her to do any work.³⁴ Poet Elena Pudovkina, who also knew Grudinina through the Palace's literary *kruzhki* for young people, held the same position at one point.³⁵ Kuzminsky was Tatiana Gnedich's literary secretary; he had participated in her translation seminar mentioned

³⁰ Shvarts, conversation with the author, January 5, 2007.

³¹ Shvarts was apparently employed as Dina Shvarts's driver for the BDT for a short time in the 1980s. Kirill Kozyrev, conversation with the author, March 12, 2017.

³² Losev, *Meandr*, 225. Losev's comments suggest that Shvarts's mother arranged her employment at the magazine.

³³ Kirill Kozyrev, conversation with the author, March 12, 2017.

³⁴ Ignatova, *Obernuvshis'*, 140.

³⁵ Valieva, *Vremia i slovo*, 103.

above.³⁶ Okhapkin was Vera Panova's assistant, a role he took over from Sergei Dovlatov, who left Leningrad for a job in Tallinn in 1972.³⁷ Poet Yury Kolker recalled his surprise when he learned that such positions existed, and that such "miscreants" as Kuzminsky could occupy them.³⁸

Shvarts continued to cultivate an outsider image and to labor over the "flasks and retorts" of poetic alchemy in solitude as she had resolved in 1966 (5:395). Stratanovsky described her lifestyle as "secluded" (*zamknutaia*).³⁹ At one point she broke off her relationship with Venzel, who grieved at the loss in such poems as "you were a beloved sad sister to both of us" ("ty byla dlia dvoikh nas liubimoi pechal'noi sestroi") and "Summer Garden" ("Letnii sad").⁴⁰ Though she does not mention him in her autobiographical writings, poet Dmitry Bobyshev was apparently Shvarts's suitor in the 1970s. Bobyshev's memoir of the era paints a mythological and misogynistic portrait of Shvarts as a "mysterious mole of the *andegraund*" (*tainstvennyi vypolzok andegraunda*) whose reputation as a "wunderkind, genius, wild woman, little night monster, and so on..." preceded her.⁴¹ Bobyshev's colorful characterization supports Shvarts's claim that she "rarely appeared before people" in these years (3:195). At the same time, her own cursory comments about her still tumultuous youth touch on disastrous parties and scandals with her at the center, shedding only hazy light on her role in a raucous and inebriated community

³⁶ Bukovskaia, "Zoloty e serebrianye," 93-94; *Samizdat Leningrada*, 238.

³⁷ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 298.

³⁸ Kolker, "Iz pesni zlogo ne vykinesh'."

³⁹ Conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

⁴⁰ Venzel', *Stikhi*, 25; Venzel', *Vtoroi sbornik stikhotvoreni*, 13-16. Bishop dates the couple's marriage to 1969, their divorce to 1974 (Bishop, "In Memoriam. Elena Andreevna Shvarts," 114-115).

⁴¹ Bobyshev, *Avtoportret v litsakh*, 246.

(3:192, 201, 214, 218). Evgeny Pazhukhin observed that scandal and assault (*rukoprikladstvo*) were “an element of socializing” for Shvarts.⁴² A fuller assessment will be made when her remaining diaries are published, but it is clear that Shvarts did not avoid the literary community entirely, even in the first half of the decade, preceding the major undertakings of unofficial culture.

Shvarts maintained her friendship with scholar Lydia Ginzburg, with whom she had become acquainted as a schoolgirl.⁴³ Like the mentors described in previous chapters, Ginzburg cultivated relationships with young writers and followed their progress. She even occasionally photographed her literary acquaintances, including Shvarts, who casts a puckish shadow in a photo-portrait by Ginzburg from the mid-1960s.⁴⁴ Entries from Elena Kumpan’s diary place Shvarts at Ginzburg’s apartment in December 1969, but the topic of conversation was precisely Shvarts’s creative isolation.⁴⁵ In her 1973 note “On Elena Shvarts,” Ginzburg expressed her disapproval of the outsider image that Shvarts cultivated, characterizing her individualism, “irrational enmity” towards others, and decadent self-destruction as a Romantic pose.⁴⁶ She laments Shvarts’s infantilism, determining that a lack of normal life and work experience has retarded her literary development. The conversation “inevitably turns to role playing,” she observes, and to “masochistic fantasies” of persecution and humiliation. At the same time, she notes approvingly that Shvarts protects her poetic world from her own rationality/sobriety (*trezvost’*) and applauds her recognition that a role is necessary for poetic self-realization.

⁴² Pazhukhin “Antisotsium,” 168.

⁴³ Van Buskirk, “Ginzburg on Shvarts,” 139.

⁴⁴ The photo is reproduced in *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts* 4:2.

⁴⁵ Kumpan, *Blizhnii podstup k legende*, 79-80.

⁴⁶ Ginzburg, “On Elena Shvarts,” 142-43.

Shvarts had participated in a Tartu poetry reading in 1967, as mentioned above, and many of her acquaintances had ties to the University of Tartu through Dmitry Maksimov and the Blok Seminar. In 1973, Shvarts's poems appeared in two issues of the university newspaper, the *Tartu Riiklik Ülikool*. An organ of the University's Communist Youth League (the Komsomol), the newspaper included typical Socialist content about heroic achievements, state holidays, *subbotniki* (Saturday work brigades), visiting delegations, Komsomol congresses, and so on. Its "Russian Page" (*Russkaia stranitsa*) was an occasional supplement to the Estonian-language paper consisting of a page or two of short articles in Russian and included material that was unlikely to be published in Moscow or Leningrad. The "Beat Lexicon," for example, was a recurring rubric that included descriptions of American and European rock groups like Deep Purple, the Grateful Dead, and Jimi Hendrix.⁴⁷ This marginal publication, in spite of its Komsomol connections, substantiates the liberal reputation of the Baltic "periphery" and the perception of Shvarts as an innovative contemporary poet.

The April 1973 issue of the "Russian Page" included a short note under the headline "Elena Shvarts," followed by her poem "Imitation of Boileau." The note indicated that future issues would include "a number of new works." The poem "Princess Dashkova's Dotage" ("Starost' kniagini Dashkovoï," 1967) appeared in the next issue, but no further publications followed. This was the only official publication of Shvarts's poetry until 1985, when the *Krug* (Circle) anthology was published, a child of the *Lepta* project described later in this chapter.

The "Second Literary Reality" and its Venues

⁴⁷ Digitized copies of many issues are available at: <http://dea.digar.ee/publication/truajaleht>

Sergei Dovlatov is credited with naming Leningrad's emerging samizdat culture the “second literary reality” (*vtoraia literaturnaia deistvitel'nost'*).⁴⁸ The label was supplanted by a succession of other names that reflect an evolution and plurality of self-perceptions, including “second culture” (*vtoraia kul'tura*), “unofficial culture” (*neofitsial'naia kul'tura*), and “underground” (*podpol'e, andegraund*).⁴⁹ The last of these reflects the lack of visibility and access to public audiences that characterized the 1970s for Shvarts and her literary associates.

In October 1973, poet Tamara Bukovskaia wrote to the Secretariat of the Leningrad branch of the Soviet Writers' Union:

It is likely not a secret to the reader of this letter that there now exist two literatures, one visible to the world and to readers (i.e. published), and a second one that people know by ear [*so slukha*], more accurately – through hearsay [*po slukham*]. With rare exception the second literature is more alive and, most importantly – more interested in truth [*istina*], than the first.⁵⁰

In December, Krivulin, Okhapkin, and prose writer Fëdor Chirskov sent a similar letter to the Secretariat. Some months later, a meeting was arranged between the Committee for Work with Young Authors and a representative group of unofficial writers consisting of Bukovskaia, Krivulin, and Okhapkin. Eduard Shneiderman later pointed to this meeting as a key turning point for the Leningrad *semidesiatniki*.⁵¹ The young generation was criticized for their development of a poetic language that only they could understand (*uslovnyi poeticheskii iazyk vashego kruga*). Their one-time mentor Gleb Semënov asked why they had turned to the “first literary reality” for help if they were not willing to accept the terms under which it functioned: the state's

⁴⁸ Okhapkin, “Interv'iu 1 s Olegom Aleksandrovichem Okhapkinym.”

⁴⁹ In “Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha,” Stratanovsky indicates that it was the perestroika-era press that brought the term *andegraund* into wide circulation. Savitskii traces the use and evolution of these terms in *Andegraund*.

⁵⁰ Shneiderman, “Puti legalizatsii neofitsial'noi poezii,” 196.

⁵¹ Shneiderman, “Puti legalizatsii neofitsial'noi poezii,” 197.

prerogative to print what was valuable to it. In Shneiderman's retelling, the poets rejected this logic, saying: "Don't think you can drive us into the literary underground [*podpol'e*]."

The entrenched attitudes of the gatekeepers of cultural institutions effected a state of arrested development in the state-sponsored arts of the Brezhnev era. The gerontocracy that characterized political control in the late 1970s was paralleled in cultural institutions like the Soviet Writers' Union.⁵² Stratanovsky explicitly connected the informal seminars, samizdat journals, and other institutions that began to appear to his circle's exclusion from public cultural life, while writers who occupied comfortable niches in the state-sponsored literary life failed to evolve, "as if they had bought a ticket for a steamship on which no seats were available for others."⁵³

The era of mass poetry readings in stadiums was well over, and the fashion for poetry that had characterized the 1960s declined. Shvarts recalled that "humble, domestic" poetry readings became the norm (3:193). Elena Dryzhakova associated the move "from public squares and crowded clubs to little circles and domestic gatherings" with a change of attitude: "the majority of young people simply lost interest in poetry [*okhladela k stikham*] when they grew up; the others – when they got hold of blue jeans and pop records. Few were seriously interested in poetry by the end of the 1960s."⁵⁴ Krivulin, too, noted the shift in a 1977 article on contemporary poetry: "one increasingly encounters humanities types...who airily observe, "No, I don't like

⁵² Vera Tolz describes the ossified structures and attitudes of the literary gerontocracy in "Cultural Bosses' as Patrons and Clients: the Functioning of the Soviet Creative Unions in the Postwar Period." See also Zav'ialov, "Retromodernizm v leningradskoi poezii," 41 and Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR*, 249.

⁵³ Stratanovskii, "Polnost'iu zacherkivat' sovetskuiu poeziiu nepravil'no."

⁵⁴ Dryzhakova, "Poeziia dukhovnogo vozrozhdeniia," 190.

poetry.’ Ten-fifteen years ago in educated society such a phrase could only be uttered in provocative jest [*s tsel'iu epatazha*].”⁵⁵

Institutional structures that had fostered the poetry boom of the 1960s declined apace. The LITO system was not defunct, but nearly so. Gleb Semënov led a prestigious, but short-lived city-wide group at the House of Writers in the late 1960s, one of the last of its kind.⁵⁶ Shvarts was not involved, but Stratanovsky and Ignatova both participated; Kolker recalled being eliminated through an audition process.⁵⁷ Though opportunities for public recitations were infrequent compared to the previous era, they still took place. Palace of Pioneers mentor Irina Maliarova included young poets in the “Evenings of Poetry and Music” that she organized at the House of Writers. Shvarts was part of this series in 1974 (5:153).⁵⁸ Following this event, the Writers’ Union Secretariat decided that Maliarova should not have free rein over the series and instituted an editorial committee to vet future instances.⁵⁹

The socio-spatial economy shifted to a metaphorical *andegraund* in Moscow as well. For Mikhail Aizenberg, the first signs came when it began to “seem natural” when young authors, “who usually seek recognition at first in a narrow circle, then [seek recognition] from famous writers they respect, and then from the wider reading public...limited their ambition to the first and second stops on the usual itinerary.”⁶⁰ Sedakova acknowledged that the visibility of the

⁵⁵ Krivulin, “Problema sovremennoi russkoi poezii,” 140.

⁵⁶ Massie, *The Living Mirror*, 39; Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 109.

⁵⁷ Ignatova, *Obernivshis'*; Kolker, “Iz pesni zlogo ne vykinesh'.” Viktor Shirali, another participant, says Shvarts was selected for the group, but there is no sign of her participation in other sources (Shirali, *Zhenshchiny i drugie puteshestviia*, 206).

⁵⁸ Shvarts described it as her first public poetry reading, although as previous chapters show, she had recited at various poetry events in Leningrad and at the University of Tartu.

⁵⁹ Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975*, 114.

⁶⁰ Aizenberg, “K opredeleniiu podpol'ia,” 173.

1970s' "other culture" (*drugaiia kul'tura*, another term in circulation) was due to the less repressive quality of the regime, especially compared to the Stalinist past: "The fact that people [were] getting together somewhere [*gde-to sobiraiutsia*] to read something to each other did not carry the threat of being accused of an antirevolutionary conspiracy." Pursuing that thought, she reflected on the spaces where the "other culture" flourished:

That "somewhere" remained a very private space [*ostavalos' kraine chastnym prostranstvom*]: let's say, even such a publication as the bulletin board newspaper [*stengazeta*] of the philology division of Moscow State University was already closed to my poetry. But at the same time, in the hallways and back staircases of the same university manor, you might read hand-written copies [*spiski*] of whoever you like, it was already customary and not scary. Furthermore, the very appearance of some sort of private space was a rather recent accomplishment. It seems only in the Khrushchev era were artists allowed to have private studios instead of the previous communal ateliers of the art factory [*obshchie tsekhi khudozhestvennogo kombinata*]. And in the studios, in those basements and mansards, the life of the "second culture" carried on. And in private apartments, too – when did our citizens start seeing those? Can you imagine a forbidden poetry reading in a communal apartment, under escort?⁶¹

Sedakova's comments suggest that a communal ethos carried over into these new "very private" venues, as they were put to collective use by the unofficial community. Poetry readings for small circles continued, but larger, less private events were essential to the *andegraund*. Art and photography exhibits, literary readings, and seminars of various kinds were held in apartments, studios, and lofts, open not only to the owner's personal acquaintances, but also to a large network of insider-outsiders. Poets and artists worked together in this creative milieu. Thanks to their official artistic work and affiliations, some painters and sculptors had state-provided studios. These capacious semi-domestic spaces were used for informal shows and readings. Moscow artists Ilya Kabakov and Ernst Neizvestnyi established salons in their studios in the

⁶¹ Sedakova, "V Geraklitovu reku vtoroi raz ne voidesh'," 191.

1960s. In Leningrad, Krivulin and Kuzminsky, among others, frequented Mikhail Shemiakin's studio.⁶²

Private apartments were also part of this network. Asked where poets gathered to read their work to each other in Leningrad, Brodsky replied "All kinds of people's."⁶³ Shvarts describes her semi-annual readings in "some atelier [*kakaia-nibud' masterskaia*] or the apartment of "somebody"; she made the acquaintance of translator Sergei Petrov "at one of my readings, at somebody's house" (3:193-94; 4:295). At the end of the decade, Shvarts began to be invited to various Moscow salons and studios. She recalled a recitation with Sedakova in the mansion of a well-to-do artist (3:194). Dmitry Prigov recounted how a crowd waited for Shvarts to make her appearance at Kabakov's studio.⁶⁴ The Andrei Bely Literary Prize, established in 1978 by the editors of the samizdat journal *Chasy*, was awarded in artists' studios, private apartments, and elsewhere.⁶⁵ Marina Nedrobova and Vadim Nechaev hosted an ongoing *kvartirnik* art exhibit at their apartment.⁶⁶ They declared the space an unofficial "Museum of Contemporary Painting," which served as the venue for a conference on unofficial culture in 1977, with participation by Krivulin, Goricheva, and others.⁶⁷

Konstantin Kuzminsky's apartment was an important salon for Leningrad's bohemian artistic-literary community and a gallery for unauthorized exhibits. Kuzminsky cultivated ties

⁶² *The Blue Lagoon Anthology* includes dozens of photographs taken in Shemiakin's studio.

⁶³ Volkov, *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, 210.

⁶⁴ Prigov, *Portretnaia galleria D. A. P.*, 160. See also Kabakov, *60-70-e...: zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 120.

⁶⁵ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 420-421; Ostanin, *Na breiushchem polete*, 181.

⁶⁶ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 283, 285. See Schlatter and Maitre, *Prostranstvo svobody* for a visual record and chronicle of apartment art in Leningrad 1964-1986.

⁶⁷ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 32, 434-435. The conference was entitled "Nravstvennoe znachenie neofitsial'noi kultury" (The Ethical Significance of Unofficial Culture) and brought together various seminar participants for talks on various subjects. See *Samizdat Leningrada*, 434-435. Nechaev's keynote address for the conference was published in *Grani* 108 (1978).

with amateur photographers who were drawn into unofficial artistic culture and subsequently documented it. In many cases, they reached the cultural underground via amateur photography circles organized by the same Palace of Pioneers and Houses of Culture that had cultivated the young writers and poets under discussion here. A 1974 exhibit at Kuzminsky's called "Under a Parachute" (*Pod parashiotom*) featured works by Leonid Bogdanov, Olga Korsunova, Boris Kudriakov, Boris Smelov, and others who were experimenting with photography as an expressive medium rather than a documentary one, as it was treated by Soviet institutions.⁶⁸

The Dostoevsky Museum was another public venue available to Shvarts's circles. The museum became a hub of artistic and intellectual activity in Leningrad soon after it opened in 1971. The museum laid valuable groundwork for Club-81, the organization for unofficial writers established at the end of the decade, whose first official events took place there. Poet Boris Likhtenfeld recalled the annual conferences it hosted, with talks by such independent thinkers as Sergei Averintsev, Marietta Chudakova, Lev Kopelev, and Grigory Pomerantsev.⁶⁹ Krivulin likened the museum to Saigon, the café he frequented to meet literary acquaintances.⁷⁰

Prigov's 1975 visit to the Dostoevsky Museum, where a scholarly conference was being held, inadvertently led him to the Leningrad *bogema* (bohemian scene), as he described it.⁷¹ His reminiscence suggests that poetry readings were literally an everyday affair among them, organized for and by *svoi* (insiders), but open to newcomers as well. Prose writer Bella Ulanovskaia, who worked at the museum, invited Prigov to an evening reading by "the

⁶⁸ On underground photography in Leningrad and "Under a Parachute", see Val'ran, *Leningradskii fotoandegraund*, 7-13; Valieva, *Sumerki 'Saigona'*, 201-203; Werneke, "Nobody Understands What Is Beautiful."

⁶⁹ Valieva, *Litsa peterburgskoi poezii*, 314.

⁷⁰ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 182-185.

⁷¹ Here and below, Prigov, *Portretnaia galereia D. A. P.*, 155-156.

marvelous poetess Elena Shvarts,” of whom he had never heard.⁷² The poet “made a strange impression on me; I had not yet got accustomed to the Peter[sburg] style [*eshche ne privyk k peterskim maneram*]. The poems lay in front of her on a lectern; her bearing was particular, slightly haughty.” Prigov’s account suggests that he subsequently saw Shvarts’s self-presentation as typical of Leningrad’s unofficial poetic culture. At the reading, Prigov also met the “extravagant and expansive” Kuzminsky, who invited him to visit him the next day. Learning that Prigov was a poet, Kuzminsky urged him to hold a poetry reading that very day. It conveniently turned out that one was already planned, and Prigov could simply be added to the program following Krivulin, Stratanovsky, and Mironov.

The *andegraund* was thus a lively environment with a pressurized atmosphere. Thanks to its informal institutions and dedicated publics, Shvarts’s career continued to develop in the absence of any official recognition. Before discussing the publication venues that the *andegraund* created for her work, I will turn to poems that exemplify Shvarts’s development in the 1970s.

Gazing East: “Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple”

Я во дворик буддийского храма
заглянул на исходе среды –
мне нравится, что Далай-лама
построил свой храм у воды.

I looked in on the Buddhist temple
as Wednesday was waning –
I like that the Dalai Lama
built his temple on the water.

– Evgeny Venzel

⁷² Ulanovskaia, who wrote a thesis on Dostoevsky and the OBERIU, participated in the establishment of the museum, undertaken in honor of the 150th anniversary of Dostoevsky’s birth.

The Brezhnev era saw a surge of interest in religious and philosophical questions in Soviet society broadly and especially among the intelligentsia. Domestic circles, study groups, and seminars fostered self-education and spiritual exploration, encouraging the “flowering of Orthodox dissent” and the rise of an “underground ‘occulture’” in both Russian capitals.⁷³ In Moscow, the best-known groups include the *Yuzhinsky pereulok* circle, the Judaic seminar led by Mark Pekker, and Aleksandr Ogorodnikov’s Orthodox Christian seminar.⁷⁴ In Leningrad, Shvarts’s closest peers were similarly engaged in theological inquiry, but she did not participate in the religious-philosophical or literary seminars they organized, persistent in her pursuit of a separate agenda.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ellis, *Russian Orthodox Church*, 369-404; Menzel, “Occult and Esoteric Movements,” 151. On the religious renaissance and unofficial culture, see Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 259-264; von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*; Lur'e, “Kak Nevskii prospekt pobedil ploshchad' proletarskoi diktatury,” 212. On esotericism and occultism in the late Soviet period, see also Heller, “Away from the Globe.”

⁷⁴ The Ogorodnikov group is associated with the rise of Russian nationalism that accompanied the 1970s religious revival. See Eilis, *Russian Orthodox Church*, 381-390; Dunlop, *New Russian Nationalism*, 167.

⁷⁵ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 181. In *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, von Zitzewitz speaks of a single religious-philosophical seminar, organized by Tatiana Goricheva, but also acknowledges that sources about its inception and continuity are contradictory (21-22). Goricheva and Stratanovsky indicate that her seminar began in fall 1975; *Samizdat Leningrada* marks the start from fall 1974. The difference may be accounted for by the different venues. Meetings were held at M. Nedrobovo’s apartment from fall 1974 to fall 1975; these could be construed as distinct from a series held at Goricheva and Krivulin’s apartment. Stratanovsky had his own, earlier version. The frequency of meetings is also unclear. Some accounts indicate weekly, others biweekly, mixing the religious-philosophical group with Krivulin’s concurrent philological seminar. Goricheva’s later description (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My_0o2tm7D8) and issue four of *Thirty-Seven* indicate that spiritual and literary topics alternated: one session was devoted, for example, to discussion of Judaism and Orthodoxy in the works of Mandelstam, another to the life and works of Gregory of Nyssa, followed by a paper on the poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov. *Thirty-Seven* editor Natalia Sharymova similarly wrote that the journal had its origins in literary and theological seminars. Rather than faulty memory, these differences seem to attest to a tension between establishing “ownership” of unofficial seminars and asserting their longevity. See Stratanovskii, “Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha;” Ignatova, *Obernuvshis'*, 141; *Samizdat Leningrada*, 417, 445-46; Goricheva, “Religiozno-filosofskii seminar,” 169-170; Sharymova, “Litso Peterburga,” 77.

Unlike most such circles, the seminar organized by Tatiana Goricheva brought together representatives of different faiths, mixing Orthodoxy with esoteric and “new age” traditions.⁷⁶ Krivulin emphasized that his contemporaries’ development of the “Petersburg spiritual lyric” did not only revive canonical Orthodox traditions, adding by way of example that even the poetry of the “super Orthodox” (*kruto pravoslavnyi*) Okhapkin “showed close acquaintance with Blavatsky and sacred Hindu texts.”⁷⁷ Even as they celebrated spiritual diversity, many of the seminar’s participants, including Krivulin, Goricheva, and Burikhin, were baptized into the Russian Orthodox faith. Shvarts later described herself as a “Christian gnostic,” discussed below, but mostly did not affirm ties to any particular belief system, pursuing instead a spiritual syncretism that was in keeping with the high eclecticism of her poetry.

Shvarts was particularly interested in Buddhism, and several scholars have pointed to its relevance to her poetry.⁷⁸ As it happened, the only Buddhist temple in European Russia, the Gunzechoinei *datsan*, was within walking distance of Shvarts’s apartment. Built and consecrated in the early twentieth century, the temple was the first Buddhist shrine in Europe, and helped establish special ties between Saint Petersburg and Buddhism.⁷⁹ Having survived the early Bolshevik anti-religious campaigns, the *datsan* ceased to serve as an educational center and house of worship when the monks were arrested and shot by the NKVD in 1937.⁸⁰ In the post-

⁷⁶ Goricheva and Stratanovsky both emphasized ecumenism in their recollections. See Stratanovskii, “Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha;” Goricheva, “Religiozno-filosofskii seminar,” 169-170. Von Zitzewitz argues that Russian Orthodoxy dominated the worldview of seminar organizers (*Poetry and the Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 23).

⁷⁷ Krivulin, “Peterburgskaia spiritual'naia lirika vchera i segodnia,” 102.

⁷⁸ Bishop, “The Book of Poems in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature,” 179-197; Vorontsova, *Prostranstvo-vremia – Androgin*, 22-28.

⁷⁹ Menzel, “Occult and Esoteric Movements,” 155.

⁸⁰ For histories of the Datsan Gunzechoinei, see Andreev, *Khram Buddy*; Alekseev-Apraksin, *Buddizm v Peterburge*; and Ostrovskaya, “Buddhism in Saint Petersburg.” For an overview of Soviet policies toward Buddhism, see Conquest, *Religion in the U.S.S.R.*, 117-120.

war era the temple was repurposed as a zoological laboratory, where birds nested and were observed.

Poet Yuri Kublanovsky recalled, “In general it was difficult to pull Lena [Shvarts] out of her den [*nora*] and from her verified, so to say, well-trod paths. For example, during White Nights we always walked on the spit [of Vasilevsky island].... [By] the Kirov, I think, Park, her favorite building was the Buddhist temple, which she marvelously likened to a golden filling on a tooth.”⁸¹ The structure worked its way into Venzel’s poetry, cited in the epigraph to this subchapter. Krivulin later declared “at the time, Leningrad was the Buddhist capital of the empire and the abandoned Buddhist temple attracted us like a magnet. [...] The watchman would let us in to the temple of science for a pack of cigarettes.”⁸² For Shvarts, the temple was a gateway to Eastern cultures and religions and demonstration of a multi-confessional Petersburg. Her foreword to the “Discontinuous Tale of a Communal Apartment” (“Preryvistiia povest' o kommunal'noi kvartire,” 1996) presents Petersburg as an architectural *kommunalka*, in which “Orthodox churches, a Catholic chapel, a mosque, a synagogue, and a Buddhist temple live together” (2:153). The unorthodox monastery of *The Works and Days of Lavinia, a Nun of the Order of the Circumcision of the Heart* is similarly ecumenical and includes a Buddhist quarter (2:165-221). Sarah Bishop has shown the particular relevance of Buddhism to this long poetic cycle, arguing that the heroine’s path to transcendence is a literal imitation of Christ’s life and simultaneously a Buddhist quest for Nirvana.⁸³

⁸¹ Kublanovskii, “Pamiati Eleny Shvarts.”

⁸² Krivulin, “Buddistskie ptitsy i zhertvenye zivotnye.” Elsewhere Krivulin identifies the circle of poet Leonid Aronzon and painter Evgeny Mikhnov-Voitenko as the most visible artistic group pursuing a Buddhist concept of creativity in Leningrad in the 1960s (Krivulin, “V poiskakh belogo kvadrata,” 29).

⁸³ Bishop, “Harmonious Disharmony,” 218, 223-226.

As Krivulin's comment suggests, Shvarts's interest in Buddhism was not unusual for her times. The 1960s saw a revival of Buddhist Studies in Leningrad, and a number of their contemporaries were deeply engaged with Eastern faith traditions.⁸⁴ "In my generation everybody was interested in Zen Buddhism and yoga," Goricheva recalled.⁸⁵ Poet Aleksandr Kondratov's 1973 book *Put' v Tibet (The Way to Tibet)* described the life and works of the pre-revolutionary Buddhist scholar and explorer Gombojab Tsybikov. Boris Ostanin and Vladimir Kucheriavkin's translation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* was issued as a supplement to the samizdat journal *Chasy*, where translations of Carl Jung's texts on Buddhism also appeared. More broadly, we can connect these preoccupations to the global surge of interest in Zen Buddhism and Eastern spirituality in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Hippie movement, which did reach Eastern Europe and the USSR, as a number of recent studies show.⁸⁶

The metaphor Kublanovsky recalled – Shvarts's likening of the Buddhist temple to a golden filling in the mouth of the city – was from "Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple," posthumously published with the "green notebook" poetry. Shvarts recited the poem to acquaintances but did not include it in her samizdat-era collections or later typographic publications. Shvarts depicts *prichudlivye* (whimsical, odd) events in recognizable geography and history, cultivating an everyday fantastic that blurs the boundary between the real and imagined. The poem demonstrates Shvarts's interest in spiritual and esthetic hybrids and an Eastern gaze that informed her later writings.

Семь ликов буддийского храма

⁸⁴ Ostrovskaya, "Buddhism in Saint Petersburg," 33.

⁸⁵ Goricheva, "Iz komsomola v ekzistentsializm."

⁸⁶ See Risch, "Soviet 'Flower Children,'" Fürst, "Love, Peace and Rock 'n' Roll;" and Fürst and McLellan, *Dropping out of Socialism*.

Таинственное сходство богов.
 Сами себе отцы
 Священных саг, Вед.
 Близнецы Один, Ягве.

Зоопарковский слон
 Тихо тело пронес
 Вдоль Ростральных колонн
 Цвета жареных роз.

Буддийский храм черней осенних веток
 У Невки – среди тумана, катеров
 И волейбольных сеток, –
 Мерцающая тусклой синевою,
 Как пломба в пасти городской.
 Или как черный слон,
 Дождя макароны глотая
 И пестрой башкою мотая,
 Еще немного бурь и бед,
 И поплывет он, как ковчег,
 К себе туда, в родной Тибет.
 Две телки встали золотые
 У золоченого руля –
 Их бронзовую кровью налитые
 Зрачки кружатся, плыть веля.
 Две золотые телки у руля –
 Божественное колесо,
 О повернись еще немного,
 Пусть тянет душу до порога,
 До занебесного чертога
 Нерукотворный пылесос.
 Город в синем заливе,
 Как в мокром стогу.

Индра усыновил Петербург.
 Как печать, как паук,
 Шива выскользнул вдруг
 И, качаясь, зацвел на снегу.
 Он – как горный склон –
 Руками, ногами оброс
 Там, куда под мышкой
 Наш грозный царь принес
 И выкрасил две вышки
 В цвет подгорелых роз.
 Индра – видишь –
 Этот храм – тумба

Для привязи коней небесных
 У входа в дворик бестелесный...
 Волненье странное – кусты и
 Деревья так целомудренно дрожат,
 Как будто Индия с Россией
 На брачном ложе возлежат
 Среди трамваев.⁸⁷

Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple

[Epigraph] The secret similitude of the gods. / Fathers to themselves / Of sacred sagas, Vedas / Odin and Yahweh are twins.
 The zoo elephant / Quietly carried itself / Past Rostral columns / The color of seared roses. // The Buddhist temple is blacker than autumn branches / By the Nevka – among the fog, pleasure boats / And volleyball nets, – / Flashing a dull azure, / Like a filling in the city's maw. / Or like a black elephant, / Gulping macaroni rain / And wagging its colorful head, / A few more storms and calamities, / And it will take sail, like an ark, / Home, to its native Tibet. / Two golden calves stand / At the gilded helm – / Filled with bronze blood / Their pupils gyrate, commanding to sail. / Two golden calves at the helm – / Divine wheel, / Oh turn about a little more, / Let it pull the soul to the threshold, / Up to the heavenly dwelling, / A hoover not made by human hands. / The city is in the blue gulf, / Like a wet haystack. // Indra adopted Petersburg. / Like a stamp, like a spider, / Shiva wriggled out suddenly / And bloomed in the snow, swaying. / He – like a mountain slope – / Has grown arms, legs / Where, borne underarm / Our threatening tsar brought / And dyed two pillars / The color of singed roses. / Indra – you see – / That temple – is a block / A hitching post for heavenly steeds / At the entrance to the incorporeal courtyard... / Strange agitation – bushes and / Trees quiver so chastely, / As if India and Russia / Will take to the bridal bed / Among the tramcars.

The epigraph to the poem is Shvarts's own, an early instance of what became her common practice. It presents a pantheon-*kommunalka* and Valhalla of mythological mirrors in which the kings of the gods gather. The Scandinavian Odin and Judaic Yahweh are twins, two of the many deities who give birth to themselves and to sacred texts – sagas and Vedas. The anagrammatical connection of *sag* and *ved* with *Odin* and *Iagve* (Yahweh) hints at the syncretic nature of religions, suggesting that the deities and sacred texts are but different faces of the same Divine realm.

⁸⁷ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi,"* 38-39.

Set in a watery Petersburg, carried along the city's rivers, "Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple" follows a route much like the one Kublanovsky walked with Shvarts during White Nights, when the sun lights the northern city round the clock. The vision of the zoo elephant passing the Rostral columns sets the poem in motion. The columns are among the city's most prominent monuments; located at the end of Vasilevsky Island, they face the Peter and Paul Fortress and the zoo on the Petrograd side of the city. Encrusted with nautical motifs, the twin pillars form a symbolic sea gateway through which the unmoored Buddhist Temple sails at the end of the poem.

"Seven Holy Faces" is saturated with architectural details of the Gunzechoinei *datsan*, located on the northern bank of the Greater Nevka river (figures 5-6). Across the canal from the temple is Elagin Island and the entrance to the park formerly known as the Kirov Central Park of Culture and Rest, the source of the leisure imagery (volleyball nets, pleasure ships) in the poem's second stanza. The exterior of the Buddhist Temple remained intact after it was repurposed, and while it was certainly less polished than it is today, the main structure retained some of its luster, which shines in Shvarts's striking image of a gold cap in the maw of the city. The dark mass of the temple with shiny adornments is likened to the elephant "wagging its colorful head" and "gulping macaroni rain," a figure that suggests the waving of its trunk.

The walls and gate around the territory of the Gunzechoinei *datsan* are topped with tridents and spearheads, attributes of the heroic sea realm of classical mythology, but also of the Hindu-Buddhist gods Shiva, sometimes depicted with a trident cross, and Indra, a god of rain and thunder who wields a three-pronged lightning bolt.⁸⁸ Shvarts reads the temple with syncretic

⁸⁸ Shiva is one of the principle deities of Hinduism, but is also worshipped by Buddhists. Indra is an ancient Vedic deity, prominent in Hinduism and Buddhism. Devotion to the elephant-headed Ganesha, one of Shiva's children, is also common to both faiths.

nautical vision, turning it into a ship ready to set sail for its native Tibet. The “two golden calves” at the “gilded helm” comprise a central image of the poem and ekphrastically reflect the gilded statuary ensemble atop the main entrance: a *dharmachakra* (wheel of dharma) flanked by two deer. Shvarts brings them to life; they signal their desire to get underway with “gyrating pupils” that urge the building into motion. Imagining its release from the earth takes the poet’s gaze to spiritual horizons and the contemplation of the threshold of earthly existence. The elevated tone is immediately countered with the surreal image of a “hoover (vacuum) not made by human hands” that exaggerates the upward motion.

The building seems to take to the water and float down the Nevka River towards the *Strelka* (spit), passing the zoo. Indra, the figure who has “adopted Petersburg” in the final stanza, is frequently pictured atop an elephant. The two seem to merge as the vessel, or perhaps as the elephant-headed deity Ganesha. Shiva appears at the bend in the Neva River where the Rostral Columns are located, growing new arms and legs when Peter the Great (“our threatening tsar”) appears with two pillars the “color of singed roses” under his arms, thus returning us to the image and location of the poem’s opening quatrain.

Likening the temple to a “hitching post for heavenly steeds,” the poet returns to the geographical starting point, but the space has become a portal to an “incorporeal courtyard” (*dvorik bestelesnyi*), imbued with spiritual potential. The poem’s last lines end the vision and coyly anticipate the union it has already enacted – the marriage of India and Russia, who retire to the bridal bed. The “seven holy faces” of the poem’s title thus allude to the gods of Hinduism and Buddhism and to shared attributes of gods from different faith systems. Shvarts’s later study of Jung and the collective unconscious would further validate her intermingling of traditions. Her thinking suggests ties to poetic predecessors as well. Philip Redko has connected Shvarts’s

Works and Days of Lavinia, a Nun of the Order of the Circumcision of the Heart to Viacheslav Ivanov and the *Cor ardens* cycle, building on Michael Wachtel's argument that Ivanov "thought in terms of homologies, relying on similarities between myths that were separated both temporally and spatially."⁸⁹ This impulse toward "layering and wide-reaching syncretism" that Redko perceives in the *Lavinia* cycle is already well visible in Shvarts's 1971 poem.⁹⁰

The Buddhist temple reappears in Shvarts's short prose text "Kapala" ("Gabala," 1996), this time in connection with the activities of the main character, a certain Chibikov, who resembles Gombojab Tsybikov, the same Buddhist scholar and explorer about whom Alesksandr Kondratov wrote in his 1973 book (3:319-324). Tsybikov's trip to Lhasa, Tibet resulted in some of the first photographs of the sacred city, as well as a travelogue published in 1919, entitled *A Buddhist Pilgrim at the Shrines of Tibet*. Personal and imperial history intertwine with fiction in "Kapala," a term for a ritual cup made of a human skull. Shvarts imagines a fantastic end for the Buryat traveler-scholar, whose skull is taken after his death to serve as a sacred chalice in Tibet. In part two of the story, the author describes how her own skull nearly suffered the same glorious fate, making it a coda or illumination to her poem "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull."

"Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull"

To create is humanity's primary purpose.
– Elena Shvarts

Shvarts later described the 1973 "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull" ("Elegiia na rentgenovskii snimok moego cherepa") as "*etapnoe*" – a poetic milestone.⁹¹ Classical and

⁸⁹ Quoted in Redko, "Boundary Issues in Three Twentieth-Century Russian Poets," 238. For the original context, see Wachtel's article in Paperno, *Creating Life*, 153.

⁹⁰ Redko, "Boundary Issues in Three Twentieth-Century Russian Poets," 238.

⁹¹ Shvarts, unpublished University of Wisconsin lecture and discussion, November 7, 2007 (author's archive).

Christian imagery intermingle in her metaphysical elegy that presents a gnostic cosmology using baroque figures and flexible polymetrical verse. Prior to a discussion of the poem itself, a brief overview of the gnostic impulse in Shvarts's circles is in order.

"I might be crudely characterized as a Christian gnostic," Shvarts stated in 1999, adding, "I am not Orthodox."⁹² Though she was baptized into the Russian Orthodox church near the end of her life, she was receptive to many other faith traditions, as "Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple" shows. Shvarts's study of gnosticism may have grown out of her fascination with alchemy: active knowledge, or *gnosis*, was a necessary component in the alchemical pursuit of transmutation, a process for transforming matter (lead turning into gold or silver) and a metaphor for alchemist's own spiritual rebirth.⁹³ She alluded to the attributes of gnosticism directly in the two-part poem "Amusements of the Demiurge" ("Priklucheniia demiurga," 1974) and the essay "Earthly Pleroma" ("Zemnaia pleroma," 2000),⁹⁴ and indirectly in works that express the poet's relationship to divine power, such as "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull" and "Kindergarten Thirty Years Later" (1:28-29, 234-235).⁹⁵ The syncretic quality of gnosticism, in which Greek philosophy, Jewish mysticism, and early Christian doctrine intermingle, was germane both to Shvarts's eclectic poetics and sense of biological self. Gnosticism's ties to Graeco-Roman Egypt are also relevant to the mythopoetic origins story discussed at the beginning of the study, in which the poet steps into the world "as if out of a pyramid."⁹⁶

⁹² Shvarts, "Poetika zhivogo. Beseda s Antonom Nesterovym," 323.

⁹³ Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 4.

⁹⁴ The essay was a revised version of Shvarts's 1977 talk on poet Mikhail Kuzmin (3:289-294) that appeared online (<http://www.newkamera.de/lenchr/kusmin.html#text>).

⁹⁵ Shvarts, *Stikhi iz "Zelenoi tetradi,"* 75-76; Shvarts, "Zametki o russkoi poezii," 187.

⁹⁶ Shvarts, *Stikhi* (1987), back cover.

The role of esoteric traditions and gnosticism in Leningrad unofficial culture and in Shvarts's thinking warrant further study.⁹⁷ She was a student of Kabbala and the tarot, knew the works of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jakob Böhme, Rudolph Steiner and Elena Blavatskaya. Works of “esoterica, anthroposophy, occultism and magic, astrology, and the interpretation of dreams” circulated in samizdat, reflecting popular demand for alternative ontologies to both Russian Orthodoxy and state-sponsored atheism.⁹⁸ Daniil Andreev's mystical treatise *The Rose of the World* (*Roza mira*), was extremely popular; it later appeared in the New York journal *Gnosis* (*Gnosis*) alongside poetry by Aronzon, Volokhonsky, Burikhin, Shvarts, and other Leningrad poets.⁹⁹

Shvarts's circles were particularly attracted to the gnostic heresies of the early Christian age.¹⁰⁰ Evgeny Pazukhin wrote that a “demiurgic complex” preoccupied Russian intellectuals in the 1970s.¹⁰¹ Krivulin saw “gnosticism and apocalypics” (*gnostitsizm i apokaliptika*) as a unifying feature of the “Petersburg spiritual lyric” of his contemporaries.¹⁰² He may have had in mind Mironov's *Gnostic Cycle* (*Gnosticheskii tsikl*) of the early 1970s,¹⁰³ Stratanovsky's talk on

⁹⁷ See Menzel, “Occult and Esoteric Movements” and Heller, “Away from the Globe” for sources and vectors of occultism and esotericism during the late Soviet era.

⁹⁸ Dolinin and Severiukhin, “Preodolenie nemoty,” 44.

⁹⁹ On Andreev's idiosyncratic, gnostic-informed theology and *The Rose of the World*, see Epstein, “Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity,” 325-356.

¹⁰⁰ Gnosticism became the subject of intense scholarly attention following the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, or “Gnostic Gospels,” in Egypt. These ancient writings showed, among other things, that gnosticism was a pre-Christian movement rather than its byproduct, as was previously thought. For a concise scholarly introduction to gnosticism and the Nag Hammadi texts, see Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*.

¹⁰¹ Von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 3.

¹⁰² Krivulin, “Peterburgskaia spiritual'naiia lirika,” 103.

¹⁰³ Mironov, *Izbrannoe*, 25-86.

gnosticism for the religious-philosophical seminar,¹⁰⁴ or Shvarts's essay "A View of Existence, or the Path Through the Circle (On Apocatastasis)" ("Vid na sushchestvovanie, ili put' cherez kol'tso (ob apokatastasise)," 1969-1976) (4:242-245). In this statement, human history begins with the fall of Lucifer and other angels who are forced to descend to the earthly world, their opportunity to redeem themselves. Describing the world as an "enclosed and self-sufficient" a space that "feeds on its own decay and death," Shvarts posits a circle of death and rebirth through which the demonic element is purged.¹⁰⁵

Hans Jonas was one of the first scholars to reconstruct the gnostic worldview: a philosophy of pessimism that nevertheless allowed the possibility of self-transcendence.¹⁰⁶ Jonas's critics perceived the influence of existentialism, which arose simultaneously, in his reading of the gnostics. It was gnosticism's existential dimension and vision of a flawed or absent godhead, as much as any of its specific tenets, that resonated with Shvarts and her contemporaries.¹⁰⁷ Poets of marginal status in a totalitarian state, writing after Stalinism, after Auschwitz, they were drawn to a theological paradigm that could account for humanity's genocidal history, which had reached new depths in the twentieth century, especially in the Soviet Union. Their study was filtered through the perspectives of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian religious philosophers and esoteric thinkers: Solovëv, Shestov, Berdiaev, and other "reactionary

¹⁰⁴ Sergei Stratanovsky, conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ A character in Shvarts's story "Prodigal Son" ("Bludnyi syn," n.d.) similarly posits: "The fallen [angels] must rise up through creaturehood [*tvarnost'*]. Through people [*Cherez cheloveka*]" (4:27).

¹⁰⁶ Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, xxxii-xxxiii.

¹⁰⁷ On gnosticism and existentialism in unofficial culture see Sabbatini, "Pathos of Holy Foolishness" and "Leningradskii tekst' i ekzistentsializm."

philosopher-emigrants,” as censors described them, whose works circulated clandestinely.¹⁰⁸

Maria Carlson has described the gnostic roots of Solovëv’s religious philosophy, arguing that he and his contemporaries perceived parallels with their own experience of “existentialism, spiritual emptiness, and alienation from a decadent world.”¹⁰⁹ A similar perception informed the “heretical” interests of the Metaphysical school, a notion that grew out of unofficial circles’ exploration of canonical and non-canonical forms of spirituality.¹¹⁰

In “Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple,” Shvarts pictured the space of Leningrad as a “meeting place” of the deities, whose co-presence has transformative potential. The poet’s skull becomes the space whose transformation preoccupies the poet in “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull” (1:28-30). Shvarts blends Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions in her metaphysical “vision-adventure,” which follows the lyric speaker’s response to a radiographic image of her skull.¹¹¹ The elegy is less a lament than a meditation on the mutual dependence of spirit and body, heavenly and earthly planes, cultural and self-knowledge.

Элегия на рентгеновский снимок моего черепа

Флейтист хвастлив, а Бог неистов –
Он с Марсия живого кожу снял –
И такова судьба земных флейтистов,
И каждому, ревнуя, скажет в срок:
«Ты меду музыки лизнул, но весь ты в тине,

¹⁰⁸ These authors were not reprinted and their works were banned from used book stores, but they were apparently available to readers in Leningrad’s State Public Library, a major research library located not far from the Malaia Sadovaia café described in Chapter Two. On censorship and Russian religious philosophy, see Blium, *Kak eto delalos' v Leningrade*, 71-72. On the broad interest in Russian religious philosophy, see von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 36-37; Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 32, 35, 53, 434; Volkov, *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, 178.

¹⁰⁹ Carlson, “Gnostic Elements,” 53.

¹¹⁰ Shvarts referred to the Petersburg metaphysical school in her discussion of “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull” at the University of Wisconsin (unpublished lecture and discussion, November 7, 2007). The notion was the subject of commentary in Anon., “Literaturnaia anketa” (*Gnozis* 7/8): 253-276. See also Meilakh, “Anri Volokhonskii,” 130.

¹¹¹ On the poem as “vision-adventure,” see Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 9.

Все тот же грязи ты комок,
 И смерти косточка в тебе посередине».
 Был богом света Аполлон,
 Но помрачился –
 Когда ты, Марсий, вокруг руки
 Его от боли вился.
 И вот теперь он бог мерцанья,
 Но вечны и твои стенанья.

И мой Бог, помрачась,
 Мне подсунул тот снимок,
 Где мой череп, светясь,
 Выбыв из невидимок,
 Плыл, затмив вечер ранний,
 Обнажившийся сад, –
 Был он, плотно-туманный,
 Жидкой тьмою объят –
 В нем сплетались тени и облака,
 И моя задрожала рука.
 Этот череп был мой,
 Но меня он не знал,
 Он подробной отделкой
 Похож на турецкий кинжал –
 Он хорошей работы,
 и чист он и тверд –
 Но оскаленный этот
 Живой еще рот.

Кость, ты долго желтела,
 Тяжелела, как грех,
 Ты старела и зрела, как грецкий орех, –
 Для смерти подарок.
 Обнаглела во мне эта желтая кость,
 Запахнула кожу, как полсть,
 Понеслася и правит мной,
 Тормозя у глазных арок.

Вот стою перед Богом в тоске
 И свой череп держу я в дрожащей руке –
 Боже, что мне с ним делать?
 В глазницы ли плюнуть?
 Вино ли налить?
 Или снова на шею надеть и носить?
 И кидаю его – это легкое с виду ядро,
 Он летит, грохоча, среди звезд, как ведро.
 Но вернулся он снова и, на шею взлетев, напомнил мне для утешенья:

Давно в гостях – на столике стоял его собрат для украшения,
 И смертожизнь он вел засохшего растенья,
 Подобьем храма иль фиала.
 Там было много выпито, но не хватало,
 И некто тот череп взял и обносить гостей им стал –
 Чтобы собрать на белую бутылку,
 Монеты сыпались, звеня, по темному затылку,
 А я его тотчас же отняла –
 Поставила на место – успокойся –
 И он котенком о ладонь мою потерялся.
 За это мне наградой будет то,
 Что череп мой не осквернит никто –
 Ни червь туда не влезет, ни новый Гамлет в руки не возьмет.
 Когда наступит мой конец – с огнем пойду я под венец.
 Но странно мне другое – это
 Что я в себе не чувствую скелета,
 Ни черепа, ни мяса, ни костей,
 Скорее же – воронкой после взрыва
 Иль памятью потерянных вестей,
 Туманностью или туманом,
 Иль духом, новой жизнью пьяным.

Но ты мне будешь помещенье,
 Когда засвищут Воскресенье,
 Ты – духа моего пупок,
 Лети скорее на Восток.
 Вокруг тебя я пыльным облаком
 Взметнусь, кружась, твердея в Слово,
 Но жаль, что старым нежным творогом
 Тебя уж не наполнят снова.
 (1:28-30)

Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull

The flute player is boastful, and the God is furious – / He took the skin from the living Marsyas –
 / And such is the fate of earthy flautists, / And to each, envious, will say in due time: / “You
 licked the honey of poetry, but you are enveloped in mire, / You are still the same lump of mud,
 And a pit of death is at your core.” / Apollo was the god of light, / But he grew dark – / When
 you, Marsyas, around [his] hand / Twisted in pain. / And now he is the god of shimmering, / But
 your anguished cries are also eternal. // And my God, growing dark, / Palmed this photo off on
 me, / Where my skull, gleaming, / Having appeared out of invisibility, / Floated, eclipsing the
 early evening, / The denuded garden, – / It was, thickly-foggy, / Enveloped in thin obscurity – /
 Shadows and clouds interlaced in it, / And my hand began to tremble. / This skull was mine, /
 But it knew me not, / It had a refined finish / Resembling a Turkish dagger – / It was of fine
 workmanship, / Pristine and solid – / But that bared grin / Is still alive. // Bone, you yellowed
 long, / Grew heavy, like sin, / You aged and you ripened, like a walnut, – / A gift for death. /

That yellow bone in me has grown insolent, / Pulled the skin over a traveling rug, / Broke into a run and and drives me, / Slowing down by the eyes' arch. // And here I stand before God, yearning / Holding my skull in a trembling hand – / God, what should I do with it? / Spit in its eye sockets? / Pour wine? / Or put it on again and wear it? / And I toss it, that light looking nut [*iadro*], / It flies, clattering among the stars like a bucket. / But it returned again and, alighting on the/my neck, reminded me in consolation: / Once long ago while visiting – a fellow skull stood on the table as decoration, / And led the deathlife of a dried flower, / Resembling a temple or phiale. / A lot had been drunk, but it wasn't enough, / And someone took that skull and began to go around the guests with it – / In order to collect for a white bottle, / Coins poured, jangling, along the dark occiput, / And I took it right away – / Put it in place – be calm – / And it rubbed against the palm of my hand like a kitten. / I will be rewarded for that: / No one will desecrate my skull – / No worm will crawl in, no new Hamlet will take it in hand. / When my end arrives – with fire I will go down the aisle. / But what is strange to me is different – it's / That I don't feel the skeleton in me, / Neither skull, nor meat, nor bones, / More like a crater after an explosion / Or the memory of lost news, / As fogginess or fog, / Or a spirit, drunk on new life. // But you will be my premises, / When the Resurrection whistle sounds, / You – navel of my spirit, / Fly faster to the East. / Around you as a dusty cloud / I will launch upwards, circling, hardening into Word, / But it's a pity that the delicate old curds / Will not fill you again.

Shvarts's vision-adventure begins from afar, with a metapoetic invocation of the flute player Marsyas, whose doomed competition with Apollo cost him his skin and his life: as myth has it, the satyr was flayed alive for his hubris. The outcome of the creative duel between Apollo, god of light and poetry, exemplar of physical beauty, inventor and master of the lyre, and Marsyas, the bold satyr who took up the reed flute dropped by Athena, is a foregone conclusion. The encounter is thus an ideal plot to represent asymmetrical power relations and to call them into question. Boris Ostanin observed, "The myth of Marsyas is one of the central myths of the poet and poetry for Shvarts. The poet is a competitor as Marsyas, and the same fate awaits him; in this sense the fate of the unfortunate flutist is perceived by contemporary poets as deeply familiar [*rodstvennaia*]." ¹¹² Indeed, not only Shvarts, but Krivulin, Ignatova, and Volokhonsky

¹¹² Ostanin, "Marsii v kletke," 275.

engaged the myth of Marsyas in their poetry.¹¹³ Their shared sympathy for the flute-player invites politicized readings such as Ostanin's of Marsyas as an allegory for the underground poet's vulnerability and insignificance in the eyes of the powers that be.

Shvarts's poem invites a metaphysical rather than political reading, however. Marsyas is likened to the poet (the "earthly flutist"), who can only briefly taste the "honey of music" (an allusion to the Scandinavian myth of Odin and his theft of the Mead of Poetry) because of his mortality. In her comments on "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull," Shvarts presented human creativity as a Promethean endeavor that requires an unauthorized crossing of boundaries, emphasizing that anyone who steals the "honey of music," all those who create, "must dare" (*dolzhen derzat'*), in full awareness of their inferiority to the Creator.¹¹⁴ Though doomed to failure, the venture offers "unearthly rewards": to taste the mead of poetry and touch the immortal.

Apollo, the god of light ("bog sveta") and the poet's God ("moi Bog") are intolerant of challenges to their own authority as cosmic architects and superior artists. Apollo's furious response to the mortal recalls the "fury and simplicity" of the unnamed Creator in "Imitation of Boileau." Both resemble the demiurge, a tyrant to be resisted,¹¹⁵ but are also affected by interactions with mortals. Marsyas's suffering at Apollo's hand "darkens" him ("Apollo was the

¹¹³ See Volokhonskii, "Marsii" (1965); Krivulin, "Fleita vremeni," (1972); Ignatova "Marsii" (published 1977). Also noteworthy is Viktor Sosnora's burlesque treatment of the myth in "Moi milyi" (1973). Shvarts knew Benedikt Livshits's memoir *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer* and his translations of French poetry. She certainly also knew his first poetry collection, *Fleita Marsiia* (The Flute of Marsyas).

¹¹⁴ Shvarts, unpublished University of Wisconsin lecture and discussion, November 7, 2007 (author's archive).

¹¹⁵ Gnostics used the term Greek term *demiurgos* (creator) to distinguish him from the true God.

god of light, / But grew dark”). Tainted by this cruelty, he becomes a demiurgic “god of shimmering” (*bog mertsan'ia*).

The mortality of Marsyas is encoded with three words that Shvarts varied and repeated elsewhere: *tina*, *komok*, and *kostochka*.¹¹⁶ The word *komok* (lump) is used in reference to the state of pre-birth and the abandoned mortal body in “Invisible Hunter” (“Nevidimy okhotnik,” 1975) and “Animal-Flower” (“Zver'-tsvetok,” 1978) (1:26-27, 96). The “kernel of mortality” is another key metaphor for Shvarts.¹¹⁷ The word *kostochka* (kernel) is productively polysemous, referring to a fruit’s stone as well as the diminutive version of the same *kost'* (bone) that inspires Shvarts’s poem: the skull.

The darkening of the bright god in the first stanza allegorically models and anticipates the photographic image that the poetic speaker contemplates. Through it Shvarts encodes the play of light and dark that represents her exploration of the metaphysical world. The shining skull appears out of invisibility, much as images come into view in the print photography process itself. Shvarts emphasizes the chiaroscuro of the x-ray, likening it to thick fog in the embrace of *t'ma* (darkness, obscurity). Guilia Gigante has described Shvarts’s poetic practice as the interpenetration of “lightwriting” (*svetopis'*) and “darkwriting” (*temnopis'*), identifying them as the “carrier elements” (*nesushchie elementy*) of her poetry.¹¹⁸ “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull” realizes this principle ekphrastically and literally, *svetopis'* being an old-fashioned

¹¹⁶ Note Shvarts’s pseudonym “Tina Brilliant.” In “Earth, earth, you eat people,” *tlen* (rot) adheres to the heels of all who walk its surface.

¹¹⁷ In Shvarts’s “Article about [Leonid] Aronzon in One Act,” Death informs the audience “I am like a pit inside a berry” (*kak kostochka vnutri iagody*) (4:181). In “Sailing” (“Plavan'e,” 1975) the dead are barely visible to each other, mantled as “grape pips” (*vinogradnye kostochki*) by the transparent sleeping bag of their souls (1:31).

¹¹⁸ Gigante, “Variatsii na temu sveta i t'my,” 74.

synonym for a photograph or dagguerotype. Gigante connects the “regime of lightshade” (*rezhim svetoteni*) in Shvarts’s poetry to Deleuze’s study of Leibniz and the Baroque, in which the “inseparability of clarity from obscurity” reigns.¹¹⁹ Shvarts ascribed similar attributes to the vision-adventure as a genre, describing it as a “complex baroque form” in which inspiration predominates over reason (4:273).

Just as Apollo strips Marsyas of his skin to expose his corporeality and vulnerability, the God in Shvarts’s poem exposes the invisible, strangely impalpable scaffolding of the skull and, by extension, the body. The speaker in the poem admits that the X-ray image shows her skull but claims “it knew [her] not,” being deprived of cognitive abilities. Towards the end of the poem, the speaker also asserts that she does not feel her own skeleton, nor other parts of her bodily composition, thus “reciprocating” her skull’s unawareness of her. Rather, she feels like “a crater after an explosion,” a void of materiality filled with spirit. Yet, the unconscious *kostochka* is the vehicle for the spirit that takes flight into the heavens at poem’s end. The corporeal and the spiritual are interdependent, even when they are not cognizant of that. This is illustrated through the example in stanza four, where the speaker recalls her encounter with a skull divorced from its spirit used as a collection box. Its extreme existence is characterized by the oxymoronic neologism *smertozhizn'* (deathlife). Life has left it, yet its corporeal existence continues, and in this “deathlife” state, the skull appears unprotected from misuse and abuse. The gesture of the speaker who tries to protect it from abuse is a gesture of the spirit.

Shvarts pointed to the antinomy of punishment and reward that connects this episode with the poem’s allegorical opening in her discussion of the poem. Marsyas is punished for encroaching on the Divine. The lyric speaker, by offering protection to her skull’s twin, earns her

¹¹⁹ Gigante, “Variatsii na temu sveta i t'my,” 69; Deleuze, *The Fold*, 32.

reward: salvation. In her comments, Shvarts suggested a capacious non-denominational understanding of salvation that literalized the metaphor of salvation itself: “In fact, the reward is for something else. It could be a reward for a kind of rescue [*spasenie*] of someone from something. Not necessarily the skull from something. The person saved someone from something. Maybe they saved some thought from nonexistence, some feeling from nonexistence, from silence [*nemota*]. Maybe they brought something alive into the world – poetry, let’s say.” In the poem, the speaker anticipates the sacred function the skull will play when the body expires: “When my end arrives – with fire I will go down the aisle.” The last stanza presents a vision of the resurrection: the skull is now called the “navel of my spirit,” the source from which the spirit is born and whose physical properties it acquires at the end, “hardening into the Word,” becoming material.

“Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull” begins with imagery of a darkened demiurge, but its conclusion presents a Christian image of the resurrection, illuminated and animated by immortal fire. The body’s frame is enlivened, taking flight toward the East, the domain of eternal powers. Shvarts attributed an intonational “sigh” (*vzdokh*) to the poem’s concluding lines, explaining as if from the perspective of the lyric heroine: “Still, it’s a pity, that we won’t be resurrected in our previous form. And the ‘soft old curds’ – the brain, that is – ‘won’t fill you again.’ We will not be our former selves anyway, although perhaps we will be better,” the poet optimistically concluded.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Shvarts, unpublished University of Wisconsin lecture and discussion, November 7, 2007 (author’s archive).

The *Lepta* Anthology: Conclusive Separation?

Talents still keep visiting each other, complaining that they are not able to bestow their work on people, so as to receive in exchange what they want from people.

People still do not recognize the talents, while eagerly giving them all that they might want in clothing, food, shelter – everything but the admiration the talents need.

– Vladimir Maramzin

Many unofficial writers and artists retrospectively suggested that there was a moment when they abandoned all hope of official acceptance or recognition. For artist Ilya Kabakov, it was seemingly the 1962 Manège exhibit that shattered hopes that the Soviet establishment would accept avant-garde artistic modes.¹²¹ Writers of Shvarts's circles, in their teens during the Thaw, became disillusioned with the official literary process considerably later. The rejection of the *Lepta* anthology marked a new phase of institutional estrangement for poets with connections to the LITOs or Writers' Union mentors. According to Krivulin, the volume's failure finalized the schism between official and unofficial cultures in Leningrad.¹²² At the same time, *Lepta* made the unofficial culture visible to itself. "Until then," Ignatova recalled, "in the city separate *kruzhki* existed that had little to do with each other."¹²³ Thomas Epstein rightly points to a 1975 shift "from the model of the poet-individualist...to a collective, choral voice" that the project contributed to.¹²⁴ The community's coalescence enabled the important collective undertakings that followed its failure: the samizdat journals *Thirty-Seven* and *Chasy*, the conferences of the cultural movement, Andrei Bely prize, and Club-81.

¹²¹ Kabakov, *60-e–70-e*, 18-19. See also Sinyavsky, "The Literary Process."

¹²² Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata," 352.

¹²³ Ignatova, "Oglianuvshis'...."

¹²⁴ Epstein, "Exiles on Main Street," 12.

The *Lepta* anthology was inspired by the recent successes in the visual arts, as many participants underscored.¹²⁵ In September 1974, nonconformist Moscow artists led by Oskar Rabin had successfully asserted their way to visibility through the infamous Bulldozer Exhibit, when their independent art show in a suburban field of Moscow was shut down with crude force in the presence of international media.¹²⁶ In both Moscow and Leningrad, officials were shamed into authorizing exhibits. Leningrad unofficial artists organized one at the Gaza House of Culture 22-25 December 1974 that attracted huge crowds.¹²⁷ Inspired by their example, in January 1975 unofficial literary circles came together to organize a collective anthology, with the explicit goal of attaining publication. Evgeny Pazukhin proposed the name *Lepta* (*Mite*, or a small contribution). An editorial board was established that included Krivulin, Pazukhin, Boris Ivanov, Kuzminsky, and Yulia Voznesenskaia; they accepted and selected texts throughout spring 1975. The artists' efforts to reach public audiences inspired writers in Moscow as well. Viktor Erofeev pointed to the Bulldozer Exhibit as inspiration for *Metropol* (1979), an "unprintable" anthology of predominantly Moscow authors that caused a much greater uproar than *Lepta*, its earlier Leningrad analogue.¹²⁸

The group lobbied the Leningrad branch of the Writer's Union and then the publisher *Sovetskii pisatel'* (Soviet Writer) for approval of the volume they were assembling.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 26-27, 419; *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 5B:89-138; Krivulin, "Okhota na mamonta;" Okhapkin, "Interv'iu 1;" Shneiderman, "Chto ia izdaval, v chem uchastvoval."

¹²⁶ See Agamov-Tupitsyn, *Bul'dozernaia vystavka* for a history of the exhibit and its impact on Moscow circles and Glezer, *Iskusstvo pod bul'dozerom* for an early tamizdat account.

¹²⁷ Another followed September 10-20, 1975 at the Nevsky House of Culture. Basin and Skobkina, *Gazanevshchina* includes photographs, documentary material, and reminiscences about the exhibits. See also Skobkina, *Leningrad: 70-e v litsakh i lichnostiakh*, 3-24; Novikov, "Chetyre dnia v dekabre."

¹²⁸ Erofeev, "A Murder in Moscow," 52.

¹²⁹ The correspondence, cited below, was reproduced in issue four of *Thirty-Seven* in the "Chronicle of Cultural Life." Digital edition at: https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3A37_4

Correspondence about *Lepta* followed Soviet bureaucratic models, as did the internal practices of the group, with each letter/item being recorded in a register. Their approach repeated models from the human rights movement described earlier: there was an “initiative group” (*initsiativnaia gruppа*) that formally addressed the Writers’ Union Secretariat in a letter that argued for the volume on behalf of its potential readers: “To this day, many poets’ only opportunity for creative contact [*tvorcheskii kontakt*] with readers has been through oral public appearances, which invariably draw the widest possible audiences of poetry lovers. However, these evenings of poetry...cannot satisfy the reader’s demand [*potrebnost*] for the new poetic word.”¹³⁰

Participants agreed not to include any overtly religious or political texts, in the hopes of achieving another important goal: the poems included would not be altered to suit the publisher.¹³¹ These self-imposed restrictions, which ostensibly would improve the volume’s chances, matched those agreed to by artists of the Gaza House of Culture exhibit.

Konstantin Kuzminsky emigrated in 1975, sending ahead a huge quantity of microfilmed material that formed the basis for the nine-volume record of unofficial culture, the *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*. The *Lepta* project took place on the eve of his departure and is well documented in the anthology, which includes *Lepta*-related correspondence and photographs of large gatherings of participants.¹³² Much of the planning took place at the

¹³⁰ Anon., “Sbornik *Lepta*: istoriia, retsenziia P. Vykhodtseva i kommentarii k nei,” 147. Possibly Krivulin and Goricheva’s involvement with a human rights group influenced their strategies. According to Mikhail Sheinker, the two were briefly part of an “Initiative Group for Human Rights” (Komaromi, “Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture,” 605). This is at odds with Krivulin’s own statement that Boris Ivanov’s efforts to recruit him for an initiative rights group in fall 1975 failed, in part due to Krivulin’s dearth of “civic courage” (Krivulin, “Belyi svet nad Chernoi rechkoii,” 213).

¹³¹ Shneiderman, “Chto ia izdaval, v chem uchastvoval,” 52.

¹³² *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 5B:89-431.

apartment of Yulia Voznesenskaia and her husband, photographer Vladimir Okulov. They provided the space, printing resources, and energy that kept the project going. Okulov photographed the goings on.¹³³ Word spread, and within a month people were dropping in at the apartment at all times of the day and night.¹³⁴

By mid-March 1975, the number of *Lepta* contributors had reached 70; soon after it rose to 100. While the editorial board pored over the manuscripts that flowed into Voznesenskaia's apartment, the poets who brought them socialized. Schneiderman recalled the scene at 19 Zhukovsky Street during that time:

There were always lots of people there. Thirty to forty, sometimes more, poets crowded [*tolkalis*] in the corridor, a tiny little room, the big room with a provocatively bare red brick wall, [and] flowed over into the communal apartment. There weren't enough chairs, stools, divans [*kushetki*], or homemade benches; people sat on the floor, someone even stretched out on the lid of the "Red October" piano.¹³⁵

Okulov's photographs show rooms packed with young people smoking and talking. Shvarts occupies a central position in several of them.¹³⁶ Poetry readings, naturally, accompanied the gatherings. Kuzminsky recalled that he, Krivulin, and Voznesenskaia organized as many as fifty over a two-month period.¹³⁷ It seems likely that Prigov's initial encounter of the Leningrad poetry scene, mentioned above, took place during this time, when private-public poetry readings were a daily occurrence. There were disagreements about the scope of the project. Of the 100

¹³³ On Okulov, see Val'ran, *Leningradskii fotoandegraund*, 85-100.

¹³⁴ Ignatova, *Obernuvshis'*, 42-43.

¹³⁵ Shneiderman, "Chto ia izdaval, v chem uchastvoval," 52.

¹³⁶ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 5B:94-99, 102-109. Some of the *Blue Lagoon Anthology* photographs are available at <https://kkk-bluelagoon.ru/tom5b/lepta1.htm>

¹³⁷ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 5B:100. Per Shneiderman the readings, which took place at various locations, continued even the publication project ended.

poets who wished to contribute to *Lepta*, only 32 were included in the manuscript submitted to Soviet Writer publishers.¹³⁸

Sovetskii pisatel' declined the anthology on the basis of a lengthy internal review by P. S. Vykhodtsev “written in the spirit of a political denunciation,” as one participant put it, that framed the authors as a decadent alien element.¹³⁹ The volume reads “like a collection of emigre poets from the 1920s,” Vykhodtsev wrote, criticizing the dark subject matter of poems that presented a “heavy, oppressive reality.”¹⁴⁰ The Leningrad of Pazukhin, Shneiderman, and Erl, he observed, is more like the “dreary Petersburg of Dostoevsky, with dirty streets walked by rag-pickers, drunks, and Raskolnikovs, instead of the present-day flourishing city full of labor, construction, and people’s real concerns.” Some of them (Bukovskaia, Stratanovsky, Krivulin) even “poeticize death,” the critic despaired.¹⁴¹

Shvarts’s poems stood out to the reviewer for their “unity of social and personal cynicism.” He expressed dismay at her depiction of drinking and conflict in “Hunchbacked Moment” (“Gorbatyi mig,” 1974) and “Black Easter” (“Chernaia Paskha,” 1974), concluding that Shvarts’s main theme is “vodka, drunkenness, and all the related anxieties, events, and consequences.” Summarizing his impressions, Vykhodtsev characterized the contributors as outsiders whose poetry was illegible and irrelevant to the new Soviet society:

These poems are the product [*porozhdeny*] of the stagnant atmosphere inhabited by people who have a certain attitude toward contemporary life and are indifferent

¹³⁸ Among them were Leonid Aronzon, Arkady Dragomoshchenko, Vladimir Erl, Viktor Krivulin, Konstantin Kuzminsky, Roald Mandelstam, Aleksandr Mironov, Elena Shvarts, and Sergei Stratanovsky.

¹³⁹ Shneiderman, “Chto ia izdaval, v chem uchastvoval,” 53.

¹⁴⁰ Anon., “Sbornik *Lepta*: istoriia, retsenziia P. Vykhodtseva i kommentarii k nei,” 151-168. Vykhodtsev was a conservative careerist and chair of Leningrad State University’s Department of Soviet Literature. The review contradicted and overwrote a positive one by poet Maia Borisova.

¹⁴¹ Anon., “Sbornik *Lepta*: istoriia, retsenziia P. Vykhodtseva i kommentarii k nei,” 156.

to people. They are too narrowly intended for one own circle. Salon poetry is too far into the past to be of interest to people building a new society, to people who look ahead, not back.¹⁴²

Vykhodtsev accused *Lepta* authors of being mired in the past, but it was their depiction of the conditions of the present – conflict, poverty, and alcoholism – that the critic found most objectionable.

When the final rejection of *Lepta* was issued in spring 1976, the samizdat journal *Thirty-Seven* was already underway and *Chasy* soon would be; both projects leveraged the ready group of contributors that the *Lepta* project had made visible. When the final rejection did come, participants wrote *Lepta*'s history into the samizdat record as an origin myth, making it an instrument of community building akin to the *Chronicle of Current Events*, the bulletin of the human rights movement.

Hidden Transcripts: Leningrad's Thick Samizdat Journals

И жуток крик его полночный
 Как будто стонут петухи
 Но уж теперь-то он воочию
 Напишет пальцами стихи.

And wild is his midnight cry
 As if roosters were moaning
 But now with his own eyes
 He will write poems by hand.

– Aleksandr Mironov

The *Lepta* anthology was imagined as a collective *sbornik* (collection) and one-time literary event. The previous decade had seen a number of such projects – *Lai* (*Bark*, 1962),

¹⁴² Anon., “Sbornik *Lepta*: istoriia, retsenziia P. Vykhodtseva i kommentarii k nei,” 156.

Antologiiia sovetskoi patologii (*Anthology of Soviet Pathology*, 1964), *Fioretti* (*Fioretti*, 1965), and *Zven'ia* (*Links*, 1966).¹⁴³ Periodicals had also been attempted, such as *Eres'* (*Heresy*, 1956), *Litfront litfaka* (*Lit[erary]front of the Lit[erary]dept*, 1956), *Svezhie golosa* (*Fresh Voices*, 1956), and *Optima* (1960-62), but most of these projects ended after a couple of issues or before a single issue was put together.¹⁴⁴ In the early 1970s, there were specialized samizdat periodicals, such as *Kvadrat* (*Square*, 1965-78), devoted to jazz, the literary-historical *Lob* (*Forehead*, 1972), and *Arkhiv*, the art journal of the unofficial Museum of Contemporary Painting mentioned above. The new periodicals *Tritsats' sem'* (*Thirty-Seven*) and *Chasy* (*The Clock/Hours*) were conceived more broadly, in the spirit of traditional Russian thick journals. The first issues appeared some six months apart in 1976. *Thirty-Seven* existed for five years, *Chasy* – for fourteen.¹⁴⁵ With them came the “golden age of samizdat,” Krivulin self-servingly assessed.¹⁴⁶

As discussed in previous chapters, poetry was as much a spoken as written activity in the 1960s, when it was heard, learned, shared, and “improved” alongside guitar poetry, epigrams, and other forms of “oral publication.” Literary domesticity thrived alongside the café scene in the 1970s, with informal seminars and domestic salons of various configurations that shaped the

¹⁴³ Among other sources on these publications, *Samizdat Leningrada*, 417, 392-393, 467-468, 406; Erl', “Neskol'ko dopolnenii.”

¹⁴⁴ Adamatskii, “Vse nachinaetsia s eresi;” Kononov, “*Litfront litfaka*;” Shneiderman, “Chto ia izdaval, v chem uchastvoval;” *Samizdat Leningrada*, 403-404; 422-423; 448-449; 437.

¹⁴⁵ The Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat has a digital archive of *Thirty-Seven* (<https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3A37>). The Andrei Bely Center has digitized issues of *Chasy* (https://samizdat.wiki/%D0%90%D1%80%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%B2_%D0%B6%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B0_%C2%AB%D0%A7%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%8B%C2%BB). Subsequent references to individual issues are to these collections, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴⁶ Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata.”

atmosphere and the existential-poetic lexicon of the *andegraund*. The journals *Thirty-Seven* and *Chasy* documented the wealth of this culture. In addition to original poetry, criticism, and translations, both chronicled the activities of Leningrad unofficial culture through transcripts of debates, discussions, evenings, conferences, speeches, and staged conversations. A stated goal of *Thirty-Seven*, conveyed in all capital letters in the editors' foreword to the first issue, was to "bring [the] culture of socializing out of its prewritten state" (*vyvesti kul'turu obshcheniia iz dopis'mennogo sostoianiia*).¹⁴⁷ The phrase was repeated in the announcement about *Thirty-Seven* that appeared in the Paris-based *Messenger of the Russian Christian Movement (Vestnik RKhD)*, which included a description of the kinds of activities taking place at the apartment that had inspired the journal's name:

Friends gather here, in apartment 37 at 20 Kurliandskaia Street. Here they read and listen. They think, exchange opinions, reflect. A group of friends, united by their interest in philosophy, literature, science, and art, boldly risk to deliberate [*razmyshliat*] aloud. The idea of the journal arose as a natural consequence of shared conversations, an aspiration to "bring the culture of socializing out of its prewritten state."¹⁴⁸

The likely architect of this idea was Krivulin, who wrote elsewhere that a "danger arises – of loss, of dispersal, of the physical destruction of the layer of oral culture that existed in an almost unrecorded, prewritten state. Poets die, their manuscripts disappear, their texts and names are forgotten."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Goricheva, Krivulin, and Rudkevich, "Ot redaktsii," 1.

¹⁴⁸ Anon., "Pervyi nomer novogo samizdatskogo zhurnala '37,'" 316-317. *Vestnik RKhD* was established in the 1920s by the first "wave" of post-revolutionary Russian émigrés. The journal published contributions from Soviet citizens struggling for freedom of religious worship. Material from *Thirty-Seven*, much of it authored by Goricheva, appeared in three issues between 1976 and 1977.

¹⁴⁹ Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata," 352.

A shift towards the written consumption and production of poetry seemingly accompanied the appearance of periodical literary samizdat. Krivulin later lamented: “In my time there was still the voice. The voice disappeared sometime in the late 60s.”¹⁵⁰ Verse still led a spoken and print double life, but poets were working less “from the voice,” as Mandelstam had it. This trend was visible not only to Krivulin. Writing about the state of poetry in 1975, Gennady Aigi observed: “The system of communication between poet and reader has changed. Now it comes not from the grandstand into the hall, into hearing, but from paper (frequently, not typographic) to person, into sight.”¹⁵¹

Thirty-Seven and *Chasy* were Shvarts’s main publication platform for the next five years and thanks to them her poetry began to be codified. Her poetry appeared in quantities that ranged from a few poems to book-length addenda, while the Chronicle section reported events and activities in which she was involved, including her Chimposium, discussed below. Her occasional translations and works in prose also appeared in the journals. Though a prominent contributor, Shvarts was not an active participant in the editorial, production, or distribution processes.

The first issues of *Thirty-Seven* appeared monthly starting in January 1976 and comprised a few hundred pages of original and translated prose, poetry, criticism, and philosophy. Editors Viktor Krivulin and Tatiana Goricheva drew on the religious-philosophical and literary seminars that they organized for content.¹⁵² The journal helped to shape perceptions of Shvarts as a religious poet and contributed to the formation of receptive audiences for her poetry, even as she

¹⁵⁰ Krivulin, “Maska, kotoraiia srosilas' s litsom,” 176.

¹⁵¹ Aigi, “Son-i-poeziia,” 72.

¹⁵² Von Zitzewitz describes the journal as the “press organ” of the religious-philosophical seminar organized by Goricheva (*Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 21).

eschewed participation. Prominently featured in the leading position of the poetry section of the first issue, her poetry seemed to exemplify journal's metaphysical orientation.

Boris Ivanov, who had been involved in the *Lepta* project and was a participant in Goricheva's religious-philosophical seminar, founded *Chasy* half a year after *Thirty-Seven* was established. It debuted in June 1976, initially as an "almanac" that included prose, poetry, documents pertaining to cultural history, and translations of philosophical texts.¹⁵³ *Lepta* organizer Yulia Voznesenskaia was the editor, briefly, of the poetry section.¹⁵⁴ Boris Ostanin, a regular at Shvarts's Chimposium, co-conspirator in mystifications involving Shvarts, and energetic propagandist of her work, joined *Chasy* at the end of the year as co-editor and head of the translation section.¹⁵⁵

While there was significant overlap between the contributors, (kinds of) content, and the audiences of the journals, the two journals had distinct orientations and publishing models.¹⁵⁶ *Chasy*, which cost 12-15 rubles per issue, had less theological content and was broader in scope than *Thirty-Seven*, apparently distributed to readers at no cost.¹⁵⁷ Still, the practice of combining spiritual, philosophical, and literary content, characteristic of the Russian *fin de siècle*, was

¹⁵³ *Chasy* was designated a journal when a "Chronicle" section was introduced in 1977.

¹⁵⁴ In December 1976, Voznesenskaia was detained for scrawling "The CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] is the enemy of the people" on the façade of the Higher Party School building. She was released, but arrested some months later for her production of samizdat. (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 135). She describes her arrest, detention, and exile to Vorkuta in "Zapiski iz rukava," 149-206.

¹⁵⁵ Ostanin and Shvarts later collaborated on a translation of David Mamet's *A Night in the Theater*, published in *Chasy* 43.

¹⁵⁶ For comparisons of the two journals, see Krivulin, "'37', 'Severnaia pochta,'" 74-77; Ivanov, "Po tu storonu ofitsial'nosti," 84-85; von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, 27-28.

¹⁵⁷ Ivanov, "Po tu storonu ofitsial'nosti," 85; Boris Ostanin, conversation with the author, May 23, 2018.

common to both, and the interplay of these modes of inquiry constituted an intellectual and aesthetic crucible for editors, contributors, and readers.

Mystifications and scandals played out on the pages of the journals, documenting the life-creationist tendencies that were nurtured by the generation's engagement with modernism. Pseudonyms were common, serving both conspiratorial and creative purposes. Of the 500 or so entries in the directory of "Proper Names and Pseudonyms" in the *Samizdat Leningrada* encyclopedia, over 175 are pseudonyms.¹⁵⁸ Shvarts often attributed writings other than poetry to alter egos, such as Tina Brilliant, Lavinia Voron, Evgenia Cherniakhovskaia, and Emelian Bondarenko, under whose names her works appeared in *Chasy*, *Thirty-Seven*, and *Bypass Canal*.¹⁵⁹ For practical reasons, too, editors and frequent contributors to *Thirty-Seven* and *Chasy* sometimes had multiple publications in the same issue under different names. Issue 7/8 (1976) of *Thirty-Seven* opened with a selection of Sergei Stratanovsky's poetry and included his contribution to a roundtable debate (*disput*) on "Christianity and Humanism," as well as a work of literary criticism about Mandelstam's poetry attributed to N. Golubev. Boris Groys published his "own" work alongside that of the fictional I. Suitsidov in issue 20. Issue 17 of *Chasy* (1978) included three texts related to Shvarts: a rapturous reading of her poetic-spiritual accomplishments called "Vosmërka logosa" (The Eight of Logos) by Nina Guchinskaia; an extended rant cum review of Shvarts's *poema* "Bliss is not attained through crude means (Horror

¹⁵⁸ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 606-618.

¹⁵⁹ Several 1967 stories and a snippet of the 1968 play about deposed Emperor Ioann Antonovich appeared under the name Evgeniia Cherniakhovskaia in *Chasy* 16 (1979). Her translation of the twelfth-century poet-saint Akka Makhadevi was attributed to Emelian Bondarenko in *Chasy* 17 (1979). Lavinia Voron was the ostensible author of the religious-philosophical essay "A View of Existence, or the Path Through the Circle (On Apocatastasis)," first published in issue 3 of *Obvodnyi kanal*. Shvarts did not use her patronymic (Andreevna) as part of her authorial identity, but her paternal lineage is visible in the Bondarenko and Cherniakhovskaia pseudonyms.

eroticus)” by “A.V.” (Arkady Dragomoshchenko); and a pseudonymous translation by Shvarts as Emelian Bondarenko. The variety of names allowed the cultivation of multiple authorial personae, while also creating the impression that the journals had a larger authorial scope. Some of the identities were seemingly adopted for tamizdat, which may have helped to protect the authors from KGB harassment over their collaboration with “the West.”¹⁶⁰

Thirty-Seven, *Chasy*, and other independent samizdat journals that followed were essential components of the broader curatorial project of unofficial culture to publish materials which were not available in official Soviet publications. The first issue of *Thirty-Seven* featured a discussion of Mikhail Bulgakov and a translation of Søren Kierkegaard, volume one of *Chasy* included a memoir about Pavel Filonov and a translation of Karl Jaspers. In her overview of the journal, Goricheva emphasized that *Thirty-Seven* published materials which “shed light on a whole epoch that has been erased by Soviet historiography.”¹⁶¹ Presenting alternative views of Russian culture and history, the journals filled an important niche in the economy of cultural shortages.

The Host Driving out Demons

Я всегда считала себя солдатом, более или менее (я здесь на службе).

I have always considered myself a soldier, more or less (I'm on duty here).

– Elena Shvarts

¹⁶⁰ Sergei Dediulin provides a “list of pseudonyms and cryptonyms” for *Severnaia pochta* that includes six of his own in “Severnaia pochta (Zhurnal stikhov i kritiki),” 11.

¹⁶¹ Goricheva, “Obzor materialov, opublikovannykh v samizdatском zhurnale ‘37,’” 298.

The poetry section of the first issue of *Thirty-Seven* opened with four poems by Shvarts: three works with overtly Judeo-Christian themes (“Sailing,” “Moses and the Burning Bush,” “Black Easter”) and “Burliuk,” dedicated to *Thirty-Seven* co-editor Viktor Krivulin. Some six months later, issue six gave over fifty pages to Shvarts’s first formally structured book of poetry with the Latin title *Exercitus exorcitans* (*The Host Driving Out Demons*). The collection was a one-time samizdat publication that the journal reproduced.¹⁶²

Works for *The Host Driving Out Demons* were drawn from Shvarts’s poetic corpus to date, with two blocks of poems written between 1967 and 1975 and the *poemas* “Hunchbacked Moment” and “Black Easter,” both from 1974. The collection was divided into three sections, whose labels matched the martial spirit of the title: *Praetoriani* (Praetorians), *Equitatus* (Cavalry), and *Machinae Obsidiales* (Siege Engines).¹⁶³ The labels may or may not have been given by Shvarts, on which more below, but they suggest a historical-geographical “rhyme” of the sort described in the beginning of this study, in which Petersburg, Alexandria, and London are doubles by virtue of their shared physical and symbolic properties. The easternmost province of the Roman Empire, guarded by the Praetorians, is another homologue of Petersburg. The titles also suggest an increase in might from section to section, with shorter works as foot soldiers and cavalry, the longer *poemas* as “siege machines.”

The military dimension of the labels arguably reflects Shvarts’s sense of the spiritual life as a battle and her own role as a warrior in it, a sentiment reflected in the epigraph to this section, which appeared under the heading “I am in the army now” (in English) in *Definition in Foul*

¹⁶² In the *Thirty-Seven* publication, the first *Kinfia* cycle was sandwiched between the “Cavalry” and “Siege Engine” sections. *Chasy* 9 (1978) – an issue explicitly comprised of material from *Thirty-Seven* – preserved the cycle’s sequence, but excluded thirteen poems.

¹⁶³ Shvarts did not retain these titles in future publications.

Weather (3:274). She had written admiringly of Tsvetaeva in 1963: “All her life she tore out of herself everything: sky, stars, soldiers. Because she herself is: a world, a forest, an armed force [*voisko*]” (5:228). Shvarts’s poems similarly emerge as a powerful host led by the poet.

Shvarts scholars Pavel Uspensky and Artem Shelia, who have worked extensively with Shvarts’s domestic archive, present the collection as Shvarts’s first attempt at a superstructure that reflected and shaped the internal ties within her poetry.¹⁶⁴ It is not clear, though, what her role was in the organization or distribution of *The Host Driving Out Demons*, which was explicitly labeled “Moscow 1976.” Shvarts said that she had little to do with her first *sbornik* (collection), entrusting Moscow philologist Vladimir Saitanov to put it together and distribute it.¹⁶⁵ It is possible she underplayed her role, but comments by her contemporaries support her characterization. Igor Burikhin joked that the collection did not really qualify as self-publication (*samizdat*), since it was produced and annotated by others.¹⁶⁶ Olga Sedakova attributed a central role to Saitanov, who “assisted with the publication – or the creation – of Elena Shvarts’s *samizdat* books; collected, collated the poems and wrote an accompanying commentary.”¹⁶⁷

Saitanov’s curatorial role may partly explain why Shvarts did not use the titles or structure of either *The Host Driving Out Demons* or her second collection *Orchestra* (1978) in later typographic publications. She was not, however, completely uninvolved in the preparation of the first book of her poetry. A copy of *The Host Driving Out Demons* found in Shvarts’s domestic archive includes Saitanov’s notes from his conversations with Shvarts about her poetry.

She took the occasion to reflect on her development to date:

¹⁶⁴ Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 180.

¹⁶⁶ Burikhin, “O groteske i dukhovnoi kontseptsii v stikhakh E. Shvarts,” 67. Ostanin mentions a foreword to the collection by an editor who explicitly took responsibility for their arrangement in “Marsii v kletke,” 259.

¹⁶⁷ Sedakova, “Conform Not to This Age,” 65.

There have been two phases in my attitude to poetry (at a conscious age): 1. the creation of scenarios for visionaries – the time of “[Elegy of an X-ray Photo of My] Skull.” (“Skull” is the most vivid example). The change of visions [*smena videnii*]. The most important thing is montage. 2. A poem as a structure in time, [made] of its units. Architecture. A poem is not a flat ribbon of visions, but a bulk [*ob'em*], situated in time, like a church, like a palace, like a barn. And in general, poetry is a semi-material means for the cognition of the immaterial.¹⁶⁸

The titles of Shvarts’s collection do reflect her idea of poetry as a “kind of weapon” and “instrument” for acquiring otherworldly knowledge, as she described it in “A Poetics of What Is Alive” (3:273). There she writes of the vision-adventure as a “supernatural state” in which the vision “creates itself.” “All creative activity is ‘synergism,’” she maintained, a “cocreation of two forces – reason and inspiration (crudely speaking)” (3:273).

Uspensky and Shelia’s broader point that poetic superstructures mattered for Shvarts and that she sought unifying principles in what she had already written is valid nonetheless. A number of her forewords, “forewarnings,” “definitions,” and summings up of a practice or genre are discussed in this study. She organized and reorganized her poetry into sections, cycles, and books based on their genre, lyric persona, and other features.

However large or small Shvarts’s role in *The Host Driving Out Demons*, the compiler of her first collection was clearly one of the participatory scribes of samizdat culture described in the introduction to this study, a reader actively involved in the extra-gutenberg production of Shvarts’s poetry. A less formative, but still important role was played by reader-participants who were empowered to improve, correct, and even amend – by, for example, crossing out a pseudonym and adding the name of the “real” author – the typed texts they encountered and

¹⁶⁸ Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 9. Emphasis (underlining) in the original.

curated.¹⁶⁹ The individuals who helped produce *The Host Driving Out Demons* for *Chasy*, when it republished her first books of poetry in a literary supplement were such figures.¹⁷⁰ A prior republication in *Chasy* 9 (1979), labeled simply *Poems (Stikhotvoreniia i poemy)* had done away with the Latin titles, which had to be written in by hand.¹⁷¹ The supplement restored the initial length, structure, and Latin titles of *The Host Driving Out Demons*, adding Russian translations.¹⁷² Shvarts's first book of poetry was thus subject to the same *mouvance* as individual written and spoken texts, depending on the material means and willingness of the samizdat scribes. The copy of the *Chasy* 19 supplement held in the Memorial Society archives in Saint Petersburg amply demonstrates the variability of samizdat production. In addition to the content from Latin, English, German, etc. added by hand, elsewhere the faint indigo impression was overwritten to make the Russian text legible (figure 7).

Krivulin later asserted that this ethos of collective curatorship was inherent to samizdat culture, requiring readers to fill in symbolic blanks, as well as the literal ones:

Take into your hands any samizdat journal: before you is not a book, but something like a mock-up [*chernovoi maket*]. The idea of a draft copy also affects perception of the texts, usually bound in the crudest possible way. You learn not to pay attention to the typos, to close your eyes to the factual inaccuracies, to look over or deeply into the text. A certain type of samizdat publication brought to life a certain type of reader, whose task included the ability to build out the text [*dostraiivat' tekst*], to continue it, to perceive what did not appear in the text itself with direct obviousness. The samizdat reader was not a consumer of literature, but became one of its creators.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ See the Andrei Bely Center's copy of issue 17 of *Chasy* for an example of the pseudonym reveal.

¹⁷⁰ The journal regularly offered long supplements devoted to a single work or author. These were sold separately, according to co-editor Boris Ostanin. Other supplements included poetry collections by Leonid Aronzon, Arkady Dragomoshchenko, Sergei Stratanovsky, and Viktor Krivulin (*Samizdat Leningrada*, 464; Ostanin, conversation with the author, May 23, 2018).

¹⁷¹ The publication also left out eleven poems, without which the titles would perhaps not have seemed justified.

¹⁷² The addendum is mentioned on the website of the Andrei Bely Center, but no digital copy is available there.

¹⁷³ Krivulin, "Belyi svet nad chernoi rechkoj," 205.

Hybrid Creatures: “Burliuk”

И имена как жребий мы тянем.

And we pull names like lots.

– Elena Shvarts

Shvarts’s poem “Burliuk” (“Burliuk,” 1974) is an exuberant evocation of poet-painter David Burliuk and an homage to Viktor Krivulin, the “main figure of our underground culture” as she later acknowledged.¹⁷⁴ The parallel she establishes between the two is motivated by Burliuk’s role as cultural organizer and the phonetic overlap between his and Krivulin’s name. In stark contrast to the reclusive Shvarts, both Burliuk and Krivulin are remembered as much for their literary sociability and leadership as for their artistic production. Burliuk’s energy and acumen were a driving force of Russian Futurism.¹⁷⁵ Krivulin similarly encouraged and organized bold and talented young poets, including Shvarts herself, whose work he promoted on the pages of *Thirty-Seven*. As mentioned above, “Burliuk” was one of the poems included in the first issue of the journal, which he helped to establish and edit.

In “Burliuk,” as in “Imitation of Boileau,” Shvarts deploys a stylistic ventriloquism that enables metapoetic commentary on the fate of the poet. Combining Classical imagery with Futurist sound patterning, archaic lexicon with brisk rhythmic shifts, she seeks to turn stylistic chaos into synthesis. “Burliuk” reflects Shvarts’s assessment of Krivulin, but also points to broader trends in unofficial culture. The poem claims and celebrates their generation’s modernist heritage, lamenting and likening their marginality to that of neglected avant-garde masters of the

¹⁷⁴ Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiia, vspominat’ o Lune.”

¹⁷⁵ Russian Futurism started as a painterly revolution based on formal principles claimed by the artist-poets brothers Nikolai and David Burliuk, the authors of “Burliukism” who were active in Russian avant-garde circles in the first decades of the twentieth century. David Burliuk emigrated in the 1920s; his artistic legacy was suppressed as “formalism” in the USSR together with suprematism, abstractionism, and other avant-garde movements.

1910s and 1920s. The poem also reflects the collaborative relations between verbal and visual artists that characterized the *andegraund*.

Бурлюк

В. Кривулину

Удивленье
В миг рожденья –
А там уж бык привык,
Что он из круга в круг,
Из века в век –
Все бык.
Но дхнул в свой рог
Дух мощный вдруг –
И бык упал,
И встал Бурлюк.

О русский Полифем! Гармонии стрекало
Твой выжгло глаз.
Музыка сладкая глаза нам разъедала,
Как мыло, и твой мык не слышен был для нас.

Явился он – и Хаос забурлил
И асимметрия взыграла,
Дом крепкий, ясный блеск светил –
Все затряслось, как лодка у причала.

Промчался он ревушим Быкобогом,
Уже безмясый, но живой,
Как перед пьяным – ввысь дорога,
Меж туч клубится орган половой.

(Бывают времена – они свою дитю
Лелеют, нежат, в хлебе запекают
Горячем. Педантичный дух,
Во чревах обходя младенцев,
Им уши протыкает,
Им зрение острит,
На кровь им дышит,
Чтоб быстрее кружила,
Снимает плесень с ока –
Блажен! – и бык тогда становится пророком,
И гении как сорняки растут –
Так много их, но и земля широка.
Но вы – о бедные – для вас и чести больше,

Кто обделен с рождения, как Польша,
 Кто в пору глухоговоренья
 Родился – полузадушенный, больной,
 Кто горло сам проткнул себе для пенья,
 Глаза омыл небесною волной
 И кто в декабрьский мраз – как чахлая осока,
 На льдине расцветал, шуршащей одиноко.)

Давид кубический приплыл
 В страну квадратных подбородков
 И матюгнулся, но купил
 Забвенье – куклою в коробке,
 Забвенье в склепе словаринном,
 А память – в звоне комарином.
 (1:11-12)

Burliuk

to V. Krivulin

Surprise / At the moment of birth – / And then the bull is already accustomed, / That from circle
 to circle, / From era to era – / It is still a bull. / But breathed into its horn / A powerful spirit
 suddenly / And the bull fell, / And Burliuk arose. // O, Russian Polyphemus! The prick of
 harmony / Burned your eye out. / Sweet musique scoured our eye, / Like soap, and your moo
 was not audible to us. // He appeared – and Chaos bubbled up / And asymmetry surged, / A solid
 house, the clear splendor of the luminaries – / Everything began to shake, like a boat at quay. //
 He flashed past as a howling Bullgod, / Already meatless, but alive, / As if before a drunk man –
 the the road is aloft, / Among the clouds the sexual organ billows. / (There are times – their child
 / They cherish, pamper, bake in bread's / Warmth. A pedantic spirit / Making the rounds of
 infant wombs, / Punches holes in their ears, / Sharpens their vision, / Breathes into their blood, /
 So it might circle faster, / Takes the mold from [their] eye – / Blessed! – and the bull then
 becomes a prophet, / And geniuses grow like weeds – / So many of them, but the earth is wide. /
 But you – poor things – for you there is still more honor, / Who is dispossessed from birth, like
 Poland, / Who in a time of deafspeak / Was born – semisuffocated, ill, / Who pierced their own
 throat for singing, / Bathed [their] eyes with a heavenly wave / And who in the December frost –
 like scraggy sedge, / Blossomed on an ice floe, rustling all alone.) // Cubic David sailed in / To
 the land of square beards / And uttered a curse, but bought / Oblivion – a doll in a box, /
 Oblivion in the crypt of the dictionary, / And memory – in the drone of a mosquito.

Linking Krivulin to Burliuk and the mythological figure of the bull, Shvarts formalizes
 his mythic status in the contemporary cultural avant-garde. Her portrait has painterly elements,

and alludes with a light hand to Krivulin's physical asymmetry and his energetic, nimble gait.¹⁷⁶ Krivulin's name, with its root *kriv* ("crooked"), also drives Shvarts's depiction and his association with Cubo-Futurism, famous for its asymmetrical portraiture. There is a visual dimension to Krivulin's classical associations as well. His curly mop of hair lent him a mythological air, as Kuzminsky recalled: "Krivulin, truly, is traditional and archaic. But in his poetry, not life. In life – he is a live wire [*zhivchik*], satyr, and faun."¹⁷⁷

Physically, Krivulin little resembled Burliuk, known for his imposing size. In his memoir *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, Benedikt Livshits described Burliuk as a "monster" (*chudovishche*) and "beast-like man" (*zveropodobnyi muzhchina*). As the "Russian Polyphemus" of Shvarts's poem, Burliuk is likened to the Cyclops blinded by Odysseus, a suggestion of his doubly giant – physical and symbolic – stature, as well as Burliuk's glass eye. Shvarts's follows his Futurist contemporaries in this association. Mayakovsky's poem *Oblako v shtanakh* (*Cloud in Trousers*, 1914-1915) alludes to Burliuk's blindness in one eye through the image of a lacerated eye (*razodrannyi glaz*).¹⁷⁸ Burliuk's unique vision is also emphasized in Velimir Khlebnikov's poem "Burliuk" (1921), where the poet observes: "Silu bol'shuiu tebe pridaval / Glaz odinokii" (Your single eye / Gave you great power).¹⁷⁹ At the same time, Burliuk's paintings and poetry were unknown to the majority of Shvarts's and Krivulin's compatriots, even after his two Thaw-era visits to the USSR.¹⁸⁰ In the late Soviet period, Burliuk was mentioned

¹⁷⁶ Polio maimed Krivulin's legs in childhood, and he moved about with a cane. It also left him slightly cross-eyed.

¹⁷⁷ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4B:180.

¹⁷⁸ Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1:20

¹⁷⁹ Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:330.

¹⁸⁰ Ehrenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*, 1:395-96; Britanishskii, *Peterburg-Leningrad*, 269-270.

almost exclusively in connection with Mayakovsky, who credited Burluk with making him a poet.¹⁸¹

The short lines and sound patterning of “Burluk” also show Shvarts’s study of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov. The opening stanza is particularly full of the phonetic and morphological repetition characteristic of Futurism. The name Burluk, which itself has a Futuristic ring, is a source of the poem’s phonetic patterning, but Krivulin’s name is also embedded in the poem. Shvarts exploits their phonetic commonalities – the sounds *u, k, l, r* – to further her analogy. The *byk* (bull) also seems born of Burluk’s name itself. Stanza one depicts the rebirth and arrival of the title character, the earthly manifestation of the bull; the word and sound repetitions of the opening sequence seemingly enacting its tumble to earth. The animal’s endless passage “from circle to circle” in the astral plane suggests a metaliterary wink at the gregarious Krivulin, ubiquitous in the various circles of Leningrad’s unofficial culture, even as the cycles of birth, death, rebirth point to Dionysian rituals and the myth of the Minotaur.

The sound patterning of the opening sequence continues less intensively in the quatrains that follow, depicting the blinding of the Cyclops and of the “we” of the poem, his arrival, bringing Chaos and asymmetry, and the transformation into a “roaring Bullgod” (*revushchii Bykobog*) who races off, penis flashing. *Bykobog* (Bullgod) is also an epithet of Dionysus in the *Homeric Hymns*, a collection of anonymous poems that invoke and celebrate the Ancient Greek gods, a genre Shvarts draws on and “futurizes” in “Burluk.”¹⁸² Each hymn is a song of praise composed for live performance focusing on a single figure’s origins, deeds, and attributes, as

¹⁸¹ Burluk and Burluk, *Stikhotvoreniia*, 50-51; Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1:20.

¹⁸² Rayor, *Homeric Hymns*, 23.

well as “how he or she obtains or exercises power,” a pattern Shvarts follows to establish Krivulin’s place in the pantheon of contemporary poetry.¹⁸³ The association with Dionysus also evokes the Krivulin that Kuzminsky described as a satyr or Pan figure.

An extended aside comparing prior epochs and the genesis of their gods begins in stanza five. The poet asserts a primal connection between the era and the creatures it gives birth to, contrasting the times when “the bull becomes a prophet” and “geniuses grow like weeds” to the present, when the impoverished “you” who is the poet’s addressee has been “born in a time of deafspeak [*glukhogovoren'e*]” and “dispossessed from birth.” The first sort, the “blessed” ones are tended carefully in the womb – ears pierced, vision sharpened, blood warmed – while the second must enact these rites themselves: pierce their own throats for singing, wash the mold from their own eyes. Such self-made creatures, born half-smothered/strangled and dispossessed from birth, “like Poland,” bloom on an ice floe and rustle in isolation, “like feeble sedge.”¹⁸⁴

The final stanza sends “David” (Burluk) off to a Cubist land, where he “purchase[s] *zabven'e*” – oblivion or obscurity. The box (*korobka*) and dictionary vault (*slovarinnyi sklep*) that he inhabits in Shvarts’s poem recalls one of Burluk’s own writings, the first poem of his “Milker of Exhausted Toads” cycle, which opens with the following lines: “Delved in the vault, hid in the tower / AND CAUGHT the arrows’ whistle” (*Glubilsia v sklepe, skryvalsia v bashne / I ULOVIAL pevuchest' strel.*)¹⁸⁵ The oblivion of the crypt (as a body, “a doll in a box,” or name)

¹⁸³ Rayor, *Homeric Hymns*, 14.

¹⁸⁴ Shvarts’s evocation of life in the womb alludes to Dionysus’s mythological origins: tricked by Hera, the pregnant Semele was consumed by fire when Zeus appeared to her in his real guise. He rescued the unborn Dionysus from Semele’s womb and sewed him into his thigh to complete gestation. Some translations of the “Hymn to Dionysus,” preserved only in fragments, render the obscure epithet *eiraphiota* as “sewn god,” “insewn,” or “sewn into the thigh.” See Rayor, *Homeric Hymns*, 113.

¹⁸⁵ Burluk and Burluk, *Stikhotvoreniia*, 140. Emphasis in the original.

is juxtaposed with the memory that is carried on and absorbed by the undying sound, the sounding word of poetry.

Like “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull,” “Burluk” addresses the place and fate of the artist, but here Shvarts speaks of the collective rather than individual lot. She dramatizes and heroicizes the cultural isolation of her contemporaries in the *andegraund*, drawing on shared metaphors for the era: silence, muteness, and a lack of breathing room.¹⁸⁶ The age of “deafspeak” is physically and spiritually inhospitable to its children, born “half-smothered, sick,” who nonetheless endeavor to recover poetic tradition “almost from scratch” to counter their generation’s inaudibility in the contemporary cultural landscape.

There is no doubt that Livshits’s memoir *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer* (*Polutoraglazi strelits*, 1933) was a formative influence on Shvarts and her circle’s perception of early twentieth-century experimental poetry. Sergei Stratanovsky recalled borrowing the rare book from her in the 1960s, as mentioned in Chapter One.¹⁸⁷ Krivulin also pointed to the importance of Livshits’s memoir, together with the early Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov and “everything connected with Futurism.”¹⁸⁸ In the preface to *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, Livshits wrote that Futurism “died without heirs.”¹⁸⁹ Shvarts controverts this assertion in “Burluk.” We might read her poem dedicated to Krivulin as a restaging of the Mayakovsky-Burluk relationship, a self-elevating gesture.

¹⁸⁶ Aizenberg, “K opredeleniu podpol'ia,” 173.

¹⁸⁷ Stratanovsky, statement at Saint Petersburg event in memory of Shvarts, May 21, 2018; Conversation with the author, May 26, 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Krivulin, “Maska, kotoraiia srosilas' s litsom,” 173.

¹⁸⁹ Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, 33.

Aping Tradition: The “Chimposium” (1976-1982?)

We play the holy fool in the world in order
to be free. We transform everyday life into
anecdotes.

– Viktor Shklovsky

Я живой, но из жизни изъятый
По своей, по чужой ли вине?
И любой человек обезьяний
И полезен и родственен мне.

I am alive, but removed from life
Through my own or another’s fault?
And any simian person
Is both useful and kindred to me.

– Sergei Stratanovsky

Shvarts established a “private society” (*privatnoe obshchestvo*) in her Novaia Derevnia apartment in the mid-1970s sometime after the *Lepta* project began (3:282).¹⁹⁰ The *Shimpozium*, or “Chimposium,” was a mock salon whose participants had primate-themed nicknames that suggested familial or monastic relations, including the hostess, who masqueraded as “sister Chimp” (*sestra Shimp*) (3:282). Regulars at Shvarts’s apartment salon included Krivulin (brother Orang), Ostanin (brother King Kong), Viacheslav Dolinin (brother Lemur), Erl (brother Tarsier), Pazukhin (brother Sloth), Boris Groys (brother Hanuman/Langur), Goricheva (sister Tamarin), and Bella Ulanovskaia (sister Marmoset).¹⁹¹ Gatherings were divided into formal and informal

¹⁹⁰ There is little agreement about the date the Chimposium was established. The *Samizdat Leningrada* article on the society indicates 1975 (465). Issue 12 of *Thirty-Seven*, dated fall 1977, states they started “about a year ago.” The introduction to *Samizdat Leningrada* has the dates as 1978-1982, but this is clearly not correct, as Shvarts’s preserved talks from the Chimposium date to 1977-1978 (3:289-297).

¹⁹¹ No sources indicate if Shvarts or someone else invented the names. Possibly they were collective creations. Different accounts have different nicknames for some participants. Viacheslav Dolinin, for example, is “brother Lemur” in *Samizdat Leningrad* (465) and “brother Mak” in Shvarts’s essay “Obez’ian’i pryzhki” (3:282). Dolinin,

segments; participants gave short talks (*doklady*) on topics designated in advance in the formal part. One *doklad* was to be on a historical topic, another on a literary one.¹⁹² Afterwards came a social hour with creative, and apparently rather strong, cocktails. The talks were assessed through a voting system that involved colored shoestrings: black (best), white, and red (worst).¹⁹³ Participants wove these into a “monkey tail” worn as a garland around the neck or wrist. A chieftan (*vozhak*) was named for each session, whose attribute of power came in the form of an “enormous dried seedpod from a plant of unknown tropical origin.”¹⁹⁴ The *vozhak* was permitted to carry on aggressively: interrupt speakers, beat herself on the chest in a sign of elation or dissatisfaction – to monkey around, in short.

The name “Chimposium” points to classical antiquity and Russian modernism simultaneously, suggesting a hybrid of Plato’s Symposium and Aleksei Remizov’s Great Free Order of the Apes (*Obez'ian'ia velikaia i vol'naia palata*), or *Obezvelvolpal*. Remizov’s Order is hard to classify as an institution, being dispersed through multiple texts in a variety of media created over a fifty-year period.¹⁹⁵ *Obezvelvolpal* was a creative order and a symbolic chancellery, one that eventually manifested itself as a physical space, the “*kukushkina*” *komnata* (“cuckoo” room) filled with fetishes and talismans endowed with names and plots that Remizov meticulously maintained in his Paris apartment in the last decades of his life.¹⁹⁶ The

who occasionally hosted the Chimposium, stated that foreign visitors also participated (Valieva, *K istorii neofitsial'noi kul'tury*, 152.)

¹⁹² *Samizdat Leningrada*, 465. The entry specifies that the historical talk was to treat a day in history that had a significant impact.

¹⁹³ Evgeny Pazukhin recalled that the voting was rather strict (Valieva, *Sumerki “Saigona,”* 169).

¹⁹⁴ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 465.

¹⁹⁵ The most comprehensive source on the *Obezvelvolpal* is Obatnina, *Tsar' Asyka i ego poddannnye*.

¹⁹⁶ Sedykh, *Dalekie, blizkie*, 104; Reznikova, “Iz vospominanii o A. M. Remizove,” 366-368.

Obezvelvolpal “meetings” were mostly created retrospectively in Remizov’s writings, a mystification, and yet not.¹⁹⁷ There is a rich graphic legacy that accompanies the *Obezvelvolpal*, including elaborate charters and certificates for its members, ostensibly signed by its potentate Tsar Asyka *sobstvennokhivostno* (by his own tail). No such visual material remains of the Chimposium. It was less central to Shvarts’s personal mythology and certainly less intensively mythologized retrospectively. Other than a brief memoir, she did not revisit the Chimposium in the post-Soviet period (3:282-288).

Shvarts stated that the idea for the Chimposiums came to her without knowledge of Remizov, but a participant pointed to the connection at the first gathering.¹⁹⁸ The meetings, which ostensibly occurred on a monthly basis for some seven years, are not well documented. Most of what we know about them comes from Shvarts’s reminiscence “Monkey Capers” (“Obez’ian’i pryzhki,” 1996) and a thin entry in the encyclopedia *Samizdat Leningrada*, two of whose compilers were Chimposium participants (3:282-288). Only a couple of the talks seem to have been preserved, and the assertion that they were “carefully prepared, but preserved with rare exception” smacks of mystification.¹⁹⁹ However, Boris Ostanin fondly recalled the

¹⁹⁷ The Obezvelvolpal had its origins in a game with Remizov’s niece. Its literary appearance came in his 1909 play *The Tragedy of Judas, the Prince of Isacariot*, in which the hero, the primate Tsar Asyka, awards ape badges to other characters.

¹⁹⁸ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 183. Remizov suffered significant erasure by the Soviets and local sources in print were thin until publications marking the anniversary of the writer’s birth and death (1877-1957) began to appear around the same time the Chimposium began. There are a few sources that participants must have known, starting with Ehrenburg’s *People, Years, Life* – a primer on pre-revolutionary socializing for Shvarts’s generation – published in installments in *Novyi mir* (New World) and *Iunost’* (Youth) in the early 1960s and later in multi-volume book editions. Ehrenburg’s chapter on Remizov mentions the Order and gives some small details about the “game” (*igra*), as Ehrenburg describes it, including his own rank in the secret order: “cavalier with the beetle proboscis” (*kavaler s zhuzhulinym khobotkom*). A reproduction of the “Primate Certificate” Remizov issued to Anna Akhmatova appeared in the 1974 Annual of the manuscript division of Pushkinskii dom (Timenchik and Lavrov, “Materialy A. A. Akhmatovoi v rukopisnom otdele,” 66).

¹⁹⁹ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 465. See also Kovaleva and Val’e, “O Viktoru Krivuline.”

gatherings, the cocktails, and his own talk on Aleksandr Vvedensky and Albert Schweitzer, if not the red shoelaces he received from sister Chimp and sister Tamarin in response.²⁰⁰

Shvarts's description of the society's meetings indicates that the literary presenters were expected to analyze a particular poem, but she did nothing of the sort in her talks on poets Mikhail Kuzmin ("Water – Killer and Savior") and Afanasy Fet ("On Behalf of a Mirror") (3:289-297). She applied her own "intuitive-mechanical method" (*intuitivno-mekhanicheskii metod*) to their work as a whole, offering and explaining an elemental key to understanding that appears in various guises in their poetry – a core archetype that drives its imagery (3:284, 4:260).²⁰¹ This master symbol has a philosophical dimension that animates and illuminates the worldview of the poet, who becomes "The Throat of Elements" (*Gorlo stikhi*) as she labeled these and other short literary studies (3:294). The poet does not choose, Shvarts explained, but is chosen by the element or object, which could be "anything at all, from the Moon to seaweed" (3:284). The talks argue that Kuzmin's element is water, Fet's – a derelict (*broshennoe*) mirror.²⁰²

Participants in the Chimposium were strictly forbidden to address each other by their real names, thus Shvarts delivered her "Throat of Elements" talks in the role of sister Chimp. The atmosphere established by the nicknames and exotic accoutrements was further theatricalized in Shvarts's talk on Fet, given as if from the personified perspective of the mirror (*ot imeni zerkala*). The mirror-presenter argues that Fet's lyric speaker is unwilling to look at and into himself, for fear of revealing his monstrousness. He casts aside the mirror, but being mirror-like

²⁰⁰ Boris Ostaniin, conversation with the author, March 14, 2017.

²⁰¹ Olga Sedakova suggests a similar concept through her references to the "sverkhslovo" of her contemporaries in "Muzyka glukhogo vremeni," 265.

²⁰² In a later writing, Shvarts described Mayakovsky's archetype as a "flying sphere" (*letiashchii shar*) (4:260).

himself, reflects the sky, clouds, and stars above. Shvarts points to other reflective surfaces in Fet, closing her talk with a citation from his poem “Lastochki” (Swallows). It is intriguing to imagine how this role-play-within-a-role-play might have been performed by Shvarts, who ironizes its solipsism with a joke about delusions of grandeur.

She reiterated in a 2003 interview that the Obezvelvolpal connection was a coincidence, insisting that the Chimposium’s goals were distinct from Remizov’s and that its *shutovstvo* (buffoonery) was superficial and different in nature, a way to make fun of serious scholarly assemblies.²⁰³ Others involved in the Chimposium seem to have embraced the association with Remizov, only to dismiss it in favor of an even more venerable legacy. *Thirty-Seven* included a note about the “Simian society” (*Obez'ian'e obshchestvo*) in issue twelve (fall 1977), followed by the text of Shvarts’s talk on Kuzmin and her one-act play about Leonid Aronzon, both labeled “From the ‘Throat of Elements’ cycle.”²⁰⁴ The note mentions Remizov, but asserts that despite the “obviously imitative name” the society has little in common with Remizov’s famous ape kingdom. Rather, the anonymous author asserts, it belongs to the greater Petersburg lineage of parodic literary societies of the early nineteenth century and Arzamas in particular.

Mikhail Berg’s 1983 roman a clef *Momemury* made a number of references to the Chimposium and its traditions; in many cases, Berg used the same nicknames to disguise the characters in his group portrait of late 1970s Leningrad, including brother Lemur, brother King Kong, brother Tarsier, brother Sloth, and brother Hanuman/Langur.²⁰⁵ (Shvarts is transformed into Madame Viardot and Krivulin into Count Kaliostro.) The novel’s metaphorical geography,

²⁰³ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 183.

²⁰⁴ Anon., “Shimpozium,” 103-112. The author of the prefatory note seems to be Boris Ostanin.

²⁰⁵ *Momemury* circulated in samizdat, then was published serially in the journal *Vestnik novoi literatury* (1993-1994). A version is also available on Berg’s website at <http://mberg.net/proza/momemuri/>

like the names, suggests ties to the satirical utopia: the poets dwell on an island colony rather than in the metropole. *Momemury* brings together not just the Chimposiums, but Club-81, the Andrei Bely literary prize, and a legendary birthday party at Sergei Stratanovsky's apartment, thereby consolidating institutions and legends about Shvarts's circles. Berg's text, which he refers to as an "epic" (*epopeia*), is indeed long (some 300 pages) and complicated, full of *andegraund* gossip. In the preface he wrote, "Real facts were supplemented with rumors, myths, for the reservation described [*opisyvaemaia rezervatsiia*] was verbal in its existence and mythologizing in its essence." It is mostly, the preface continues, about the bohemian characters that chance brought the author into contact with, whose "distinctiveness [*svoeobrazie*] was in striking opposition to their miniscule [*mizernaia*] renown and influence on the world around them."²⁰⁶ The fate of *Momemury* itself, described by Vladimir Erl (Brother Tarsier) as a "very untimely book" (*kraine nesvoevremennaia kniga*), was similar.²⁰⁷ The work seems to have gained only the attention of samizdat readers, the metaphorical inhabitants of the same narrowly circumscribed island community Berg depicted. Later published by an obscure press, absent from academic libraries, *Momemury* never found its way to aboveground audiences.

The Chimposium erased art-life boundaries in Shvarts's circle and facilitated the rise of explicit role playing in her poetry. Her first masked cycles, attributed to Kinfia, the Roman poetess "famous not only for her talent but also for her ill humour" (2:5) were written during the same time frame as the gatherings (2:5-24).²⁰⁸ The mask-within-a-mask device of her Chimposium talks later returned in the poetry of Shvarts's Estonian alter ego, Arno Tsart, who

²⁰⁶ Berg, "Predislovie k tret'ei redaktsii."

²⁰⁷ Klimentovich, "Kommentarii k romanu *Momemury*."

²⁰⁸ See Barker, "Russia's Classical Alter Ego," 82-122 for discussion of the Kinfia cycle and its relationship to aniquity.

wrote from the perspective of a shape-shifting Chinese werefox (2:35-60). The spirit of literary play was catching. Boris Ostanin (brother King Kong) encouraged the proliferation of Shvarts's and others' personae and pseudonyms on the pages of *Chasy*. He launched his own series, the Oredezh Readings, conceived in the spirit of the Chimposium and other literary salons of the recent past. Aleksandra Petrova credited Ostanin and Kirill Kozyrev with a charter and mythology of the "community of lie-abouters" (*sodruzhestvo lezhunov*), who "flaunted their laziness" (*bravirovali len'iu*) in opposition to a culture of superficial busy-ness.²⁰⁹ The lie-abouters were seemingly successful – the only trace of the Readings is Ostanin's theatrical *doklad* (talk) about Shvarts's poetry, entitled "Marsyas in a Cage," in which Ostanin himself wore multiple masks.²¹⁰

Small Epics and a "Hunchbacked Moment"

...Ибо путь комет –
Поэтов путь.

...For the path of comets –
is the path of poets.

– Marina Tsvetaeva

Quand les comètes vont et viennent, formidables,
Apportant la lueur des gouffres insondables,
À nos fronts soucieux,
Brûlant, volant, peut-être âmes, peut-être mondes,
Savons-nous ce que font toutes ces vagabondes
Qui courent dans nos cieux?

– Victor Hugo

²⁰⁹ Petrova, "Oredezhskie chteniia," 257.

²¹⁰ Ostanin, "Marsii v kletke," 262-301.

Shvarts's *malen'kie poemy* (small verse epics) bookend her most productive, inspired years. She wrote fourteen of them between 1974 and 1996.²¹¹ Assembling them for the 1999 “white book” of her collected poetry, she commented on her favorite genre²¹² in a foreword (*predovedomlenie*):

The small verse epic [*malen'kaia poema*] is neither a new nor old genre. It has been forgotten and does not come easily. All of “The Trout Breaks Through the Ice” by Kuzmin is written in this mode [*v etom rode*], as are many of Khlebnikov's works.

In essence, it is not a “*poema*” at all. But how else is one to call it? Some musical term might be more appropriate.

Its exceedingly discontinuous plot development distinguishes it from the “*poema*” proper. The plot [*siujet*] of a regular *poema* flows like a river, that of a small one now hides under the earth, now unexpectedly crashes down from the heights, now returns to its source.

At the same time, the plot itself often consists of a battle of metaphysical ideas, visions, feelings, whimsically mixed with the mundane events. The counterpoint always finds a harmonious resolution to the contradictions.

In that sense, it is a small tragedy [*malen'kaia tragediia*], with a protasis, apotheosis and catharsis, monologues and choruses. (2:62)

Shvarts's first efforts in this form were labeled more traditionally, simply as *poemy*. Following a failed attempt at a “Kiev *poema*,” she wrote “Hunchbacked Moment” (“Gorbatyi mig”) and “Black Easter” (“Chernaia Paskha”) back to back in spring 1974, combining them in a typescript booklet labeled “Dve *poemy*” (Two verse epics).²¹³ She later began qualifying these and subsequent *poemy* as “small,” an addition that accounted for their brevity compared to traditional *poemy*, long narrative works that can have thousands of lines.²¹⁴ The revised label also reflected

²¹¹ Shvarts wrote a final, fifteenth small epic in 2006: “New Year's Capriccio” (“Novogodnee kaprichcho”) (3:96-103).

²¹² Epstein, “Velikansha malen'koi poemy.” I am grateful to Thomas Epstein for sharing the English version of his essay with me.

²¹³ Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 5.

²¹⁴ Aleksandr Blok, by contrast, characterized his “Vozdmezdie” (“Retribution”) as a “big *poema*.”

the poetics of contradiction that Shvarts cultivated; as scholars have pointed out, *malen'kaia poema* is “itself an oxymoron.”²¹⁵ Shvarts’s allusion to Pushkin’s cycle of short plays, *Little Tragedies* (*Malen'kie tragedii*) hints, meanwhile, at the canonical connotations of the genre. Pushkin’s *Ruslan and Liudmila*, a fairytale *poema* replete with transformations, play of proportions, and flying cut off heads, informed Shvarts’s surreal experiments of the “green notebook;” its imagery and tonality are also palpable in “Hunchbacked Moment.”

In the reflection quoted, Shvarts acknowledged that her thinking about the *poema* as a genre was informed by Mikhail Kuzmin’s “Trout Breaks Through the Ice” (“Forel' razbivaet led,” 1927), a narrative cycle whose “natural syncretism of the tragic and the mildly comic, of the simultaneously lyrical and the mystical” appealed to her.²¹⁶ She applied Kuzmin’s method, appropriating and reworking bits of his cycle in the process. Kuzmin’s ability to bring a light touch to dark subjects inspired Shvarts, who saw herself enacting a tragicomic role in her poetry.²¹⁷ True to this spirit, in “Hunchbacked Moment” Shvarts essayed to balance the petty and mundane with the eternal, the intimate with the universal, and the childish with the adult.

Shvarts’s minimalist approach to the *poema* was counterbalanced by metaphorical abundance and layers of allusions. Taking seaward her metaphor above of the subterranean currents that feed and animate these works, a steady undertow of other texts is palpable in “Hunchbacked Moment:” in addition to “Trout Breaks through the Ice” and *Ruslan and Liudmila*, there are traces of *Hamlet*, Pëtr Ershov’s fairy tale *Koněk Gorbunok*, as well as poems by Victor Hugo translated by Benedikt Livshits. The discussion below, of necessity incomplete, is an intertextual analysis that focuses on these intertwined sources.

²¹⁵ Bishop, “Harmonious Disharmony,” 213. See also Epstein, “Velikansha malen'koi poemy.”

²¹⁶ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 183.

²¹⁷ Shvarts, “Vstrecha s Elenoi Shvarts,” 183.

Горбатый миг

1

В Сингапуре пестрых дней
 В розовой кружась лодке,
 По волнам веселой водки
 Я ныряла среди теней,
 Счеловеченных неловко.
 Горою вспучился Залив.
 Миг, нечто значащий, горбат.
 И звезд вдруг удлиниться гвоздья,
 Сосен мерзнущие гроздья –
 Тяжкий зимний виноград –
 Он чуть подсолен, чуть в укор.
 Чего ты вздыбился, Залив?
 Но он молчит, как будто горд,
 Что к небу бросил, не спросив,
 Зеленый непрозрачный горб.

2. Пробуждение

Заката острая игла
 Кровавая накалена,
 Прямо в сердце впиться хочет,
 В сердце, слабое со сна.
 Болят соски – натерты
 Небритою щекой.
 Ты мне чужой, как мертвый,
 Мертвец не так чужой.
 В зеркало косо взгляну –
 Глаза камикадзе,
 Только светлей,
 Да сигарета пыхтит веселей
 И небрежней.
 Вдруг быстро и нежно
 Мандолина возле уха
 Пробежала бойким пони,
 Только, только я проснулась,
 А корабль дня уж тонет.
 Засыпала на рассвете
 И проснулась я под вечер,
 И неделями мне светят
 Только лампы, спички, свечи.
 Пахнет блуд кавказской травкой,
 И козел бежит к козлице –
 Для кого-то они блюда,
 Для кого-то они боги,

Для кого-то облака.
 И змеи шипенье в страсти,
 Потные хладеют руки
 На краю как будто счастья
 И в краю смертельной скуки.

3

О несданные бутылки,
 Обниму вас, соберу вас,
 Ваши шеи и затылки.
 С вами я спущусь в подвал,
 Где лампа тонко
 Пищит и будто бы чадит,
 Где очередь стоит
 Обиженным ребенком.
 Бог тоже там, но Он пока молчит,
 Хоть слышит Он молитву из бочонка.
 Он запах перегара, водки, гнили
 Вдруг превратит в чистейшую из лилий,
 И всё, что стоило нам слез,
 И всё, что было нам как груз,
 И вся тоска уйдет в навоз,
 Чтоб дивный сад на нем возрос
 Для Диониса и для Муз.

4

Я в заснеженном Египте,
 Я в развале пирамид –
 Будто кто глушил пространство,
 Бросил страшный динамит.
 Зачем комета к нам летит?
 Зачем ты вспучился, Залив?
 Ответ лежит под белым дном,
 Драконом невысоких гор,
 Как дева шарфом на ветру,
 Загородился.
 И побережье всё как спальня,
 Где детский сад в свой тихий час резвился,
 Где в перьях и подушках пол,
 Сползли матрасы, клочья ваты ...
 Что значит этот миг горбатый?
 И что сломалось нынче в мире?
 Хоть не узнать нам нипочем,
 Мы все гадаем – кто на чем:
 На воске кто, кто – на Шекспире.
 Быть может, просто чернь минут

Задумала времен сверженье,
 Но потерпела поражение,
 И белый царствует террор.
 В небытие мятежников угонят.
 Как, впрочем, всех. Рисунок на ладони
 Сместился. Куда-то линии полезли,
 И я гляжу в глаза созвездий,
 Подернутых молочной пленкой,
 Щенка невиннее, ребенка –
 Они не знают ничего.
 Ветшает ткань небес,
 Свежа одна лишь булка.
 Луна свисает ухом недоумка,
 Куда блохою космонавт залез.

5

Как женщина, когда она в разводе,
 Румянится, и шьет, и красит брови, –
 Паук, когда и мух-то нет в заводе,
 Уж в январе свой цепкий ромб готовит.
 И я вот так – иду сдавать бутылки,
 Хотя на сигареты мне б хватило,
 Так жалко их – как будто я на рынке,
 Они – цыплята, я их год растила,
 Они звенят, они пицат в корзинке.

6

Гляну в зеркало – и снова детский вид,
 Время, что ли, во мне стоит?
 И сломались во мне часы?
 И не слышу я свиста косы?
 И я опять подросток нервный,
 То жалко грубый, то манерный?
 И запылились только веки,
 С них не смахнуть уже вовеки
 Пыльцу дорожную времен.

7

.

8

Ночью проснулась от крика –
 Да это же мне подпиливают переносицу:
 Два-три взмаха
 Напильником,
 И путь от глаза до глаза

Опасен – грозит обвалом.
 Ах, горб лица, и ты болишь!
 Вселенную уронили ребенком,
 И она всё еще плачет,
 Она горбата.
 Я видела вчера горбунью юную в аптеке,
 Она торговала – такая веселая, впрочем,
 Мужчина в одежде рабочей
 Попросил у нее презервативы,
 Так беззащитно и кокетливо
 Она ему их подала
 И улыбнулась так приветливо ...
 Чужая боль – как музыкант за стенкой.
 Мозг раскололся, и любая белка
 Его достанет сточенным когтем,
 Дыша, кусая мелко-мелко
 И в лапках комкая, – для друга своего
 Несет комочек в домик поднебесный,
 Чтоб вместе слопать им святое вещество
 И снова ждать, когда оно воскреснет.

9

Что же значил этот миг?
 Отчего он стал горбат?
 Но что-то значил он.
 Я слышала какой-то крик,
 Какой-то странный был ожог.
 Быть может, в стакан вселенной
 Брошен яд,
 Комет ужасный порошок,
 Но в жилах космоса еще не растворился?
 Гадалки говорят: верней всего,
 Что в будущем году враг человечества родится,
 И, может, в этот миг родители его
 Решили пожениться.

10

Конек заржавленный луны
 Чертил носком дурные сны
 В моем мозгу
 И дуги, смутные круги
 В замерзнувшем пруду.
 Знаменья значили: беги
 Иль – жди, вот-вот приду?
 Встал Новый год не с той ноги
 И плакал на углу.

Комета канула во мглу,
 И мутно-серым языком
 Залижет горб Залив.
 Опять летит равнина дней.
 Ты, время, уравнило шаг.
 И мы, как камень муравей,
 Твой обползли желвак.
 (2:71-76)

Hunchbacked Moment

1

In a Singapore of colorful days / Circling in a pink boat, / On waves of merry vodka / I dove
 among the shades, / [Who were] Clumsily humanized. // The Gulf heaved up mountainously. /
 The moment, meaning something, hunched. / And the nails of stars suddenly lengthened, /
 Clusters of freezing pines – / Weighty winter grapes – / Lightly salted, lightly reproachful. / Why
 have you reared up, Gulf? / But it's silent, as if proud, / That it threw skyward, without asking, /
 The opaque green hump. /

2. Awakening

The sharp needle of the sunset / Bloody glowing, / Wants to sink right into the heart, / Into the
 heart weak with sleep. / Nipples ache – rubbed / By an unshaved cheek. / You are a stranger to
 me, like the dead, / A corpse is less a stranger. / I'll peek crookedly at the mirror – / Kamikaze
 eyes, / Only lighter, / And the cigarette puffs more merrily / And carelessly. / Suddenly quickly
 and tenderly / A mandolin at the ear / Ran past like a boisterous pony. / I just now woke up, /
 And the ship of the day is already sinking. / I dozed off at sunrise / And woke as the evening
 began, / And for weeks, light has come / Only from lamps, matches, candles. / The smell of lust
 [hangs] like weed from the Caucasus / And the he-goat races to the her-goat – / For someone
 they are a meal, / For someone they are gods, / For someone clouds. / And the hiss of the snake
 in passion, / Sweaty palms grow cold / Around the corner seemingly from happiness / And in a
 corner of deathly dullness.

3

Oh, unreturned bottles, / I will embrace you, collect you, / Your necks and napes. / With you I
 will descend into the basement, / Where the lamp thinly / Squeaks and seems to smoke, / Where
 the line stands / Like an offended child. / God is also there, but He is silent for now, / Though he
 hears the prayer from the barrel. / The smell of booze breath, vodka, rot / He will suddenly turn
 into the purest of lilies, / And everything that cost us tears, / And everything that was a burden to
 us, / And all of our heartache will go into the manure, / So that a glorious garden might rise up /
 For Dionysus and the Muses.

4

I am in snowy Egypt, / I am in the ruins of pyramids – / As if someone muffled/dampened space,
 / Threw frightening dynamite. / What is the comet flying to us for? / What have you swelled up
 for, Gulf? / The answer lies under the white [sea] floor, / Like a dragon of diminutive hills, / Like
 a maiden with a scarf in the wind / Has shut itself in. / And the shore is all like a bedroom, /

Where the nursery had a romp during quiet time, Where the floor is full of feathers and pillows /
 The mattresses slid off, bits of wadding... / What does this hunched moment mean? / And what
 broke just now in the world? / Though there's no way we'll find out, / We all tell fortunes, with
 this and that / Some with wax, some with Shakespeare. / It could be just that the rabble of
 minutes / Intended to overthrow time, / But was defeated, / And a white terror reigns. / The
 rebels will be driven into nonexistence. / Like everyone, for that matter. The drawing on [my]
 palm / Has shifted. The lines crawled somewhere, / And I look into the eyes of the constellations,
 / Covered with a milky film, / More innocent than a puppy, a child – / They don't know
 anything. / The fabric of the universe grows shabby, / Only the bread roll is fresh. / The Moon
 droops like the ear of a half-wit, / Where the cosmonaut climbed up like a flea.

5

Like a woman divorced, / Who uses rouge and sews and colors her brows, – / A spider, when
 there's not a fly about the place, / Already in January prepares its clingy rhombus. / So I, too,
 going to turn in the bottles, / At least to have enough for cigarettes, / I feel so sorry for them – as
 if I'm at the market, / They are little chicks, I raised them for a year, / They jangle, they screech
 in the basket.

6

I look in the mirror – again the look of a child, / Is time standing still in me or something? / And
 the clock in me has broken? / And I don't hear the whistle of the scythe? / And again I am a
 nervous teenager, / Now wretchedly surly, now pretentious? / And only my eyelids have
 gathered dust, / From them can never be brushed off / The trail dust of the ages.

7

.....

8

I awoke in the night from a cry – / Why it's my nose they are filing off: / Two-three swipes /
 With the file saw, / And the path from eye to eye / Becomes dangerous – threatening a cave-in. /
 Ah, hump of my face, you hurt, too! / The universe was dropped as a child, / And it's still crying,
 / It's hunchbacked. / I saw yesterday a young hunchback in the pharmacy, / She was making
 sales – and in good humor, / A man in worker's clothes / Asked her for condoms, / So
 defenselessly and coquettishly / She gave them to him / And smiled in such a friendly way... /
 Another's pain is like a musician on the other side of the wall. / The brain split, and any squirrel /
 Can get at it with a well-filed claw, / Breathing, biting-nibbling / And crumpling with its little
 paws, for its friend / Carries the little lump to the little celestial house / So they can eat the sacred
 substance together / And wait again for it to be resurrected.

9

What did that moment mean? / For what reason did it grow hunchbacked? / But it signified
 something. / I heard a cry, / It was some strange burn, / Perhaps in the glass of the universe /
 Poison was thrown, / The terrible powder of comets / But has not yet dissolved in the veins of the
 cosmos? / Fortunetellers say: sure as anything, / Next year an enemy of humankind will be born,
 / And, maybe, at this moment his parents / Decided to get married. /

10

The rusty little horse of the moon / Traced bad dreams with its toe / In my brain / And bows,
 blurred circles / In the frozen pond. / The omens signified: run / Or – wait, I'll be there soon? /
 The New Year got up on the wrong side of the bed / And cried in the corner. / The comet
 vanished in the haze, / And with a cloudy gray tongue / Will lick the hump of the Gulf. / The
 flatlands of days flies again. / You, time, have evened out your step. And we, like ants [around] a
 stone, / Crawled around your goiter.

Shvarts's first *poema* has a three-part structure: a prologue (section 1), followed by an account of exploits (sections 2-9), and an epilogue (section 10). To summarize the skeletal plot briefly, in section one the poet shows herself afloat, carried along on "waves of merry vodka" and "diving among the shades" who are her contemporaries. A sudden swell on the Gulf seems to distend time, the "moment, meaning something, hunched;" however, what the meaning was remains unknown. The poet arises at sunset in section two to the ill effects of a dissipated nocturnal life. In section three, the poet anticipates her descent into a bottle return facility whose reek and rot the god Dionysus can transform into the "purest of lilies." In section four, the poet's voice returns to the Gulf, via Egypt, introduces a comet, questions its purpose, stages a cosmic pillow fight, asks what is broken in the universe, speculates about a revolt of the minutes against time, looks to the night skies for guidance, and receives none. Section five shows the poet on her way to return the empty bottles. She catches sight of her reflection in stanza six, and wonders if her childish appearance is not a sign that her internal clock is broken. Section seven is an "empty" one. In section eight, the poet awakens from a nightmare that her nose has been filed off, prompting suppositions that "the universe was dropped as a child" and has a hump or hunchback, as a result. This leads to the memory of a flirtatious female hunchbacked pharmacy clerk, and the proposition that "Another person's pain is like a musician behind the wall." Section nine returns to the "moment" of the title, the comet, and their cosmic meaning; it reports a prophecy about an enemy of humankind who might be born the following year. The final

stanza dismisses the bad dreams and omens, whose meanings are obscure, as a sign that the new year got up on the wrong side of the bed. Time is righted as the comet leaves orbit and the Gulf smooths out its bulge, licking it with a “drab gray tongue.”

The space of “Hunchbacked Moment” is more abstract, but like “Seven Holy Faces of the Buddhist Temple,” the poem unfolds in recognizable physical and social geography, in sight of the Gulf of Finland, at a bottle return facility and a pharmacy. The landscape is similarly animated by hybrid and mythical creatures, but “Hunchbacked Moment” is more lyrical than fantastic in spite of the ominous air that hangs over it, and focuses on the poet’s experience. Shvarts later acknowledged that the atmosphere of the late Soviet era was palpable in this work.²¹⁸ The poem is also pinned down by its date: 7 February 1974²¹⁹ suggesting that its imagery was partly inspired by Kohoutek, “the best observed and studied comet in history,”²²⁰ visible from earth December 1973 – January 1974.²²¹ The comet first appears in stanza four, a mysterious otherworldly visitor who, like the stars, may tell the poet something about the future or past.

“Hunchbacked Moment” demonstrates Shvarts’s preoccupation with history and the events that shape it, a concern that also informed the Chimposium.²²² Each meeting was to feature one talk on literature and another on a moment in history that significantly impacted the

²¹⁸ Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiia, vspomnit' o lune.”

²¹⁹ The poem is dated February 1974 in *Socheniia Eleny Shvarts* (2:76). It was marked 7 Feb. 1974 in *The Host Driving Out Demons* and in subsequent republications (*Chasy* 9, the literary supplement to *Chasy* 19).

²²⁰ SP-404 Skylab’s Astronomy and Space Sciences, chapter 4: <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-404/ch4.htm>

²²¹ The popular science journal *Nauka i zhin'* (Science and Life) included articles about the comet, discovered by Czech astronomer Luboš Kohoutek, in three consecutive issues December 1973 - February 1974.

²²² Note also the overlap between stanza three and the opening of Shvarts’s reminiscence about the Chimposium, “Monkey Capers” (3:282).

future. Brother Lemur (Viacheslav Dolinin), for example, took up the day when the Bolsheviks successfully wrested power from the Russian Provisional Government and occupied the Winter Palace in his talk “A Night in the Life of the Second Congress of Soviets – 7/8 November 1917).”²²³ The poet considers such turning points on the backdrop of a timeless everyday in “Hunchbacked Moment,” presenting an outsized moment spatially. The Gulf distends in a wave and time bulges out in the opening section, establishing the poem’s primary theme: time and its measurement. Shvarts’s lyric speaker addresses her questions to the Gulf, seemingly distended in the frozen “moment” about which the poet speculates. Her interlocutor is an enigmatic companion who leaves the poet’s many questions – from “Why have you reared up, Gulf?” to “What did that moment mean?” – unanswered.

Kuzmin’s “Trout Breaks Through the Ice” depicts visits with the undead who roam the earth: suicides, unchristened infants, and others who have died untimely deaths. The “clumsily humanized” shades among whom Shvarts’s lyric speaker swims are similar. The lyric speaker suggests that her unnamed lover occupies a different plane of existence when she declares to him: “You are a stranger to me, like the dead, / A corpse is less a stranger.” The lyric speaker measures her own materiality through the mirrors that appear in the poem. An air of licentiousness (*blud*) literally hangs in the air of section two where she sees herself “crookedly,” with the “eyes of a kamikadze.”

Rising at sunset, the poet slowly prepares to leave, anticipating a journey to the subterranean bottle return as she gathers the empties in a contradictory state, “Seemingly around the corner from happiness / And in a deathly dull corner.” In stanza three, Shvarts imbues the Soviet everyday with Christian meaning. Imagining the descent into the basement, dimly lit and

²²³ *Samizdat Leningrada*, 465.

smoking as if with live fire, seems to prompt a “change of vision” (*smena videnii*) characteristic of vision-adventures, as if the speaker enters the catacombs of the *andegraund*. The tone shifts to one of prayer as the speaker perceives the sacred in the humble surroundings and anticipates a Christian miracle, the transformation of reek and rot into pure beauty, and our tears, burdens, and *toska* (heartache) into fertilizer for a wondrous garden “for Dionysus and the Muses.”

In stanza four, the poet returns to the same questions about the comet that animated the poem’s opening: “What is the comet flying to us for? / What have you swelled up for, Gulf?” and, further, “What does this hunched moment mean? / And what broke just now in the world?” Motifs of fate and *gadanie* (fortune telling) accompany the poet’s efforts to read the cosmos and its patterns. The mention of Shakespeare as an instrument for fortune-telling and the poem’s preoccupation with time points to *Hamlet* and the eponymous hero’s assessment that “the time is out of joint” following his encounter with his murdered father’s shade.²²⁴ The supernatural visit shakes the speaker’s perception of the universe; the premise of Shvarts’s poem is similar.²²⁵

The comet as a means for telling the future connects Shvarts’s poem to two texts by Victor Hugo, who wrote of the signifying potential of comets in “À la fenêtre, pendant la nuit,” and “Je vis Aldebaran dans les cieux,” poems that she would have known in Benedikt Livshits’s translations as “U nochnogo okna” (By the nighttime window) and “Ia videl glaz tel'tsa” (I saw the eye of the Bull).²²⁶ In “À la fenêtre, pendant la nuit” and “Je vis Aldebaran dans les cieux,” the poet addresses Aldebaran, the largest star in the Taurus constellation, asking the spectral

²²⁴ Act 1, scene 5. “Vek rasshatalsia” in Mikhail Lozinsky’s translation.

²²⁵ There are other echoes of *Hamlet*, including the prince’s reflections on physical and moral corruption as “the stamp of one defect, being nature’s livery or fortune’s star” (Act 1, scene 4).

²²⁶ Livshits, *U nochnogo okna*, 26-30, 32-34.

force for guidance about the comet's meaning.²²⁷ "À la fenêtre, pendant la nuit" teems with questions as the poet contemplates the night sky and speculates about time and the structure of the universe. Hugo's lyric speaker asks if the Creator will not rouse himself to create new constellations, a potential that the comet – the burning, flying bearer "perhaps of souls, perhaps of worlds" – holds within it.²²⁸

Seeking answers, Shvarts's speaker looks "into the eyes of constellations," but unlike the "animate vagabonds of the sky" that carry answers in Hugo's poem, the stars the poet consults are as innocent as babes. The dimwitted moon of the present day, accessible to cosmonauts who can verify its inanimacy, can explain nothing. Time's passage can better be measured by the bottles the poet has collected, likened to chicks that she will take to market. The speaker looks again in the mirror, but is presented with a childish reflection that causes the speaker to question if she is pinned to any time at all, or has her internal clock broken?

Stanza eight starts with a nightmare that returns the bulge in time, the Gulf, the universe, and the figure of the hunchback. The condom sale by the flirtatious hunchbacked pharmacist both returns us to the Soviet everyday and imbues this so-called reality with whimsical vision, as if the poet were indeed sailing on waves of vodka. Meanwhile, the figure of the Gulf, with its green hump thrown proudly skyward, suggest associations from the realm of children's literature. In Pushkin's *Ruslan and Liudmila*, the diminutive sorcerer Chernomor and the sorceress Naina are both *gorbatye* (humpbacked) in their old age. The hero of *Konëk-gorbunok* (The Little Hunchbacked Horse), household reading for Shvarts's generation in childhood, is a

²²⁷ The poet appeals to Aldebaran in section two of "À la fenêtre, pendant la nuit:" "Dis, larve Aldebaran, réponds, spectre Saturne" (part II, stanza 1).

²²⁸ A digital edition of Hugo's poem may be found at:
https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Les_Contemplations/%C3%80_la_fen%C3%AAtre,_pendant_la_nuit

diminutive doubled-humped horse, a Quasimodic Pegasus. The stanza 10 epilogue alludes to the small horse, explaining that the *koněk* of the moon is the source of the poet's bad dreams, a figure anticipated in stanza two, when a mandolin "suddenly and tenderly" races past the poet's ear, "like a boisterous pony."²²⁹ In "Seven Holy Faces" and "Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull," Shvarts pointed to the shared attributes of the gods. She evokes multiple subtexts through the image of the hunchback, suggesting a similar "secret similarity" between them.

In stanza nine, the poet asks about the hunchbacked moment's meaning for the last time. Imagining comets as poisonous powder in the veins of the universe that has not yet dissolved, the poet reports a fortune-teller's prediction that an enemy of humankind will be born and speculates that the hitch in time occurred at the moment the parents decided to wed.²³⁰ In this apocalyptic potential of the comet, there are also echoes of "À la fenêtre, pendant la nuit." Hugo's lyric speaker reasons that the seemingly eternal earthly order might change overnight if the Creator wished it. This thought prompts a dark vision in the poem's final lines of mean-spirited runaway stars that might reach earth: "Perhaps, in this moment [*mig*] – in the depths of the starless nights / A swarm of shining lights, born in the somber abyss, is already swelling up, / And an unknown sea of eternity / Hurries toward our heavens and will soon break in a wave of deathly stars."²³¹

²²⁹ The phrasing echoes Pushkin's when the singer Bayan takes up his instrument at Ruslan and Liudmila's wedding feast: "But suddenly a pleasant voice rang out / And the quick sound of a ringing zither [*gusli*]."

²³⁰ The Russian language does not have definite or indefinite articles. Thus, another way to translate this phrase is: the parents of the future enemy of humankind decided to marry.

²³¹ This is an English rendering of Livshits's translation: "...наряду с блаженными мирами / Есть злые духи звезд. / Быть может, в этот миг – на дне ночей беззвездных / Уже вздувается рожденный в мрачных безднах / Блестящих Светов рой, / И бесконечности неведомое море / На наши небеса стремит и сбросит вскоре / Смертельных звезд прибой" (*U nochnogo okna*, 30). The corresponding passage from Hugo is: "Car dans le gouffre énorme il est des mondes anges / Et des soleils demons! // Peut-être en ce moment, du fond des nuits funèbres, / Montant vers nous, gonflant ses vagues de ténèbres / Et ses flots de rayons, // Le muet Infini, sombre mer ignorée, / Roule vers notre ciel une grande marée / De constellations!"

The classical verse epic focused on an important historical event, the folkloric epic – on journeys and heroic deeds. Shvarts deflates both in “Hunchbacked Moment,” imbuing a seeming non-event with metaphysical import, but also ironizing and softening this solipsism with empathy. The comet functions as a force that disrupts the “flatlands of days,” a mundane flow of time. This is particularly clear in section eight, where we can see a connection to “Elegy on an X-ray Photo of My Skull.” Here it is the physical skull of the speaker that is destroyed, broken into two halves (like a nutshell) from which a squirrel gets its “sacred substance,” and eats it together with the other inhabitants of its “little celestial house,” and then “wait again for it to be resurrected.” Thus, for squirrels, the destruction of the speaker’s skull is a mere moment in the cycle of death and rebirth.

The final stanza suggests that it was the comet that disrupted time’s steady march; the “bulge” is smoothed over when it passes out of the sky. The moment is reduced to a “bump in the road” of earthly experience. Krivulin later suggested that the combination of metaphysical heights with the “rotten” everyday imbued unofficial literature of the 1970s, a pattern that Shvarts’s first *poema* exemplifies.²³² Shvarts makes her rumination contemporary, ironic, and whimsical, adopting a tragicomic tone through which the poet tries to balance the scales of lightness and darkness.

Conclusion: Shvarts in 1978

By 1978, Shvarts had become one of the most prominent and dramatic figures of Leningrad poetry, even as she maintained distance from many of its official and unofficial institutions. She had a “huge circle of readers,” which, as she later came to understand, “in a

²³² Krivulin “Belyi svet nad chernoï rechkoï,” 221.

sense...was broader and better” than in the post-Soviet 1990s and 2000s when her writings were officially published in one collection after another. “Then,” she recalled, “if there was a reading somewhere, a good, lively audience [*zhivaia khoroshaia publika*] gathered in huge numbers at someone’s house or an artist’s studio.”²³³ Evgeny Pazukhin described just such an event for readers of *Thirty-Seven* in issue fourteen:

On 25 February 1978 Elena Shvarts read her poetry at an apartment. Her work has long been at the center of the Leningrad intelligentsia’s attention.

The spacious room was filled to overflowing. People sat on the floor, stood leaning against the walls, crowded in the narrow hallway. The poetess put a fragile lectern, on which pages of her poetry lie, between her and listeners.

Elena Shvarts reads [her] poetry, now speeding up, now slowing down the tempo. The rhythm and articulation constantly change within poems, but there is almost no pause between the different texts.

The poems were chosen for the reading in such a way that the attentive listener can, following the poet’s lead, make out the landmarks of her creative development, marked like a dotted line [*slovno punktirom*]. This was clear even though the order of the poems did not quite match the chronology of their creation.²³⁴

The note presents Shvarts surrounded by a “good, lively audience” that has crowded together in an anonymous apartment to hear her poetry. Listeners like Pazukhin, Shvarts’s acquaintance from the Palace of Pioneers, the *Lepta* project, the samizdat journals of her circles, and the Chimposium, knew her poetry and its development well enough to notice that poems were not recited in the order they were written.

It is no coincidence that Shvarts’s 2007 reflection on shifting readerships led her to recall the eager audiences of the *andegraund* years. Pazukhin’s eye-witness account attests to the relevance of poetry readings in Leningrad as a ritual of resistance in unofficial culture even after

²³³ Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiui, vspominat’ o lüne.”

²³⁴ Pazukhin, “Večer poezii Eleny Shvarts,” 147.

the establishment of *Thirty-Seven* and *Chasy*. The journals' reports and transcripts show the extent to which samizdat readerships were sustained by live readings, seminars, and exhibits – the “culture of socializing” that they documented.²³⁵ Pazukhin's account shows how Shvarts's reputation was shaped “in house” by the poet and her audience of acquaintances in a mutually constitutive process, much as in samizdat culture, in which the reader was “not a consumer of literature, but...one of its creators,” as Krivulin later asserted.²³⁶

The item that followed Pazukhin's note about the poetry reading in issue 14 of *Thirty-Seven* reported on an “Evening of Poetry” held in the screening room (*kinozal*) of Leningrad branch of the Soviet Artists' Union about a month after Shvarts's domestic reading.²³⁷ Dragomoschenko, Krivulin, Kushner, and Shneiderman recited their poetry. The event shows the ongoing entanglement of official and unofficial realms in Leningrad poetry, as the author of the piece – the same Evgeny Pazukhin – also pointed out: “The evening was interesting, because for the first time in a while poetry lovers had the opportunity to compare the creative work [*tvorchestvo*] of ‘official’...and ‘unofficial’ poets.”²³⁸ This account also attests to the enduring importance of the spoken word in Leningrad poetry, and in a different way. The acoustics of the space were terrible, Pazukhin noted, preventing contact with the audience via the live voice.

²³⁵ Goricheva, Krivulin, and Rudkevich, “Ot redaktsii,” 1.

²³⁶ Krivulin, “Belyi svet nad chernoi rechkoj,” 205. Note also Boris Ostanin's pseudo-transcript of a 1977 discussion of Shvarts's poetry, “Marsii v kletke,” a theatrical rendering of an unofficial literary seminar and “script” for reading Shvarts's poetry that appeared in *Chasy* 14 (1978).

²³⁷ Pazukhin, “Vecher poezii v LOSKhe,” 149-154.

²³⁸ Pazukhin, “Vecher poezii v LOSKhe,” 149.

When those in the back rows could not hear, a microphone was procured that “significantly distorted [the poets’] voices.”²³⁹

The population of the Leningrad underground thinned over the decade as many of its most visible and active figures chose or were forced to leave. “Everybody is bolting from here [*Otsiuda vse drapaiut*],” Oleg Okhapkin wrote to Konstantin Kuzminsky in 1979, predicting: “Another six months, one year, two, three, four – no one will be left.”²⁴⁰ Émigrés in Shvarts’s circles included Efim Slavinsky (1971) Joseph Brodsky (1972); Vladimir Maramzin (1974); Natalia Gorbanevskaja (1975); Kuzminsky, Igor Burikhin and Sergei Dovlatov (1978); Dmitry Bobyshev (1979); Tatiana Goricheva and Yulia Voznesenskaia (1980); Boris Groys (1981); and Yury Kublanovsky (1982).²⁴¹ Emigration was perceived as “once and for all,” with no chance of return, and relationships were maintained through textual exchange of private letters and works intended for publication.

The number of Russian émigré periodicals, especially in Paris, expanded rapidly in the second half of the 1970s as a result. The practice of sending “unpublishable” texts abroad or creating them in emigration beyond the reach of state censorship was not a new phenomenon in Russian literary life, but the term *tamizdat* (“there-published”) was coined in the Soviet era by analogy and euphony with *samizdat* (self-published).²⁴² Intelligentsia departures created new spaces and opportunities as entrepreneurial émigrés promoted the creative work of acquaintances who stayed behind in the Soviet Union, turning the so-called *podpol'e* (underground) into a transnational media network. As Krivulin observed, with broad possibilities for publication in

²³⁹ Pazukhin, “Vecher poezii v LOSKhe,” 149.

²⁴⁰ *Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4B: 159. See also Valieva, *Sumerki* “Saigona,” 157.

²⁴¹ See *Samizdat Leningrada*, 41 for a fuller list of emigrations by year.

²⁴² On *tamizdat*, see Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There*; Kind-Kovács and Labov, *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond*, esp. 1-23.

West Germany, France, Italy, and the United States, unofficial writers turned the tables on their peers: “If before [unofficial writers] felt defenseless faced with the totalitarian state, they now found themselves in an advantageous position compared to their intimidated colleagues from the official creative unions.”²⁴³

Through her ties to Maramzin, Goricheva, Kublanovsky, and others, Shvarts’s poetry began to appear in Russian émigré journals: first in the Paris-based *Ekho*, then in *22* (Tel Aviv), *Gnozis* (New York), and *Kovcheg* (Paris). Tracing the path of her early poems in this study, we have seen that they passed from mouth to ear in spoken recitations, then were gathered into samizdat books, parts of which were sampled for her first publications in *Thirty-Seven*, which were republished in various forms by *Chasy*. Similarly, the three poems that appeared in issue 2 of *Ekho* were labeled “Verse from the journal 37.”²⁴⁴ Many more samizdat publications followed, eventually including her first typographically produced books of poetry.²⁴⁵ The first was *Tantsuiushchii David* (Dancing David), published in New York in 1985 through the efforts of Yury Kublanovsky, Igor Burikhin, and Aleksandr Sumerkin. Kublanovsky made clear his role as participatory scribe in the volume’s foreword, acknowledging that he had arranged Shvarts’s poems according to “compositional interest” rather than chronological sequence.²⁴⁶

The title of Maramzin and Khvostenko’s journal *Ekho* (Echo) was appropriate: alongside new writings, the Paris journal republished samizdat writings of the neoavantgarde and

²⁴³ Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta*, 135.

²⁴⁴ Shvarts, “Stikhi iz zhurnala ‘37’,” 89-92. A footnote indicated “The journal ‘37’ is a Leningrad samizdat journal.” The poems were drawn from issues 1 and 6 of *Thirty-Seven*.

²⁴⁵ Shvarts’s *Stikhi*, with a foreword by Burikhin, appeared in 1987 through the “Beseda” imprint that Goricheva established in Paris following her forced emigration.

²⁴⁶ Kublanovsky, “Ot sostavitelia,” 3.

traditionalist circles of the Leningrad school. Friederike Kind-Kovács has described broadcast radio as an “echo chamber” of tamizdat,²⁴⁷ which was itself an echo chamber of samizdat, as the journal’s re-republications of Shvarts’s poems show. The culture of live poetry readings also echoed in emigration, where the Russian programming of Radio Liberty, the Voice of America, and the BBC offered poets and bards new venues for “oral publication.” Recent émigrés staffed and shaped the programming of these outlets. Efim Slavinsky, Shvarts’s philologist friend and Leningrad’s “number one beatnik,” hosted a “radio panorama” on the BBC’s Russian service.²⁴⁸ Dedicated to the poetry of the community in which he had been a central figure until his arrest, the shows featured live appearances and readings by Brodsky, Bobyshev, and Khvostenko; tape recordings sent by Natalia Gorbanevskaja from Poland; and Slavinsky’s own recitations of poems re-published in *Ekho*, *Kovcheg*, and the *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*.²⁴⁹

By 1978, many of Shvarts’s peers had already been published in tamizdat.²⁵⁰ Thanks to the *andegraund* ethos of community curation, such publications did not necessarily reflect any authorial decision or ambition. For Sergei Stratanovsky, hearing that his poetry had been published abroad inspired fear, not joy. “It prompted a sort of persecution complex,” he recalled, “I kept waiting for a hidden beast to jump out.”²⁵¹ Stratanovsky’s concerns were well justified.

When Shvarts’s writings began to appear in tamizdat, as she later recounted, her mother Dina

²⁴⁷ Kind-Kovács, “Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty as the ‘Echo Chamber’ of Tamizdat,” 70-91.

²⁴⁸ Bobyshev, “Bitnik No 1.”

²⁴⁹ See https://vtoraya-literatura.com/razdel_20406_str_1.html for recordings of some shows. Slavinsky mentions shows dedicated to Shvarts’s and Prigov’s poetry, but those recordings are unfortunately not included.

²⁵⁰ Elena Ignatova’s collection *Stikhi o prichastnosti* was published in Paris in 1976. *Grani* 103 (1977) featured poetry by Burikhin, Ignatova, Krivulin, and Okhapkin. *Vestnik RKhD* 121 (1977) included poetry by Stratanovsky sampled from *Thirty-Seven*. Natalia Gorbanevskaja’s poetry appeared in tamizdat in 1969, thanks in part to the enhanced visibility her political engagement created.

²⁵¹ Stratanovskii, “Semidesiatye – preodolenie strakha.”

Shvarts was informed she would no longer be permitted to travel internationally with the Bolshoi Drama Theater, because she was “bringing up [her] daughter poorly” (3:196). Thus, the family’s existence was explicitly confined to the borders of the USSR, while Shvarts’s writings traveled abroad instead.

Chasy editors Boris Ivanov and Boris Ostanin established the Andrei Bely award (*Premiia Andreia Belogo*) in 1978. Later heralded as Russia’s first independent literary prize, it continues to be given annually in three categories: poetry, prose, and philosophy/criticism. Awarded to Leningraders and Muscovites, the prize marked a new phase of institutionalization of unofficial culture across the Russian capitals, even as notions of distinct schools of contemporary poetry became attached to each city: the Metaphysical school to Leningrad and Conceptualism to Moscow.

The jury awarded the inaugural Andrei Bely prizes to Arkady Dragomoshchenko for prose, Boris Groys for criticism, and Viktor Krivulin for poetry. Krivulin’s role as leader and social entrepreneur tipped the scales in his favor, as Ostanin later acknowledged.²⁵² Shvarts was bitterly disappointed in the decision, which seems to have soured her on literary prizes for life. “They spawn nothing but envy, anger, and petty competition,” she later stated.²⁵³ Dismayed by Shvarts’s wounded pride, Krivulin quickly organized a different prize of which she was the first and only recipient: the Dante Prize (*Premiia imeni Dante*) (3:196-197). This ad hoc literary institution, not mentioned elsewhere in the abundant but hopelessly patchy record of Leningrad unofficial culture, testifies to Krivulin’s role as literary companion and champion of Shvarts’s poetry. It also encapsulates Shvarts’s role and reputation in unofficial culture in 1978: not a

²⁵² Boris Ostanin, conversation with the author, March 14, 2017.

²⁵³ Shvarts, “Vspominaia Rossiia, vspominat' o Lune.”

leader-organizer, but lone wolf and *enfant terrible*, a figure that her contemporaries took to be an out-standing, in all senses of the word, poet.

In 1978 the voluntary scribes of samizdat put together Shvarts's second collection of poems, *Orkestr* (Orchestra).²⁵⁴ It contained her boldest works to date, many with complex masks and multi-part structures, including two books of poems "by" Kinfia (*Kinfia*, 1974, 1978); the *Wishes* cycle of "Roma poems" (*Zhelaniia*, 1977); "Simple Poems for Myself and for God" ("Prostye stikhi dlia sebja i dlia Boga," 1976); the *poema* "Bliss is Not Attained through Crude Means (Horror eroticus)" ("Grubymi sredstvami ne dostich' blazhenstva," 1978); and the fifth, seventh, and eighth "floors" of the *Staircase with Rickety Landings* (*Lestnitsa s dyriavymi ploshchadkami*, 1978).

Shvarts's literary masks became a core element of her reputation around this time. The line between art and life blurred in the *Kinfia* cycles, as Shvarts's bold behavior, mythologized by her own contemporaries, fueled comparisons with the capricious Roman courtesan and eponymous heroine (2:5-24). Male contemporaries in particular focused on the "person-text" represented there, rather than the depth of Shvarts's classical engagement, which Georgina Barker has shown to be profound.²⁵⁵ Shvarts's live readings of the cycle of poems written from the perspective of Propertius's "girlfriend" Cynthia²⁵⁶ contributed to the confusion. Bobyshev described his first encounter of Shvarts, who is indistinguishable from Kinfia, at such an event in his reminiscence of Leningrad in the 1970s, a *Self-Portrait in Roles* whose subtitle is *Chelovekotekst* (Persontext). As in Mikhail Berg's *Momemury*, the "poetess" appears

²⁵⁴ The collection is reproduced in Shvarts, *Voisko, Orkestr, Park, Korabl'*, 81-174.

²⁵⁵ Barker, "Russia's Classical Alter Ego," 73-146.

²⁵⁶ Barker, "Russia's Classical Alter Ego," 82.

unpredictable, unfamiliar, unknowable, even semi-human – the madwoman not in the attic, but in Leningrad’s literary underground.²⁵⁷

The “persontext” of Bobyshev’s title refers not only to the author, but also to the hybrid creatures he (re)creates. The compound mimics Symbolist *zhiznetvorchestvo* (lifecreation), and while both terms suggest the symbiosis of life and literature, the vector of “persontext” is different from “lifecreation,” emphasizing the production of texts over a poeticized everyday life. The term was not coined for Bobyshev’s memoir, but reflects the self-ironizing citationality of the Bronze Age, as some of his contemporaries characterized their literary generation.²⁵⁸ Krivulin bemoaned the “persontext phenomenon” in his talk for the Second Conference of the Cultural Movement (1979), finding symptomatic the confusion of texts with their authors in the latest Russian poetry.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Bobyshev, *Avtoportret v litsakh: Chelovekotekst, kniga vtoraiia*, 246-259.

²⁵⁸ An early mention of “Bronzovyi vek” (Bronze Age) came in a 1975 poem by Oleg Okhapkin dedicated to his contemporaries (*Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 4B: 97-99). For discussions of the term, see Sedakova, “O ‘Bronzovom veke;’” Soprovsky, *Priznanie v liubvi*, 164; Kulakov, “Bronzovyi vek russkoi poezii;” Medvedev, “Proklyatiyi poet andegraunda 50-x;” and Valieva, “Nauchnye chteniia pamiati Liudmily Aleksandrovny Iezuitovoi.”

²⁵⁹ Krivulin, “Dvadtsat' let noveishei russkoi poezii (predvaritel'nye zametki),” 242. Boris Ivanov later explained the persontext as an authorial persona (*lichnost' avtora*) that was an amalgam (*splav*) of social behaviors and texts (*Istoriia Kluba-81*, 21).

Conclusion

The Stagnation in Leningrad: *Paradiz*

Нам не бывает больно,
Мучений мы не знаем,
И землю, горы, волны
Зовем, как прежде, – раем.

We feel no pain,
Know not torture,
And the earth, hills, waves,
We call, as before, paradise.

– Elena Shvarts

“The stagnation years were blissful [*blazhennye*] in a sense, because they gave one so much internal space, nothing got in the way but poverty,” Shvarts reflected in 1990, when the Soviet utopian project – and with it, unofficial culture – was officially ending.²⁶⁰ In hindsight, creative nonconformists in Moscow and Leningrad perceived the abundant time of the 1970s as a vast metaphorical space filled with cultural pursuits. In his reminiscence about the “strange seventies,” Moscow artist Georgy Kizivalter observed: “if we consider how inexpensive it was to live modestly in those years...the Soviet regime provided simply paradisiacal conditions [*raiskie usloviia*] for the work of dozens of poets, artists, and philosophers.”²⁶¹ Kizivalter frames the era as a “loss of innocence,” a metaphor that evokes the disillusionment that followed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and exposes the paradoxical qualities of a postlapsarian state of artistic freedom in an authoritarian culture.

It was a highly imperfect *Paradiz*, Peter the Great’s nickname for Saint Petersburg that Shvarts used with irony in her poetry (1:135). On the one hand, Leningrad-*Paradiz* is the upside-

²⁶⁰ Shvarts, “Kholodnost' i ratsional'nost',” 211.

²⁶¹ Kizival'ter, *Eti strannye semidesiatye, ili poteria nevinnosti*, 14.

down version of Paradise, its gnostic antithesis. Krivulin describes Petersburg existence as “dreadful, satisfactory for no one” (*zhutkaia, nikogo ne udovletvoraiushchaia*). For Shvarts, life in the “dead paradise” was “Hoffmanesque” (1:127, 3:246). Imbibing the apocalyptic air of the Silver Age, Shvarts’s circles saw parallels with their own time, but as a shabby copy, an “apocalypse of mundanity” (*apokalipsis povsednevnosti*) devoid of events or change.²⁶² And yet, the Chimposium, in Boris Ostanin’s estimation, was an expression of “almost *sobornost’* [spiritual community],” summoning an ideal space devoted to *logos* itself.²⁶³ Writing on the eve of 1979, *Chasy* editor Boris Ivanov looked back on the last few years and assessed: “They are hardly comparable to any other period of our lives, insofar as the development of free creative work [*razvitie svobodnogo tvorchestva*] is concerned.”²⁶⁴ In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the path to Paradise lay through the underworld Inferno; in late Soviet Leningrad it lay through the *andegraund*, an ideal space of uncensored cultural production and preservation. The Leningrad of *Chasy* and *Thirty-Seven* was a “real-utopian” space, as Thomas Epstein observes, where “writers and works of various eras, cities, peoples, and traditions coexisted,” transcending political, temporal, and linguistic barriers.²⁶⁵ As the announcement about the Andrei Bely prize in the samizdat journal *Chasy* declared, “the so-called ‘second culture’ is simply culture.”²⁶⁶ The

²⁶² Ivanov, “Viktor Krivulin, poet rossiiskogo *Renessansa*,” 281.

²⁶³ Boris Ostanin, conversation with the author, March 14, 2017. *Sobornost’* is notoriously difficult to translate. A variety of approaches to the term are found in Kornblatt and Gustafson, *Russian Religious Thought*, esp. 19-20, 107-108, 226.

²⁶⁴ Ivanov, “Reziume. Nakanune 79-go,” iv.

²⁶⁵ Epstein, “Exiles on Main Street,” 13.

²⁶⁶ Anon., “Prisuzhdenie Premii imeni Andreia Belogo,” 248.

new qualifier belies the import of this collective realization for Shvarts and her unofficial contemporaries, for whom, as Olga Sedakova succinctly put it, “culture was freedom.”²⁶⁷

Vasily Betaki argued, citing Aleksandr Blok’s famous formulation, that Shvarts’s poetic generation achieved a “secret freedom” through its recovery of the cultural heritage that had been purged from official public discourse.²⁶⁸ Viacheslav Dolinin and Dmitry Severiukhin, historians of the Leningrad underground and compilers of the monumental *Samizdat Leningrada*, likewise emphasized that underground authors considered filling the cultural vacuum an absolute necessity. It was not only their own “muteness” that unpublished authors overcame, but the cultural silence that had been imposed on them. Through a shared imagination of belonging to a broader cultural community, the *andegraund* community positioned itself as the inheritor of avant-garde tradition, promoting an alternative history of Russian culture that simultaneously legitimized its own work.

The importance of heterotopian spaces, as Christopher Ely has written of an earlier, radical Petersburg underground, lies in the “leverage they can exert from their removed position.”²⁶⁹ Foucault’s framework helps conceptualize the complex realities of the post-war cultural landscape in Leningrad. Even if we limit ourselves to the “real” sites mentioned in this study, its map would include locations official, unofficial, and in between, the role of all of which must be acknowledged in the origins of the late Soviet *andegraund*: the Palace of Pioneers and the House of Writers, the Malaia Sadovaia and Saigon cafés, Lev Losev’s desk at *Kostër* magazine, Yulia Voznesenskaia’s apartment where the *Lepta* project was undertaken, apartment 37 at 20 Kurliandskaia Street, where Viktor Krivulin and Tatiana Goricheva lived, as well as the

²⁶⁷ Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies*, 15.

²⁶⁸ Betaki, *Russkaia poeziia za 30 let 1956-1986*, 198.

²⁶⁹ Ely, *Underground Petersburg*, 24.

paths around and to Elena Shvarts's own apartment. Shvarts pointed to the dramatic Egyptian House as her poetic cradle, but Krivulin put the "elite dump" she occupied in the 1970s at the center of his own map of the era:

Every literary generation has its eternal spring, and every eternal spring has its own geography, more concretely, its own cosmography, with special forbidden zones and sacred territories. For me, the expanse between Kamenny Island and Novaia Derevnia, bounded by four points [...] will always be such a sacred "eternal-spring" territory and will always remain so. In the center of this rectangle was the Villa Rodé, which burned down right after the revolution, behind a cast iron railing...and the apartment of Lena Shvarts in an elite brick *khrushcheba* [Khrushchev-dump] on Shkol'naia Street.²⁷⁰

Elena Shvarts was one of the outstanding creators of the heterotopian space of post-war Leningrad. She presented her calling as a search for self-understanding rather than confrontation with the totalitarian system she inhabited: "My work lay in a different arena: spiritual knowledge, attaining some understanding of the secrets of life, a search for new paths for poetry. These are the things that concerned me much more [than politics]."²⁷¹ These fields were capacious enough, and this study has endeavored to give a sense of the unfettered range of Shvarts's imagination and curiosity. Shvarts explored an aggressively "unfeminine" naturalism, matching her male colleagues' boldness and successfully navigating a male-dominated professional environment. She cultivated stylistic hybrids, joining neoclassical tradition to avant-garde modernism, and a neobaroque poetics abundant with paradox and oxymorons, figures that corresponded to her own sense of biological-historical self. Quite in line with Foucault's spatial model, Shvarts's work came to embody the simultaneity of different layers of tradition as a

²⁷⁰ Krivulin, "Buddistskie ptitsy i zhertvenye zivotnye." The four points Krivulin identifies are "from the north, the Buddhist temple on Primorskoe highway and "the grove of Pushkin's duel" by Komendantsky airfield, and from the south the pseudo-gothic chapel of John the Baptist, where Pushkin's children were christened, and the faux-classical rotunda in the curve of Krestovskiy Island, used by quiet military pensioners as a reading room at the Kirov Central Park of Culture and Rest."

²⁷¹ Shvarts, "Vspominaia Rossiia, vspominat' o lune."

principle of poetic vision. “It is as if the poetry were written not by the individual but their cultural layer [*kul'turnyi sloi*],” Mikhail Aizenberg, a Muscovite who espoused a very different poetic strategy, wrote about the Leningrad school of poetry. “The reader seemingly witnessed a parade of poetry, a display [*demonstratsiia*] of brilliant poetic figures.”²⁷² The reestablishment of lost connections with poetic tradition that Shvarts and her Leningrad circle saw as their mission was complicated by Shvarts’s self-conscious aloofness from most official and unofficial cultural institutions. These circumstances together granted her a highly idiosyncratic status as an outstanding outsider whose prominent presence on the literary scene was as elusive as the *andegraund* culture of the Brezhnev era itself.

²⁷² Aizenberg, *Vzgliad na svobodnogo khudozhnika*, 76.

Appendix

Illustrations

All photographs are by the author.

Figure 1. Street view of the “Egyptian House.”



Figure 2. Egyptian house street entrance detail



Figure 3. Spine of *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Poems) (1999)



Figure 4. Inscription in author's copy of *Trost' skoropista* (The Stenographer's Walking Stick) (2004)

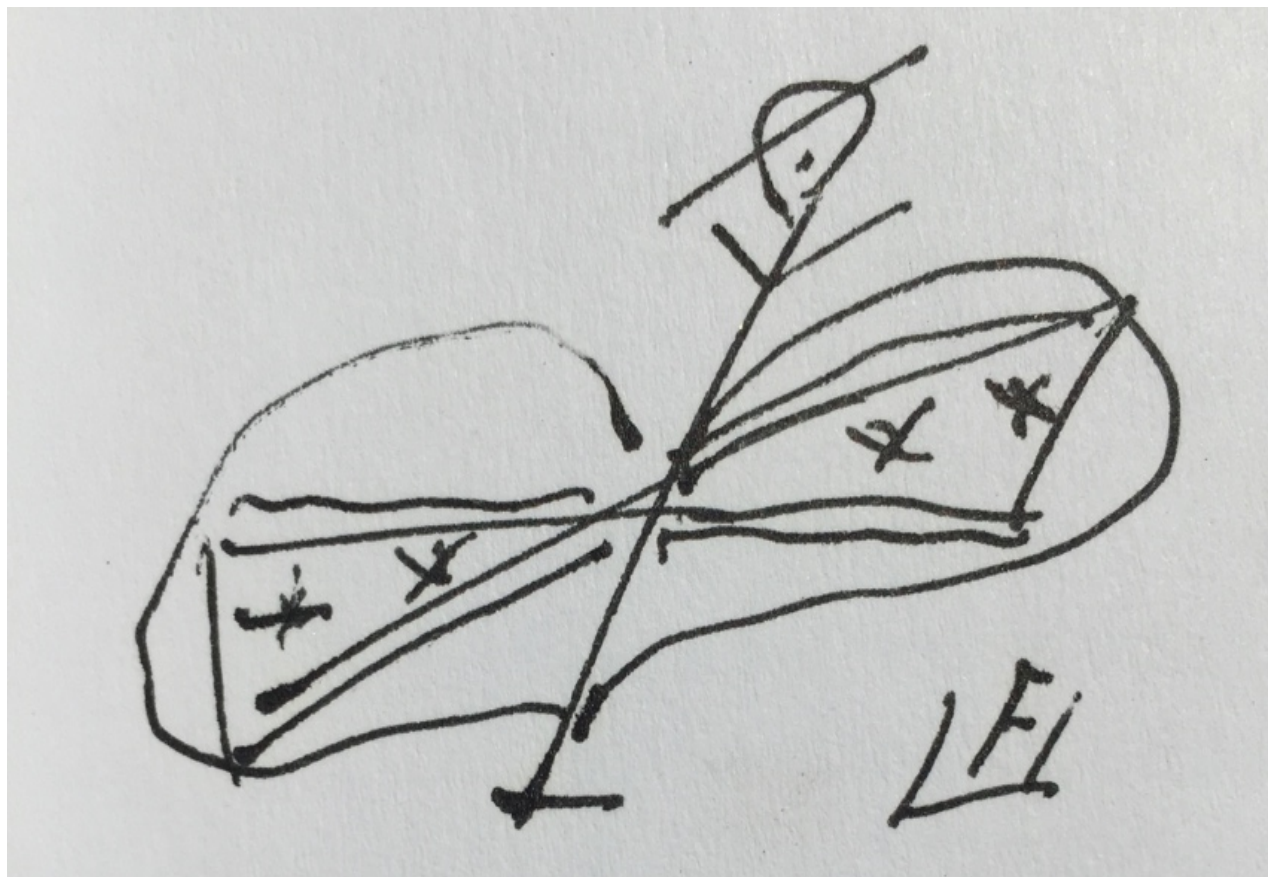


Figure 5. Datsan Gunzechoinei street entrance.



Figure 6. Datsan Gunzechoinei temple entrance.



Figure 7. Partial table of contents of *The Host Driving Out Demons* (from the literary supplement to issue 19 of *Chasy*)

-173-

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

Exorcismus exercitans
 Тейко, изгоняю ее бесов

Pincetoriani / Тварлейн /

Башня, в ней клетка	1
Соловей спасенный	2
Соловей спасенный / стихотворение -любимая /	3
Бурный	4
Рондо и кривое патристическое	5
Da bin ich Dichter	7
Распространенная библиотека астронома	8
Новорожденному	10
Колоса заботы у магазина	11
Утро второго снега	12
К шк- Держар	14
Невидный охотник	15
Элегия на рязаньской скамье моего царя	16
Плещень	18
Всплеск с скарпунчским сеансе и теми Александра	19
Пучина	20
Боготомное сладострастие	21
Темнослеп	23
Колос и куст, в котором живет Бог	24

Equitatus / Колница /

Колчанная Буря	25
Основа чувства	26
Битва, которую в войне скарпунчат народы	27
Сестра поэта Дамской	28
Петербургские сплетни	29

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