

**What Cannot Be Known Cannot Be Performed:  
Staging the Gulag in Varlam Shalamov's *Анна Ивановна***

*Josefina Lundblad*

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Josefina Lundblad is a PhD candidate in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley.

## **What Cannot Be Known Cannot Be Performed: Staging the Gulag in Varlam Shalamov's Анна Ивановна**

In his 1999 essay “С Варламом Шаламовым,” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn recalls a meeting between the two writers over three decades earlier, in January 1963: “...мы ужинали в номере и живо обсуждали пьесы: мою ‘Олень и Шалашовку,’<sup>1</sup> которую он уже прочёл, – и его колымскую пьесу, не помню её названия, драматургии в ней было не больше, чем в моей, но живое лагерное красное мясо дрожало так же, пьеса его волновала меня.”<sup>2</sup> The title of the Kolyma play by Varlam Shalamov that escapes Solzhenitsyn’s memory is Анна Ивановна.<sup>3</sup> The staging of a play set in the Gulag, following the epochal publication of *Один день Ивана Денисовича* in November 1962, must have seemed possible. Although the politically promising Thaw allowed for the publication of prose narratives about the camps, the theme was prohibited from theatrical representation: almost thirty years would have to pass before either *Олень и шалашовка* or *Анна Ивановна* premiered in a Russian theater.<sup>4</sup> Shalamov’s play about the Gulag, however, is not set in a camp as such. Its five scenes are set in liminal spaces connected to and dependent on the camps of Kolyma to suggest that their interior is unrepresentable in the theater and the experience of those within unknowable to an audience.

The representational limits of the Gulag theme evident in the spatial aspect of the scenes in *Анна Ивановна* were problematic for Shalamov also while writing his main prosaic work, *Колымские рассказы*. In his literary manifesto “О прозе” (1965), he presents a paradoxical point of view on this process: “Автор ‘Колымских рассказов’ считает лагерь отрицательным

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1 Олень и шалашовка is a revised version of Solzhenitsyn’s play *Республика труда* (1954) which he presented to the director Oleg Efremov at the *Sovremennik* Theater in 1962.

2 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “S Varlamom Shalamovym,” *Novyi mir* no. 4 (1999): [http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi\\_mi/1999/4/solgen-pr.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/4/solgen-pr.html).

3 Анна Ивановна is Shalamov’s first, and only finished, play. In the 1970s, he wrote a second play, *Вечерние беседы*, which was never finished. Fragments from the play in which Shalamov meets four Russian Nobel laureates of literature (Bunin, Pasternak, Sholokhov, Solzhenitsyn) was published September 2013 in the seventh volume of Shalamov’s collected works. See V. V. Esipov, *Varlam Shalamov i ego sovremenniki* (Vologda, 2008), 203.

4 In 1991, *Олень и шалашовка* premiered in a production by Oleg Efremov at the Moscow Art Theater. See, for example, Oleg Efremov, *O teatre i o sebe*, (Moscow, 1997), 120. In 1992, fragments of *Анна Ивановна* were staged in Vologda by V. Trushchenko. See “Shalamov na stsene: pervye opyty,” in V. V. Esipov, ed., *Shalamovskii sbornik* (Vologda, 2002), 3:228-9.

опытом для человека – с первого до последнего часа. Человек не должен знать, не должен даже слышать о нем. <...> Лагерь – растление для всех – для начальников и заключенных, конвоиров и зрителей, прохожих и читателей беллетристики.”<sup>5</sup> The paradox of writing about what should not be known seems to entail a larger philosophical claim for Shalamov as both a witness to and a writer of the Gulag: this horror *cannot* be known. Whereas this paradox remains problematic, and possibly unresolved, in his prose, the stage dynamics of his drama propose a potential resolution: to perform not the camps, but their reflections; to stage the destructive impact of the Gulag on the world beyond its confined spaces. As the experience of those who perished in the camps, the “true witnesses” in the words of Primo Levi,<sup>6</sup> remains unknown as well as unrepresentable, Анна Ивановна presents the audience with a shadow play in its place.

The strategy to perform not the Gulag, but reflections of it, reveal a significant difference between the poetics of Shalamov’s prose and the poetics of his play. Unlike prose, a play presupposes a physical presence of actors and requires a spatial setting on the stage. As a theatrical work positioned not only on a stage but also within the historical context of the early 1960s, the dramatic structure of Анна Ивановна appears to have anticipated the dynamics of reception from an audience through its intended performance. An inquiry into the meaning of the play thus invites different questions than an exploration of the literary properties of his short stories from Колымские рассказы. Although the play is similarly steeped in the tradition of Russian literature and also shows traces of being informed by what Leona Toker calls the “mandatory intertextuality” of Shalamov’s works,<sup>7</sup> the interaction of Анна Ивановна with its immediate cultural context shows its specific dynamic as a dramatic work. Intertextuality is an integral part of this dynamic. The intertextual allusions of the play cannot be limited to literary predecessors but necessitates also the inclusion of a distinctly theatrical category: performance in Russian theater. Therefore I

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5 Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow, 2004-5), 5:148. This source is cited parenthetically in the text indicating volume and page number.

6 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (Harmondsworth, 1988), 63.

7 “In the case of Shalamov, intertextuality is mandatory rather than optional. Here the *hors-text* provides, as it were, the annotations without which the text may remain plainly misunderstood.” Leona Toker, *Towards the Ethics of Form in Fiction. Narratives of Cultural Remission* (Columbus, 2010), 201. See also David J. Galloway, “Polemical Allusions in Russian Gulag Prose,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 535-52.

attempt to approach the interplay of allusions in Shalamov's play from a dual perspective: from the tradition of Russian literature as well as from the history of Russian theater. Examining *Анна Ивановна* in relation to Russian literature, we find that the play is indebted to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Записки из Мертвого Дома* (1861), an influence which Elena Mikhailik, among other scholars, has detected elsewhere in Shalamov's prose.<sup>8</sup> Read in the context of Russian drama, the play becomes informed by Nikolai Gogol's *Ревизор* (1836), by Nikolai Pogodin's comedy about Belomor Canal, *Аристократы* (1934), and by Solzhenitsyn's labor-camp play *Республика труда* (1954). The dramaturgy of Shalamov gains further illumination through the context of Russian theatrical performances; his dramatic strategies appear influenced by Vsevolod Meyerhold's staging of Gogol's *Ревизор* in 1926, as well as by the production of *Аристократы* in 1934 and 1956 by Nikolai Okhlopkov, and the attempted staging of a modified version of Solzhenitsyn's play, entitled *Олень и шалашовка*, at the *Sovremennik Theater* in 1962. It is within these literary, dramatic, and theatrical contexts that I propose to position my inquiry into the significance of Shalamov's play as an intended performance in the early 1960s.

My proposed dual perspective on *Анна Ивановна* positions the play also within the historical context in which Shalamov hoped to stage it: Soviet society of the early 1960s. Through a theatrical representation of a space only partially acknowledged by authorities, Shalamov contributed to the search for a different, collective and public yet personal and intimate, experience for Soviet society in the early 1960s. Intended as a dramatic depiction of the Gulag within an official culture with severe restrictions on public expressions of that same experience, *Анна Ивановна* engages with the traditional role of theater in Russian society as "the allegorical voice of thoughts, aspirations and feelings forbidden by the political regime."<sup>9</sup> The way in which Shalamov used this 'allegorical voice' includes more than an allegory in the spirit of the 1960s;<sup>10</sup> the allegorical layer inherent in

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8 On the influence of Dostoevsky's *Записки из Мертвого Дома* on Shalamov, see, for example, Elena Mikhailik, "Dostoevsky and Shalamov: Orpheus and Pluto," *Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent Review* 1 (2000), 147-57.

9 Victor Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture." *A History of Russian Theatre*, Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, eds., (Cambridge, 1999), 10.

10 "Эпоха 60-х была насквозь литературной. Руководством к действию стала метафора – как у властей ('Нынешнее поколение советских людей будет жить при коммунизме!'), так и у оппозиции ('Соблюдайте

the texture of the play gestures toward a complex combination of the factual with the fictional emblematic also of Shalamov's prosaic works. It seems that Анна Ивановна depicts neither fact nor fiction, rather a fusion of both.

The dramatic intrigue of the play unfolds in a space between factography and fictionality: it simulates verifiable situations of Kolyma life, yet provides them with a fictional dimension. The play centers on a political prisoner, a doctor by the name of Platonov, who meets Anna Ivanovna, a former prisoner convicted of a crime of passion, after a shooting at a roadside canteen. Following an inspection of the hospital ward where Platonov works, he is transferred to do physical labor at a geological exploration site. There he again encounters Anna Ivanovna and, as he learns she is soon to leave Kolyma, entrusts her with his poetry notebook. Intercepted by the camp authorities, the notebook is seen to contain not poems but coded information about the Kolyma fortresses intended for foreign intelligence. After an interrogation, Platonov is sentenced to death and Anna Ivanovna to the camps as a political prisoner. The events of the drama are probable and typical of the most acute years of the terror and penal abuse, 1937-38.<sup>11</sup>

Probable though its events may be, the drama flaunts its aesthetic constructedness through deliberate anachronisms<sup>12</sup> and symbolic names – Anna Ivanovna's last name is Rodina (Russian for 'motherland' as well as a common Russian surname) and Platonov appears as a collective representative of the intelligentsia (as are several Andreev, Krist, and other focalizers<sup>13</sup> in Shalamov's prose). His surname, though it may be a reference to Platonov the writer, more

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свою Конституцию!). Любимым занятием – расшифровка аллегорий и чтение между строк. Самым распространенным языком – эзопов.” Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow, 1999), 253-4.

11 Toker notes a combination of different time periods in the plot: “Indeed, a hasty concoction of charges, the torture of prisoners, and summary executions were most typical of the years 1937-38, but the references to the ‘bitch war’ pertain, rather, to the mid forties.” Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago. Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington, 2000), 139.

12 See Shalamov's afterword to the play: “Разумеется, автор знает, что ни пенициллина, ни автоматов не было в том году, к которому он относит действие своей пьесы. Эта пьеса – довоенная” (2:504).

13 In the context of Shalamov's poetics, narration relates to a *focalizer*, rather than to a *hero* or a *main character*, as his prose is situated on the border between the fictional and the factual and those depicted lack conventional characterization. About *focalization*, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin trans. (Ithaca, New York, 1981), 189-94. About *focalizer*, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 2009), 147-53.

likely refers to Plato the philosopher.<sup>14</sup> In Shalamov's staging of the Gulag, Plato's cave metaphor of shadow play illuminates the inability of Анна Ивановна to perform the interior of the camp experience. In addition, the characters often vocalize that which would have gone unsaid within the camps, as if clarifying events or concepts to the spectators. In her excellent discussion of Shalamov's play, Toker calls these elements *formalization*.<sup>15</sup> As a result of formalization, the play neither creates nor sustains any dramatic illusion; the audience of Анна Ивановна is thus deprived of both an internal representation of the Gulag and of being immersed in a dramatic illusion. Yet the aesthetic constructedness does not reduce the ethical urgency of the factual circumstances it relates. One example of this can be illustrated by how Dostoevsky's *Записки из Мертвого Дома* resounds in the play.

Shalamov's drama about Kolyma originates, as it were, from the unwritten space between the last chapter of part I of *Записки из Мертвого Дома*, "Представление," which recounts the prisoners' theatrical performance, and the first chapter of part II, "Госпиталь," set in the military hospital. Shalamov allows his audience to take the place of Dostoevsky's narrator as spectator, but immersion remains incomplete: unlike *Записки из Мертвого Дома*, Анна Ивановна does not allow us to enter inside. Instead, it is set on the border between the Smaller Zone (the camps) and the Larger Zone (the USSR), in spaces of transition which belong to neither zone: beside the hospital ward, they are set in a roadside canteen (дорожная столовая), at a geological exploration site (геологическая разведка), in the Interrogator's office (кабинет следователя), and during a dispatch of convicts (этап). The spatialization of the prison experience implicit in Shalamov's play challenges the revelatory aim of Dostoevsky's work: whereas the latter exposed the Smaller Zone to the Larger Zone in the nineteenth century, the setting of Анна Ивановна in a borderland saturated with the destructive moral, social, and linguistic codes of the Gulag suggests a potential, and potentially dangerous, conflation of the two in the twentieth century.

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14 For a discussion of Platonov in the works of Shalamov, see Robert Chandler, "Varlam Shalamov and Andrei Platonov," *Essays in Poetics* 27 (Autumn 2002). See also the comments by V. V. Esipov and S. M. Solov'ev before the Russian translation by Elena Gordon of the article on Shalamov.ru: <http://shalamov.ru/research/171/>.

15 See more about this in Toker's discussion of the play: Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 138-40.

In the context of Shalamov's poetics, reinterpretation, transposition, and reevaluation of nineteenth-century Russian literature occupy a place of aesthetic as well as ethical importance.<sup>16</sup> By positioning Shalamov's play in relation to other literary and dramatic works as well as within a historical context, the four sections of this paper discuss the intertextual dimensions of Анна Ивановна beyond a theatrical reinterpretation and twentieth-century transposition of Записки из Мертвого Дома. The first section, "“Чему смеетесь?”: Belomor Canal and Аристократы,” connects Shalamov's play with Pogodin's comedy about successful reformatting of criminal convicts at Belomor Canal; the second section, “The Case of a Spoon: Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn,” explores the theatrical dialogue between the two writers and their attempts at staging their plays in the early 1960s; the third section, “Gogol's Ревизор and Meyerhold's Ревизор,” links Анна Ивановна with Gogol's Ревизор and Meyerhold's 1926 production of the comedy; the fourth and final section, ““Оно себе мотает на ус”: Platonov and Rodina,” presents a conclusion through a reading of the play's main characters, the intellectual hero and the allegorical heroine.

### I. “Чему смеетесь?”: Belomor Canal and Аристократы

The depiction of forced labor in scene III of Анна Ивановна, set at a geological exploration site, alludes to Belomor Canal yet omits its most integral part: the convicts on stage perform no work. The legacy of the atrocious project materializes in the cigarettes the Supervisor smokes, “Беломор” (2:481), and resounds in the proverb begun by a criminal convict and finished by the Supervisor himself: “Блатарь: ...Эх, Петр Христофорович, без туфты и аммонала... Прораб: Не было бы Беломорского канала” (2:482). The term for scamming in camp folklore, туфта, is referenced in both Pogodin's Аристократы<sup>17</sup> and Solzhenitsyn's Республика труда.<sup>18</sup> In

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16 The ability (or inability) of the reader to properly recognize an allusion can alter the meaning of Shalamov's text. For example, if the beginning of “На представку” (1956), “Играли в карты у коногона Наумова,” is read as a travesty on the opening line of Pushkin's “Пиковая дама,” it creates a different short story. See Elena Mikhailik, “Potentialities of Intertextuality in the Short Story ‘On Tick.’ Varlam Shalamov: Problems of Cultural Context,” *Essays in Poetics* No. 25 (2000), 169-86.

17 “Садовский: ...Я строитель? Я энтузиаст? Витя, это туфта, это липа, это блат, это мимикрия, друг мой.” Nikolai Pogodin, *P'esy* (Moscow, 1952), 109.

18 According to Solzhenitsyn, the correct term is тухта: “1-й десятник: Надо горбить, а не тухту писать!” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *P'esy i kinostsenarii* (Vermont and Paris, 1981), 304.



Shalamov's play, it becomes but one designation for labor-related mimicry; it is also referred to as оползень, landslide: "В воображаемую канаву воображаемо оползает воображаемый грунт. <...> Работы нет, и в то же время работа есть" (2:493). The absence of results of labor allegedly performed and the presence of its official endorsement remind us of the Mayor in Gogol's Ревизор and his defense of the nonexistence of a church supposedly built: "Да если спросят, отчего не выстроена церковь <...>, то не позабыть сказать, что начала строиться, но сгорела. Я об этом и рапорт представлял. А то, пожалуй, кто-нибудь, позабывшись, сдуру скажет, что она и не начиналась."<sup>19</sup> The line from Gogol's comedy about nineteenth-century туфта illuminates the оползень of twentieth-century Kolyma in Shalamov's play; together they deconstruct the propaganda of Belomor Canal: as перековка, or reforging, of prisoners was premised on labor, no one can be reeducated when no work is performed.

Аристократы by Nikolai Pogodin,<sup>20</sup> the predecessor of both Республика труда and Анна Ивановна, proclaimed the opposite. In this socialist-realist comedy, forced labor as well as reforging of criminal convicts is successful during the building of Belomor Canal in the early 1930s. Аристократы served a propagandistic purpose similar to that of the abundantly illustrated book about the horrendous project that a writers' collective led by Maxim Gorky compiled; what the latter presented in written form, the former represented in the theater. Upon visiting the camp-aided construction in August 1933, Pogodin wrote not only Аристократы but also the script for the film Заключение (released in 1936). Despite different media, their general trajectory is the same: both chronicle the social rebirth of two main criminal characters, Kostya-kapitan and Sonya, through forced labor supervised by the Chekists.

The callous untruth of перековка which the play, as well as the film, proclaims is not the only problematic aspect of these officially endorsed productions; in both, political prisoners are

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19 N. V. Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem. V 23-i tomahk* (Moscow, 2003), 4:21.

20 It seems that Аристократы was much needed by the authorities and that the idea was solicited until both a playwright and a director was found; it might never have been neither written nor staged as the offer to write a play about Belomor Canal was turned down by Mikhail Bulgakov (Joachim Klein, "Modernizatsia kak mobilizatsia: kul'tura SSSR 1930-kh godov. Belomorkanal: literature i propaganda v stalinskoe vremya," *NLO*, no. 71 (2005), 243), and Vsevolod Meyerhold "noticeably refrained" from staging the comedy (Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage: Tairov – Vakhtangov – Okhlopkov* (Cambridge, 1989), 144).



absent. Thus, the meaning of *Аристократы* becomes not what the comedy exposes but rather what it conceals. It appears to have been, as Joachim Klein suggests, a theatrical equivalent to the spectacle witnessed by the writers upon their arrival at the finished construction of Belomor Canal in August 1933:

Mutatis mutandis публика пьесы Погодина находилась в том же положении, что прежде писатели – посетители Беломорканала: там писатели были такой же публикой, там также требовалось уверовать в постановку. И если зритель в принципе был готов к этому, все происходило без особых сложностей: декорации Беломорканала были выстроены с не меньшей тщательностью, чем декорации Реалистического театра.<sup>21</sup>

After its premiere in the Realist Theater in Moscow in December 1934, not the absence of political prisoners but the romanticized representation of criminal convicts concerned the authorities. Pogodin defended his play together with its director Nikolai Okhlopov, a disciple of Vsevolod Meyerhold; their joint endeavor resulted in positive newspaper reviews.<sup>22</sup> An immense success among critics as well as with theatergoers, Okhlopov's carnivalesque production came to shape the enduring reception of *Аристократы* as a classic of socialist-realist drama.<sup>23</sup> Following a suggestion by Bertolt Brecht in 1955, Okhlopov restaged the comedy in the Mayakovsky Theater in 1956.<sup>24</sup> Approximately twenty years after its premiere, critics commented that the content of the comedy no longer was relevant in the political context of the nascent Thaw.<sup>25</sup> An American critic writing about Soviet theater in 1963, however, viewed the production as a return to the more experimental theatrical practices of the 1930s.<sup>26</sup>

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21 Klein, "Modernizatsia kak mobilizatsia," 248.

22 Worrall relates the events of a meeting between Pogodin and Okhlopov with the authorities: "[Vyshinsky] questioned the play's educational value and accused the theatre of romanticizing the criminal world. Okhlopov and Pogodin countered the arguments energetically, Okhlopov working himself up into such a state that, at one point, he had to leave the hall to recover." Worrall, *Modernism to Realism*, 166.

23 "From that time onward, the play ran not only in Moscow-area and regional theaters, but also in provincial and 'backwoods' theaters – from Aleksandrovsk-on-Sakhalin and Iakutsk to Astrakhan and Kineshma. *Aristocrats* became a Social Realist classic." Evgeny Dobrenko, trans. Jesse M. Savage, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven and London, 2007), 227.

24 "Brecht saw it and was very impressed, suggesting to Okhlopov, during the 1950s, that he revive it. 'Young people must see what genuine theatricality is like.'" Worrall, *Modernism to Realism*, 166.

25 See Cynthia A. Ruder, *Making History for Stalin. The Story of the Belomor Kanal* (Gainesville, 1998), 171-2.

26 "It is gratifying to see Nikolai Okhlopov at the Mayakovsky Theater, for instance, reviving Pogodin's *Aristocrats* in almost the same *mise-en-scène* he created in 1935..." Norris Houghton, "The Soviet Theater Today,"

The performance of *Аристократы* in 1956, at the very beginning of the process of de-Stalinization, brings this staging of the Gulag closer to Shalamov, who, after his rehabilitation in 1956, relocated to Moscow. It seems that he was aware of this production as Pogodin's play is referenced frequently in several of his sketches from the late 1950s and included in *Очерки преступного мира*, the fourth volume of *Колымские рассказы*, which is devoted to an almost ethnographic depiction of the criminal world within the camps. Shalamov appears to have been appalled by the content of the comedy as he calls the dramaturgist a naive spectator in "Об одной ошибке художественной литературы";<sup>27</sup> his play false and harmful in "Жульническая кровь";<sup>28</sup> and its consequences for Soviet society disastrous in "‘Сучья’ война."<sup>29</sup> Beyond references to *Аристократы*, *Очерки преступного мира* contains another connection to Анна Ивановна: its sketch "Сергей Есенин и воровской мир" resounds in the play through thematic similarities as well as through one and the same quotation from Sergei Esenin's verse.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the play and *Очерки преступного мира* share an objective: to discredit the appalling misrepresentation of convicts in Pogodin's comedy in particular and to debunk the criminal world in general.

As *Аристократы* was continuously performed in the Mayakovsky Theater in the early 1960s,<sup>31</sup> so Shalamov continued his polemics with the play. In 1961, in the second chapter of his antinovel *Вишера* (completed in 1971), he juxtaposes Pogodin's depiction of reformatory at Belomor Canal with his personal experience of the introduction of the same penal practice in the forced-

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*Russian Review* 22, no. 2 (April 1963), 147.

27 "Литературным венцом этого периода явились погодинские 'Аристократы,' где драматург в тысячный раз повторил старую ошибку, не дав себе труда сколько-нибудь серьезно подумать над теми живыми людьми, которые сами в жизни разыграли несложный спектакль перед глазами наивного писателя" (2:11).

28 "А тем временем в городах с непонятным упорством возобновляли насквозь фальшивую и вредную пьесу Погодина, и новые поколения 'начальничков' проникались понятиями о 'чести' Кости-капитана"(2:18).

29 "Если один Костя-капитан перевоспитался, то десять тысяч блатных вышли из тюрем раньше времени и совершили двадцать тысяч убийств и сорок тысяч ограблений. Вот цена, которую заплатили за 'Аристократов'..." (2:68).

30 Both the sketch and the play contain "Как мало пройдено дорог, / Как много сделано ошибок," an imprecise citation from Esenin's 1923 poem "Мне грустно на тебя смотреть..."

31 The comedy was still performed in 1962, the year of Pogodin's death. See footnote 123 in Klein, "Modernizatsia kak mobilizatsia," 256-57. Contrasting information can be found in Mikhail Geller, *Kontsentratsionnyi mir i sovetskaya literatura* (London, 1974), 151 (footnote).

labor camps of the northern Urals in 1929-31.<sup>32</sup> In Shalamov's first letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 1962, he references the distorted depiction of criminals in this play twice.<sup>33</sup> Solzhenitsyn was also aware of the impact of both the play and the subsequent film *Заключенные* on Soviet culture. In *Архипелаг ГУЛАГ*, he highlights the importance of *Аристократы* as an officially endorsed representation of the camps:

Николай Погодин получал командировку на Беломорканал и, вероятно, проел там немало казны, – а ничего в блатных не разглядел, ничего не понял, обо всём солгал. Так как в нашей литературе 40 лет ничего о лагерях не было, кроме его пьесы (и фильма потом), то приходится тут на неё отозваться.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the comedy seems to have become a text against which subsequent representations of the Gulag must position their narratives, dramatic or literary, voluntarily or involuntarily.

It seems therefore permissible to suggest that Pogodin's comedy and its restaging during the Thaw informed both the writing and intended performance of *Анна Ивановна* as well as *Республика труда*. Not only does their content oppose *Аристократы*, but also their genres: neither is a comedy.<sup>35</sup> As a final reaction against his dramatic predecessor of the 1930s, Shalamov declared the comedic mode inappropriate for representing the Gulag: “Лагерная тема не может быть темой для комедии. Наша судьба не предмет для юмористики. И никогда не будет предметом юмора – ни завтра, ни через тысячу лет” (4:411).<sup>36</sup>

## II. The Case of a Spoon: Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn

In scene II of *Анна Ивановна*, set in a hospital ward, one of the patients rejects a spoon with the following motivation: “На прииске не нужна ложка. И кашу и суп одинаково можно

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32 See the second chapter “Вишера” (4:155-83).

33 For example, the second reference in the letter begins, “Вся ложь, которая введена в нашу литературу в течение многих лет ‘Аристократами’ Погодина...” (6: 284).

34 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arhipelag GULAG: Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia* (Moscow, 2010), 2:411.

35 Solzhenitsyn designated his play as a ‘drama’ (драма) whereas Shalamov called his simply a ‘play’ (пьеса).

36 From the short story “Афинские ночи” (1973) in *Перчатка, или КР-2*, the sixth volume of *Колымские рассказы*. In his unfinished play *Вечерние беседы*, Shalamov accuses Solzhenitsyn of holding the opposite opinion: “Это Вы написали, что в лагерной тематике есть все возможности для создания комедии, гротеска, бурлеска, юмора – что у шутки нет границ, нет пределов, нет запретных областей.”

через борт выпить, пальцем, если нужно, подправить. А миску вылизывать каждый легко научится”(2:472). Since the patients as well as the doctor and the male nurse present on stage are convicts, and thus familiar with such harsh conditions in the Kolyma mines, his rejection could have been unmotivated. It is one of many instances in Shalamov’s play when characters recognize the intended presence of spectators and explain what would have been mutually understandable within the camps. This explanation, however, seems not solely for the benefit of the audience. It may also be viewed as a rejoinder in a dialogue between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn which is signaled by the presence versus the absence of one tiny object in their respective depictions of the camps: a spoon. In his first letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 1962, Shalamov reacted to the spoon in Shukhov’s possession in *Один день Ивана Денисовича*: “В каторжном лагере, где сидит Шухов, у него есть ложка, ложка для настоящего лагеря – лишний инструмент” (6:278).<sup>37</sup> In *Олень и шалашовка*, Solzhenitsyn responds to Shalamov’s interpretation of Shukhov’s camp experience as privileged: “...как говорится, если работяга в ложке нуждается – это ещё лагерь хороший. Доходиловка – когда миску пьют через бортик.”<sup>38</sup> Solzhenitsyn appears to acknowledge that the presence of a spoon in both the novella and the play indicates gentler circumstances for the convicts and thus a selective representation of the Gulag. Yet the rejected spoon in *Анна Ивановна* is not a presence but an absence. Unlike his prose, Shalamov’s play keeps offstage the realm where a spoon is no longer needed.

Aside from the case of the spoon, another difference between the representative strategies of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov can be illustrated through their stage directions. The two writers’ strategies for the organization of stage space are diametrically opposite: whereas *Анна Ивановна* does not invite the spectator behind the enclosure, *Республика труда* transforms the space of the theater into a forced-labor camp:

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37 Later in the same letter Shalamov returned to the question of the spoon: “Ложками едят! Где этот чудный лагерь? Хоть бы с годок там посидеть в свое время” (6:284).

38 Solzhenitsyn, *P’esy i kinostsenarii*, 279.

Из освещённого фойе зрители входят в тёмный зрительный зал, где жёлто неярко светятся только фонари под жестяными колпаками, посаженные как бы на верхушки столбов по всему полукругу барьера оркестра. Столбы выдаются невысоко, чтобы не мешать видеть действие. Они оплетены колючей проволокой, уходящей в оркестровую яму. Охранные лагерные вышки приставлены справа и слева к порталу сцены. На вышках весь спектакль стоят часовые.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding their differences, both the hyperbolic mimetism of Solzhenitsyn and the cautious circumscription of Shalamov suggest a similar response to the problem of staging of the Gulag: the element of imitation implicit in the dramatic representation must at all times remain palpable. Whereas Solzhenitsyn signals the construction of his play through a replication of the space it represents, the distanced locations of Shalamov's play indicate that even a reconstruction of the realm where no spoon is needed must remain impossible.

The differences in their representations of the Gulag were not yet apparent in Shalamov's first letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 1962<sup>40</sup> which was sent after their first meeting in the editorial office of the journal *Новый мир*. The journal, for which Shalamov worked as an internal reviewer of manuscripts, had just published Solzhenitsyn's novella *Один день Ивана Денисовича*. Among reflections on and comparisons of his camp experiences in the light of Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich*, Shalamov's letter includes two references to *Аристократы*. Whether informed by the continuing performance of Pogodin's comedy or by the sudden opportunity for public expression of a hitherto proscribed topic (or both), a theatrical representation of the camp was already on Solzhenitsyn's mind. By the end of November 1962, he read *Олень и шалашовка*, a revised version of *Республика труда*, in the *Sovremennik Theater*, the newest theater in Moscow.<sup>41</sup> Organized in the late 1950s as a studio of the Moscow Art Theater, *Sovremennik* became emblematic of the early 1960s as a theatrical venue premised on the political climate of the Thaw. Led by the actor and director Oleg Efremov, the theater challenged other theatrical institutions by accepting plays

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39 Ibid., 257.

40 See also Shalamov's other letters to Solzhenitsyn from November 1962 to August 1966 (6:276-318). Solzhenitsyn's letters to Shalamov have not been published.

41 "В конце ноября, через десяток дней после появления повести, художественный совет 'Современника', выслушав мою пьесу ('Олень и Шалашовка', тоже уже смягченная 'Республика труда'), настойчиво просил разрешить им ставить тотчас..." Emphasis in the original. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telenok s dubom. Ocherki literaturnoi zhizni* (Paris, 1975), 61.

which could appear problematic for current censorship. In the 1960s, many future dissident writers brought their plays there; not only Solzhenitsyn, but also Vasily Aksyonov, Anatoly Kuznetsov, and Aleksandr Galich.<sup>42</sup> The production of *Олень и шалашовка* was banned from the stage of *Sovremennik* by June 1963.<sup>43</sup>

Almost a year later, the play reappears in a May 1964 letter from Shalamov to Solzhenitsyn (6:294). The letter relates a recent conversation between Shalamov and Leonid Varpakhovsky, currently a director at the Maly Theater and formerly a disciple of Meyerhold, concerning Solzhenitsyn's plays *Олень и шалашовка* and *Свеча на ветру* (1960). Shalamov first met Varpakhovsky, who in 1936 had been sentenced to several years in the camps as a Trotskyist, in Kolyma in 1942. According to the short story "Иван Федорович" (1962) from *Левый берег*, the second cycle of *КОЛЫМСКИЕ РАССКАЗЫ*, the two met again on a Moscow street in the early 1960s.<sup>44</sup> Several months after Varpakhovsky visited him with a request to read his prose, Shalamov mentions Анна Ивановна in a letter to Solzhenitsyn dated November 15 1964.<sup>45</sup> From Solzhenitsyn's reference to the play in "С Варламом Шаламовым," cited in the beginning of this paper, it is unclear if he read Анна Ивановна already in January 1963. Since Solzhenitsyn did not send his comments until a year and a half later, the suggestion by Valery Esipov that Shalamov wrote Анна Ивановна in 1964 for both a specific director, Varpakhovsky, and a particular Moscow theater, the Maly Theater, seems probable.<sup>46</sup> In a letter to Lev Kopelev from May 1965, Shalamov relates how he waited for a response concerning the play from the Maly Theater during the previous year.<sup>47</sup> As

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42 For details on the role of the *Sovremennik* Theater in the 1960s, see Anatoly Smeliansky, trans. Patrick Miles, *The Russian Theatre after Stalin* (Cambridge, 1999), 18-29.

43 "What Solzhenitsyn had failed to do, [Vladimir Lebedev] said, was to show that some people had been successfully re-educated in the camps." Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York and London, 1984), 471.

44 The following paragraph shows the focalizer Andreev to be a double of Shalamov: "Андреев с Варпаховским встретился в Москве на улице. Варпаховский работал главным режиссером театра имени Ермоловой. Андреев – в одном из московских журналов" (1:258). The short story situates their meeting between 1957 and 1960, while Varpakhovsky was working in Yermolova Theater. See Leonid Varpakhovskii, *Nablyudeniya. Analiz. Opyt* (Moscow, 1978), 274.

45 The letter begins: "В Вашем письме об 'Анне Ивановне' есть одна фраза, одно замечание, которое я оставил на потом, чтобы подробнее Вам ответить..." (6:296). I will return to this 'phrase.'

46 "...[в 1964 году] они встречались, у Варпаховского были большие планы по сценическому воплощению лагерного материала, Шаламов давал ему читать 'Колымские рассказы' и, вероятно, в расчете на постановку у Варпаховского написал пьесу 'Анна Ивановна.'" V. V. Esipov, *Shalamov* (Moscow, 2012), 268.

47 "Солженицын должен был на другой день передать Вам мою пьесу. Я ждал от Вас открытки,

there is no reference among Shalamov's notes or in his correspondence to an affirmative answer from either Varpakhovsky or the Maly Theater, I conclude that the play was turned down. Valery Esipov has argued that the reason for this was the change in official policies concerning the public appearance of works about the Gulag toward the end of the Thaw.<sup>48</sup>

The unsuccessful attempts of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn to stage the Gulag in the early 1960s find themselves in good company in the history of Russian theater. Such classics of Russian drama as Aleksandr Griboedov's *Горе от ума* (1822-4), Aleksandr Pushkin's *Борис Годунов* (1825), Ivan Turgenev's *Месяц в деревне* (1850), and Nikolai Erdman's *Самоубийца* (1928) were prohibited from performance in their time. In the air of anticipation following the sensational appearance of *Один день Ивана Денисовича*, it seemed that the Soviet public might have also been amenable to a dramatization of the Gulag: "Потрясение от правды 'Одного дня' было огромно, и так же огромно было ожидание последствий – что-то (может быть, ложь) должно было рухнуть. Но не рухнуло."<sup>49</sup>

The case of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn shows not only a potential outcome of the mandatory interaction of Russian literary works with censorship, but also demonstrates the unfortunate failure of both plays as contemporary performances. In the early 1990s, when Oleg Efremov revived the dramatic legacy of Solzhenitsyn in the Moscow Art Theater, the once topical plays from his trilogy about the Gulag entitled *45* seemed to have become obsolete. The first play in the trilogy, *Пир победителей*, failed to make a powerful impression on its audience.<sup>50</sup> Also *Олень и шалашовка*, produced to mark Solzhenitsyn's return to Russia, appears to have held little attraction for contemporary theatergoers.<sup>51</sup> Thirty years after their historical moment, his plays

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получили ли Вы эту пьесу. Это было время, когда я ответа из Малого театра еще не получил, и хотя бы беглое суждение со стороны об 'Анне Ивановне' было мне важно" (6:371).

48 Esipov, *Shalamov*, 268.

49 Vail' and Genis, *60-е*, 249.

50 "When he put on at MXAT in 1991 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's play *The Conqueror's Feast*, a piece about the life in the camps under Stalin banned for three decades, the production seemed not even to register with the public. Very likely an instinct of self-preservation was at work here: people were reluctant to pick over an old carcass when everywhere was littered with so many fresh ones." Smeliansky, Anatoly. "Russian Theatre in the Post-Communist Era." Trans. Stephen Holland. Leach and Borovsky, *A History of Russian Theatre*, 388.

51 "To celebrate the Inspector/Classic's return, MKhAT put on his play *The Love-Girl and the Innocent*, which had been banned since the sixties. It played to half-houses." Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre after Stalin*, 144.



about the Gulag presented a theme by then available for public expression through other literary or memoiristic outlets; Solzhenitsyn's dramatic works might also rightly have been perceived as artistically inferior to his major prose works.

### III. Gogol's *Ревизор* and Meyerhold's *Ревизор*

“[В]друг остановился, увидевши, что перо так и толкается об такие места, которые цензура ни за что не пропустит. А что из того, когда пьеса не будет игратья? Драма живет только на сцене. Без нее она как душа без тела.”<sup>52</sup> This passage could have been written by either Shalamov or Solzhenitsyn while working on their plays in the early 1960s. It is, nevertheless, from a 1833 letter by Gogol and the play in question is *Ревизор*. It seems that Gogol, as would later Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn, anticipated his play to be circumscribed by censorship. Despite its author's premonitions, *Ревизор* was allowed; in 1836, tsar Nikolai saw it himself and approved it for public performance.

A dramatic masterwork and a staple of the repertoire of Russian theaters since the nineteenth century, *Ревизор* had made a lasting impression on Shalamov; he even recited the play from memory while in the camps of Kolyma.<sup>53</sup> The comedy left a mark also on Анна Ивановна. The influence of Gogol on the dramaturgy of Shalamov, however, appears mediated by the theatrical experiments of the 1920s in general and, in particular, by Meyerhold's acclaimed 1926 staging of *Ревизор*.

Shalamov was quite familiar with the Soviet theater of the 1920s; he appreciated its artistic experiments and referred to it as blossoming in his autobiographical sketch “Двадцатые годы” (not dated). During this decade, his favorite theater was Teatr Revoliutsii, established by Meyerhold in 1922, and his favorite actress Maria Babanova, who played Maria Antonovna in Meyerhold's *Ревизор*.<sup>54</sup> In 1926, Meyerhold presented an unusual, even unprecedented, take on Gogol's classic:

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52 From Gogol's letter to M. P. Pogodin February 20 1833. N. V. Gogol, *Perepiska N. V. Gogolia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1988), 1:343.

53 “[На Черном озере] я и проводил свои устные анкеты о Пушкине, Некрасове, читал вслух ‘Ревизора’ и ‘Евгения Онегина’” (4:485).

54 See Shalamov's essay “Двадцатые годы” (4:318-98; esp. 393-98, about the theater).

first of all, and perhaps most astonishingly, he staged the comedy as a tragedy.<sup>55</sup> The dramatic text underwent substantial alterations as the director opted for a performance not of the play, but of the playwright as a concept and, through Gogol, of Russia itself.<sup>56</sup> Meyerhold wished a sense of an “inevitable catastrophe” to hover over this *Ревизор*.<sup>57</sup> The premiere in December 1926 provoked an immediate and extensive critical response from the intellectual elite.<sup>58</sup> Shalamov must have seen this sensational production which ran for years until the closing of Meyerhold’s theater in 1938 and the arrest of the director the following year.

In 1964, Shalamov offered *Анна Ивановна*, a play with significant allusions to *Ревизор*, to Varpakhovsky, one of Meyerhold’s disciples. Had the play been staged by Varpakhovsky in the early 1960s, its meaning as a theatrical performance would have depended greatly on the ability of the audience to recognize it as a play both written and produced by former political prisoners with personal experience of the Kolyma camps. This awareness could have created a subtext in the play similar to the invisible but quintessential background omitted from it.

Gogol’s *Ревизор* and Meyerhold’s 1926 staging can also be connected with the two other labor-camp plays discussed in this paper. Pogodin’s *Аристократы* was staged by one of Meyerhold’s disciples, Okhlopkov; on a thematic level, however, it seems to allude to Gogol’s comedy only through the misrepresentation of Pushkin’s authority as a poet for comic effect.<sup>59</sup> Solzhenitsyn’s *Республика труда* contains a scene, omitted from his reworking of the play for *Sovremennik* in 1962, which appears as a theatrical quotation from Meyerhold’s *Ревизор*: in scene 11 from the fourth and final act,<sup>60</sup> four bureaucrats are replaced by live-sized dolls, a theatrical

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55 “Мейерхольд, приступая к ‘Ревизору’ в 1926 году, подхватывал пушкинскую тему грусти о России и переключал комедию в трагедийный план потому, что ‘дурное,’ осмеянное Гоголем, оставалось неуязвимым.” K. L. Rudnitskii, *Rezhisser Meierkhol’d* (Moscow, 1969), 352.

56 *Ibid.*, 351-2.

57 “Мейерхольд хотел, чтобы над миром, им воссозданным, над всем этим изящным и красивым ‘скотинством’ нависало ощущение неизбежной катастрофы.” *Ibid.*, 357.

58 See, for example, *Gogol’ i Meierkhol’d. Sbornik literaturno-issledovatel’skoi assotsiatsii TS.D.R.P.* (Leningrad, 1927), and “*Revizor*” v *teatre imeni Vs. Meierkhol’da. Sbornik statei* (Leningrad, 1927).

59 See Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*, 167-70.

60 This scene, the penultimate in the play, is only present in the 1981 publication of *Республика труда*; thus, *Республика труда* consists of twelve scenes and *Олень и шалашовка* of eleven.

device similar to the one employed by Meyerhold in the famous dumb scene.<sup>61</sup>

In *Анна Ивановна*, some allusions to Gogol's *Ревизор* simultaneously gesture toward Meyerhold's *Ревизор*. The list of dramatis personae in the play presents nameless characters defined by their professional functions: for example, Supervisor (Прораб), Interrogator (Следователь), and Doctor (Врач). Identified by others during the course of the play (the Supervisor becomes Petr Khristoforich Kuznetsov; the Doctor names himself Sergei Grigorevich Platonov), the initial anonymity of characters establishes the irrelevance of such individual attributes as names in the camps. In his afterword to the play, Shalamov referred to his dramatis personae as "[в]се – люди и в то же время не люди" (2:504). The prevalence of a function determined by the setting of the play suggests Meyerhold's perspective on theatrical characters as not containing any psychological integrity but rather embodying the style of a particular production.<sup>62</sup> The anonymity of Shalamov's dramatis personae can also be seen to embody how the town's bureaucrats became nameless in Meyerhold's *Ревизор*.<sup>63</sup>

The only one named in *Анна Ивановна* is the eponymous heroine: Anna Ivanovna Rodina.<sup>64</sup> Her symbolic last name, however, is only pronounced, and thus revealed to the audience, in the fifth and final scene. The title of the play, a name and a patronymic, invites several possible interpretations. For example, it presents the answer of a convict during roll call in the camps, a familiar topos in Gulag literature which is depicted in scene V of Shalamov's play. As the one of few opportunities for a prisoner to set herself apart as an individual entity within the dehumanizing system of the camp, it echoes the title of Solzhenitsyn's novella *Один день Ивана Денисовича*. It

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61 "Занавес уходил вверх, и на сцене зрители видели застывших в предуказанных Гоголем позах персонажей спектакля. Скульптурная группа была недвижима. Далеко не сразу зрители догадывались, что перед ними стоят уже не актеры, а – куклы, что 'немая сцена' – действительно и нема и мертва." Rudnitskii, *Rezhisser Meierhol'd*, 376.

62 "Типические образы в театре Мейерхольда обладали индивидуальной конкретностью. Но это не было конкретность характера. Это была конкретность определенного стиля, конкретность автора, его манеры. В данном случае – конкретность Гоголя." Ibid.

63 "The play's famous opening scenes at the mayor's house, which Gogol had laden with exposition and character introduction, were cut to the textual quick; Lyapkin-Tyapkin, Zemilianika, Khlopov, and the rest of the town officials were rendered nameless and melded into a hydra-headed apparatchik chimera." David Chamber, "The Master of Praxis," *Theater* 28, no. 2 (1998), 52.

64 Except for Anna Ivanovna, only the convict working as a nurse in scene II has a name: Grisha. As he is never granted a patronymic or a last name the nickname seems collective rather than individual.

may also allude to Gogol's designation of the main female characters in *Ревизор*: Anna Andreevna and Maria Antonovna.

The title of Shalamov's play, as does that of Gogol's comedy, refers to a character initially unaware of the centrality of her role to the dramatic plot: neither Anna Ivanovna nor Khlestakov instigate the action. The dramatic intrigue of *Ревизор* rests in the deception of a misidentified government inspector by the local bureaucrats in a provincial town. Their attempted deception of Khlestakov, however, becomes an unconscious self-deception of the authorities themselves.<sup>65</sup> The comedy ends with the announcement of the real government inspector's arrival which leaves the actors frozen on stage in the well-known dumb scene. Shalamov's play is also concerned with deception and likewise encompasses a measure of self-deception. In Shalamov's staging of the Gulag, the theatrically inclined theme undergoes a slight alteration: rather than concealing appalling conditions to deceive a state official, the local authorities in the camps produce a misrepresentation of reality aimed not only at the authorities, but also at engaging themselves and the prisoners in a process of conscious self-deception.

In scene II, set in the camp hospital, the focal point is the disguise of prison reality from camp superiors. The dialogue between Doctor Platonov and the Head Doctor evokes the deception aimed at the anticipated Inspector in act I of *Ревизор*. The Head Doctor's instructions are reminiscent of the Mayor's to *Zemlyanika* – the Mayor wishes the patients to wear clean caps (“...вы сделайте так, чтобы все было прилично: колпаки были бы чистые...”),<sup>66</sup> – and, similarly, the absence of sheets in the ward will temporarily be camouflaged by the Head Doctor's wife: “Пошлите Гришку ко мне домой, и жена даст пятнадцать-двадцать простыней на один час” (2:474). Just as Gogol's Mayor desires written records of the patients (“Да, и тоже над каждой кроватью надписать по латыни или на другом языке...”),<sup>67</sup> so does Shalamov's Head Doctor demand corresponding documentation: “Истории болезни по порядку положите...” (2:474). This is not the first modification of reality for Platonov; he recalls a similar inspection one

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65 Yu. V. Mann, *Tvorchestvo Gogolia: smysl i forma* (Saint Petersburg, 2007), 179.

66 Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie*, 4:11.

67 Ibid.

year earlier and the role the language of medicine played in affirming the illusion: “В коридоре больной стекла вставлял, не успел уйти. Сам спрашивает: ‘А этот что?’ Начальник говорит: ‘Этот стеклит.’ Так и записали в список: Диагноз – ‘стеклит.’ Воспалительное окончание ‘ит’ – аппендецит, плеврит, стеклит...” (2:474-5). Thus, the allusion to Gogol’s shadow play for the authorities acquires an additional dimension in Анна Ивановна – rather than a temporary solution, deception in the camps for the sake of official inspection is presented as a practice that has become systematic.

In scene III, set at a geological exploration site, the Supervisor clarifies the prerequisites for successful systematic deception to Анна Ивановна, his wife. He explains why he employs Platonov for physical labor and not as a medical doctor: “...настоящий начальник должен всех своих помощников из заключенных иметь по два... <...> Два повара, два бухгалтера, два врача, два десятника, два дневальных. Один работает, а другой – на общих, в забое вкалывает, поняла?” (2:484-5). According to the Supervisor, no prisoner should feel irreplaceable knowing that a double is ready to take his place. His method of duplication echoes Meyerhold’s haunting addition of the Visiting Officer as a double silently following Khlestakov; this ever-present double came to permeate his character with an ‘infernal’ dimension.<sup>68</sup>

Within the structure of Shalamov’s play, the Supervisor himself acts a double for such an infernal character: the Interrogator, Ushakov. The Supervisor is the second husband of Анна Ивановна; the Interrogator, her first. In scene III, the Supervisor questions the convicts concerning the absent results of their alleged labor; in scene IV, the Interrogator questions the witnesses concerning the allegedly subversive contents of Platonov’s poetry notebook. The dramatic function of the two antagonists appears similar, if not identical. In scene V, the two former husbands of Анна Ивановна bid her farewell together as she is sent away with a prison dispatch, this time as a political prisoner. She disowns them both as well as their familial bonds: “У меня нет родных”

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68 “...фигура Хлестакова всеми воспринималась как infernalная. Ощущение это усугублялось тем, что по следам Хлестакова Мейерхольд пустил его двойника. ‘Заезжий офицер,’ почти бессловесный спутник, вечно пьяный, с изломанной бровью на лице, бледном до синевы, повсюду неотступно следовал за Хлестаковым.” Rudnitskii, *Rezhisser Meierkhol’d*, 357.

(2:503). Standing side by side in the last moment before the curtain falls, the Supervisor and the Interrogator seem a disturbing transposition of the comic duo Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky from *Ревизор*. It is easy to imagine them assuming positions similar to those described by the stage directions in Gogol's dumb scene, "...у самого края сцены, Бобчинский и Добчинский с устремившимися движеньями рук друг к другу, разинутыми ртами и выпученными друг на друга глазами,"<sup>69</sup> as the Supervisor formulates a final statement for both of them in the last line of the play: "Уехала наша Анна Ивановна" (2:503).

Transplanted into the context of the Gulag, the Gogolian intertext retains an air of absurd humor, albeit of a darker shade, and acquires a grotesque quality. The allusions to Gogol have lost their comic dimension in Shalamov's play; what appears to have taken its place is the tragic atmosphere of Meyerhold's interpretation of *Ревизор*. Meyerhold's intention to stage "Gogol" as a literary and dramatic concept and, through his interpretation of the Gogolian, to enact Russia itself in anticipation of an imminent catastrophe also finds resonance in Shalamov's play. As numerous situations, phrases, and even the name of one character (Platonov) can be found nearly verbatim in the first volume of *Колымские рассказы*,<sup>70</sup> it seems that Shalamov might have intended to stage, by fusing elements from his own prose, *Kolyma* as a materialization of Meyerhold's Gogolian catastrophe. As that which was once comic in Gogol's *Ревизор* became tragic in the production of the 1920s, so the tragedy that was once but anticipated by Meyerhold's *Ревизор* seems to have materialized in the omnipresent Gulag of Shalamov's play.

#### IV. 'Оно себе мотает на ус:' Platonov and Rodina

In scene IV, set in the office of the Interrogator, Platonov is not only investigated for a

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69 Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie*, 4:86.

70 The location of the first scene in a roadside canteen seems a reply to the remark in "Заговор юристов" (1962): "Драматургу надо показывать Север именно в дорожной столовой – это наилучшая сцена" (1:196). The surname Platonov is used for a political prisoner in "Заклинатель змей" (1954). The citation of a popular poem by Esenin, mentioned in *Анна Ивановна* and "Сергей Есенин и воровской мир," appears first in "На представку" (1956). Both Platonov in the play and the focalizer of "Плотники" (1954) rejects the position of foreman as immoral in the camps. In "Хлеб" (1956), as in the hospital of *Анна Ивановна*, the tails and the heads of the fish are distributed on separate days with a similar gesture toward the 'psychology' behind the decision. These are only a few examples of intertextual connections between *Анна Ивановна* and *Колымские рассказы*.

crime he did not commit – the crime itself does not exist. In the Interrogator’s office, the content of his notebook undergoes a catastrophic transformation from poems into a code pertaining to the Kolyma fortresses and intended for Japanese intelligence. During the process of the investigation the relationship of Platonov and Anna Ivanovna also becomes transformed: from platonic to romantic. The play does not show any romantic attachment between the two; neither does it stage the circumstances of the second accusation against him. Even during the investigation, the second crime is never vocalized but rendered through the language of gesture: “Прораб: Ну всякие суждения (показывает вверх) и вообще. (Как будто крутит воображаемый ус.) Следователь: Совершенно ясно” (2:495). The Interrogator understands the meaning of the Supervisor’s gesticulation; it needs no translation into words. Their mutual understanding may not be the only reason why the accusation is not voiced. The mustache is a clear reference to Stalin (one of whose common nicknames was *усатый*). Thus, the gesture of a mustache can be seen as a criminal act of speaking about the head of state, replacing the words which cannot be pronounced: “Вот вы говорили, что Платонов – то (показывает вверх) и это (крутит воображаемый ус). Можете вы дать характеристику Платонова, освещающую именно эту сторону дела?” (2:495). In anticipation of a mutual, albeit mute, concord with his double the Interrogator, the Supervisor adds an inscription of this suggestive gesture to the case against Platonov which is never read aloud to the audience.

The twisting of an imaginary moustache seems not only a mutually intelligible gesture substituting the unspeakable name of Stalin on stage. The gesticulation can also be suggested as yet another allusion to *Ревизор*. As an accusation against Platonov, it becomes the fatal twentieth-century embodiment of a folkloric image uttered by the Judge in act I: “Начальство имеет тонкие виды: даром что далеко, а оно себе мотает на ус.”<sup>71</sup> In Gogol’s comedy, the twirling of a fictional mustache is but a humorous figure of speech. In Shalamov’s play, the transposition of a comical

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71 Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie*, 4:11. This phrase from Gogol appears in another Gulag narrative, Anatoly Marchenko’s *Мои показания* (1967), in the words of a camp official: “Расскажут – опять здесь, у нас, очутятся. Что ж, они этого не понимают, что ли? И без них тысячи выходят на волю, а язык за зубами держат. А если кому расскажут, так тот наматывает себе на ус, постарается сюда не попадать.” Anatolii Marchenko, *Мои показания* (Moscow, 2005), 74.



metaphor from Gogol to the context of the Gulag produces disastrous consequences for the Doctor in the outcome of the interrogation: the gesture classifies him as a dangerous intellectual. His execution takes place offstage between scenes and through it he becomes anonymous, a man without a name but with a fate summarized by a guard in the final and fifth scene: “Весом выдали срок! Сухим пайком. Девять граммов и на луну” (2:499).

The literary crime of Platonov and Shalamov’s choice to center the dramatic intrigue on the official interpretation of a poetry notebook as the motivation for the execution of a dangerous intellectual did not please Solzhenitsyn’s dramatic taste. In Shalamov’s letter to Solzhenitsyn from November 1964, the former responded to what must have been the critique of the latter: “Вы написали, что лучше бы у героя ‘Анны Ивановны’ вместо тетради стихов было бы что-нибудь другое” (6:296). Shalamov maintained that the notebook must contain poems not only because it places Platonov among the intelligentsia<sup>72</sup> and shows the severity of literary crimes within the camps,<sup>73</sup> but also because he intended to present his audience with a different hero to oppose the conventional positive hero of working class origin in Socialist Realism:

Кто же истинный герой? Я считаю, что долг каждого честного читателя – героизация именно интеллигенции гуманитарной, которая всегда и везде, при всякой смене правительств принимает на себя самый тяжелый удар. Это происходило не только в самих лагерях, но во всей человеческой истории (6:297).

Seen as a part of Shalamov’s attempt to create a new, and essentially different, kind of hero, Platonov’s dispassionate acceptance of the official interpretation of his poetry and the disastrous outcome of the investigation appear not to constitute a flaw in the dramatic depiction of his character. Rather, the fate of Platonov and his acceptance of it indicate the conscious creation of a symbolic representation of an intellectual, the political prisoner as a hero, someone who does not

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72 “Тетрадку сделать чем-то вроде чертежей Кибальчича было бы очень легко. Но нужно совсем не это. Мне кажется, что традиционно как раз описание героизма деятелей науки, техники и т. д. Традиционна боязнь изобразить человека искусства наиболее чутким (ведь это так и есть и иначе быть не может). Второе – я знаю несколько случаев самых тяжелых наказаний за литературную деятельность в лагере. Сюжет ‘Анны Ивановны’ подкреплен живой правдой о мертвых, убитых людях” (6:296).

73 “Не говоря уж о том, что преступление писать стихи – одно из худших лагерных преступлений” (ibid.).

sacrifice his integrity even when faced with the inhuman penal practices of the Gulag.

As the character of Platonov embodies not the singular fate of an individual but rather personifies the collective fate of the many, so his female counterpart Anna Ivanovna is a character whose constituent parts come to signify a greater whole. The meaning of her surname, Rodina, suggests the possibility of an allegorical reading of her larger-than-life character. She appears to continuously resist a stable identity from the beginning to the end of the play. In scene I, she rejects two common feminine terms of address, of mother as well as of daughter: “Анна Ивановна: Я тебе не мамаша. Старатель: Ну, дочка. Анна Ивановна: И не дочка” (2:466). Later, in scene IV, she rejects the last name of the Interrogator, her first husband: “Следователь: Садитесь, гражданка Ушакова. Анна Ивановна: Я не Ушакова. Следователь: Это я пошутил. Садитесь, гражданка Кузнецова” (2:488). The final and fifth scene, the dispatch of convicts, or “шутовской карнавал этапа” (2:504) as Shalamov refers to it in the play’s afterword, emphasizes the ambiguity of Anna Ivanovna through the tragic culmination of her fate as a character. The motivation for her imprisonment, the possession of the evidence for a crime never committed, Platonov’s misinterpreted notebook of poems, undergoes yet another metamorphosis in a conversation between two guards: “За то, что американцам передала планы всех крепостей” (2:499). The guard’s account of what happened to Anna Ivanovna proposes quite a different dramatic narrative to the audience:

Уж, говорят, на самолет садилась. Вместе с ребенком, сыном – для маскировки. Контролер говорит: ‘Одну минуточку, вас просят вот в ту комнату.’ И – обыск! Она говорит: ‘Я золото не везу.’ Они говорят: ‘Мы золото и не ищем.’ Раздевают ее догола и находят план колымских крепостей. Судят и – на всю катушку! (ibid.).

The guard’s version, reminiscent of an action movie rather than of the events depicted in the play *Анна Ивановна*,<sup>74</sup> not only presents the viewers with a scandalous spectacle they never saw, but also illuminates the consequence of systematic deception taking place within and around the camps: the inescapable erosion of any semblance with the truth.

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74 The two guards begin by the scene by discussing a movie screening from the previous evening: “Первый конвоир (усаживаясь и закуривая). Картину вчерашнюю видел? Второй конвоир. Видел. Первую часть дали два раза подряд. Начальник опоздал. Ждали, ждали, его все нет. Начали крутить. Две части прокрутили, когда он пришел. Ну, механик перемотал назад и снова...” (2:498-9).

Part scandal and part action movie, the summary exposes what happens when deception becomes inseparable from self-deception and dissolves the very existence of the original truth that it was intended to conceal. The final interpretation of Anna Ivanovna's fate shows that the officially sanctioned elimination of any difference between reality and construct, between life and death, and, ultimately, between the Larger Zone and the Smaller Zone, has become nothing but a text which can be overwritten or in which events can simply be substituted in accordance with the needs and desires of the authorities. In scene IV, the Interrogator hints at such an ephemeral quality of official documentation during his conversation with the Supervisor: "Ах, архивы, архивы. Сегодня это архивы, а завтра – дым, звук пустой" (2:495). Just as the individual becomes expendable in the dehumanizing penal practices of the camps, so the presence of one document can be replaced by its absence – or vice versa – depending on instructions from the authorities.

The end of Анна Ивановна overwrites the fate of its title character when it sends a woman by the name of Motherland accused of a fabricated crime to the camps for a second time. As the final scene emphasizes the unrepresentable dimension of the Gulag by omitting what Shalamov deemed the theater unable to perform – the experience of Anna Ivanovna as a political prisoner – the allegorical meaning of her last name endows the play with another dimension. She walks off the stage with the prison dispatch and, as a dramatic character, into the unrepresentable space of death. As an allegory of the Motherland, and thus implicitly also of Russia, her transition from a liminal yet open space to an enclosed one presents the audience with an uncomfortable idea: that the camp experience has become the experience of the country.

The unperformed tragic end of the allegorical heroine echoes how the play as a whole eclipses the horror of the interiority of the camps from theatrical performance as well as illuminates the intertextual dimensions of Shalamov's play. The play rejects the comedic mode of Pogodin's Аристократы as well as the premise that its 'happy' end justified its inhuman means: a convict reforged through forced labor. The camps of Kolyma improve no one. Unlike Solzhenitsyn in Республика труда, Shalamov needs not simulate life within the Smaller Zone to expose its destructive impact on the Larger Zone. The dramatic fates of Platonov and especially of Rodina

show the transitory quality implicit in the borders between them: between innocence and guilt, freedom and imprisonment, life and death. Mediated by Meyerhold's 1926 production, Gogol's *Ревизор* becomes infused with the theatricality of the 1920s performance. Allusions to Gogol situates Shalamov's play in the history of Russian theater and revisits one central aspect of the comedy for the twentieth century: as *Ревизор* ended before the arrival of the real inspector general, so *Анна Ивановна* ends before the truly horrific experience of Anna Ivanovna. In lieu of a dumb scene, Shalamov appears to have opted for an allegory to convey a powerful yet problematic message to his audience of the intended performance in the Soviet Union of the early 1960s: whether as an individual named Anna Ivanovna Rodina or as an embodiment of the Motherland, her life in the camps remains a horror that can neither be known nor performed.

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