KWARTALNIK NEOFILOLOGICZNY, LXXI, 4/2024 ISSN 0023-5911
DOI: 10.24425/kn.2024.154216

DUCCIO COLOMBO
(UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO)
ORCID 0000-0003-3044-3665

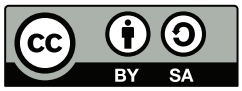
CRUISES IN EVIL WATERS: *THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO* AND ITS MODELS[1]

ABSTRACT
Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is commonly referred to as belonging to a genre of its own. A connection can be, however, paradoxically traced to *Belomor*, the collective work of 36 Soviet writers under the direction of Maxim Gorky glorifying the benefits of work in prison camps for "reforging" criminals into enthusiasts of socialist construction. A book Solzhenitsyn shows to know, and violently criticizes, the structure of which, however, seems to inform through parody the structure of his own work. A linguistic analysis of *The Gulag Archipelago* shows how often inmates are treated as "the other" to which the writer tries to give voice. In this sense, a postcolonial reading can offer new insights, as camps become, paradoxically, the "Contact Zone" where the writer can finally meet the Russian people and even become part of it.

KEYWORDS: Solzhenitsyn, Gorky, Tret'iakov, Shalamov, non-fiction

> Rather than asking, "What is the attitude of a work *to* the relations of production of its time" I would like to ask, "What is its position *in* them?" This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary *technique* of works.
>
> Walter Benjamin

[1] The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)", ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.



It is perhaps the fate of great books to be read out of their immediate context, which they unavoidably end up hiding behind their very grandness.

Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is almost always referred to as belonging to "a genre that is absolutely *sui generis*, without precise precedent in either Russian or Western literature": Martin Malia's (1977: 50) opinion on genre[2] is still widespread, while (scarce) forerunners were later identified, usually among Russian XIX century classics (the most commonly quoted being Chekhov's *Sakhalin Island*).[3] With no intention to challenge the greatness and originality of Solzhenitsyn's work, we would like to point to a different genre model which the writer had surely in sight. It is, paradoxically, *Belomor* – this being the main title of the 1935 English translation, or, in the original, *The History of the Construction of the Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal*: the infamous collective work of 36 Soviet writers, edited by Maxim Gorky together with former RAPP chairman Leopol'd Averbakh and camp commander Semen Firin, glorifying the benefits of work camps in converting criminals into enthusiasts of Socialist construction.

Solzhenitsyn defines his work on the title page "An Experiment in Literary Investigation" (*Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia*); "Literary History" (*Khudozhestvennaia istoriia*) is Gorky's definition of the books that the *History of Factories and Plants* was supposed to produce. Despite the outstanding organisational effort and the great publicity, this endeavour generated only a small number of books, of which *Belomor* was probably the closest to the desired model.[4]

The similarity does not end in the definition. The intentions are similar too: the most peculiar feature of *Belomor* lies in its collective character – it was presented as the collective work of the thirty-six writers signing the volume collectively, as stated on the title page:

> All authors are responsible for the text of the book. They helped each other, completed each other, corrected each other. Therefore, it would be often hard to name the individual authorship. We designate here the authors of the main parts of each chapter, but we remind once again that the final author of the whole book is the full staff that worked on the History of the Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal (Gor'kii *et al.* 1998: 7).

A list of names follows.

As for *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn repeatedly highlights the fact that it is only because of the circumstances that the book was not written collectively. In the afterword, he writes:

> Instead of my writing this book alone, the chapters should have been shared among people with special knowledge, and we should then have met in an editorial conference and helped each other to put the whole in true perspective.

[2] See, among others, Geller (1989: 9); Chukovskaia (1979: 138); Etkind (1994: 27–28).

[3] For a complete catalogue, see Ranchin (1999); see also Shneerson (1984: 73); Erlich (1976: 120).

[4] "In the 'History of factories and plants' series this is the best known and, undoubtedly, the most literary book (as already stated, a totally avantgarde book, a literature of fact of sorts)" (Dobrenko 2007: 161).

> But the time for this was not yet. Those whom I asked to take on particular chapters would not do so, but instead offered stories, written or oral, for me to use as I pleased. I suggested to Varlam Shalamov that we write the whole book together, but he also declined (Solzhenitsyn 1978: 526).

The preface comprises a substantially analogous statement, with the mention of the former prisoners, whose letters and conversations provided the material for the book:

> This book could never have been created by one person alone. In addition to what I myself was able to take away from the Archipelago – on the skin of my back, and with my eyes and ears – material for this book was given me in reports, memoirs, and letters by 227 witnesses, whose names were to have been listed here. (...) But the time has not yet come when I dare name them (Solzhenitsyn 1973: xi).

Beginning in 2005, new editions include these 227 names, a list which has a graphic effect not all that different from that of the names of the 36 writers on the title page of *Belomor.* Solzhenitsyn's list, however, should be compared more precisely with *Belomor*'s "bibliography"; this comprises no books, but only official documents produced by the camp administration, the prisoners' judicial files, transcripts of the writers' interviews with them and with OGPU officers, and (at number 19) "hundreds of prisoners' autobiographies" (Gor'kii *et al.* 1998: 614). These are clearly the autobiographies found by July Draskoczy (2018: 62, 248) in the archive files relating to the book and it is they that provide the main bulk of rough material used to write the book.[5]

Most of the "History of factories" produced books, notably *People of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory* and *Stories of the Builders of the Subway,* were organised as a series of individual life stories. The reason why *Belomor* stands out as "more literary" is the manner in which these life stories are combined. This is what makes the book peculiar: individual life stories are included as examples, as proof of the authors' theoretical and historical argument: a pattern that can also be recognised in *The Gulag Archipelago*.

In other words: *Belomor* can be read as the writers' reworking of the prisoners' life stories in an overall narrative. With regard to *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn said, "… I had never planned to write such a thing. But I had to work out that huge flow of material", consisting in the testimony about the camps which "hundreds of people" started sending him after the publication of *Ivan Denisovich*. "I had to choose completely new forms" (Solzhenitsyn 1977: 132–133). Viktor Shklovskii and the other Soviet writers working on the collective opus about the canal were probably met with a very similar problem.

Solzhenitsyn's list of sources, as mentioned in the *Preface*, is not limited to the former prisoners' testimonies received by the writer. He also mentions the memoirs

[5] See also Papazian (2009: 162).

and literary works which had begun to circulate during his period of work on the book (Shalamov, Vitkovskii, Evgeniia Ginzburg, Adamova-Sliozberg), and also other authors who, "despite their intent and against their will … provided invaluable material for this book". These include Soviet officers and legal experts (Krylenko, Vishinskii, Ida Averbakh) and, finally:

> Material for this book was also provided by *thirty-six* Soviet writers, headed by *Maxim Gorky,* authors of the disgraceful book on the White Sea Canal, which was the first in Russian literature to glorify slave labour (Solzhenitsyn 1973: xii).

The writer does not hide the fact that he is familiar with the collective work. Indeed, he quotes abundantly from it, especially in chapter 3 of the third part. His treatment of this book is, of course, violently sarcastic; the chapter can be easily interpreted as a reading of *Belomor* inside out, and this kind of interpretation can maybe apply to the whole of Solzhenitsyn's work.

The whole structure of the *Archipelago* can be viewed as a parody: as we will try to demonstrate, the main Archipelago metaphor, and the construction of the narrative as a journey through the islands, while calling the prisoners "natives", can be interpreted as an ironic reversal of the story behind *Belomor*. This story, Solzhenitsyn states,

> … is as follows: On August 17, 1933, an *outing* of 120 writers took place aboard a steamer on the just completed canal. D. P. Vitkovskii, a prisoner who was a construction superintendent on the canal, witnessed the way these people in white suits crowded on the deck during the steamer's passage through the locks, summoned prisoners from the area of the locks (where by this time they were more operational workers than construction workers), and, in the presence of the canal chiefs, asked a prisoner whether he loved his canal and his work, and did he think that he had managed to reform here, and did the chiefs take enough interest in the welfare of the prisoners? There were many questions, all in this general vein, and all asked from shipboard to shore. in the presence of the chiefs and only while the steamer was passing through the locks. And after this outing eighty-four of these writers somehow or other managed nonetheless to worm their way out of participating in Gorky's collective work (though perhaps they wrote their own admiring verses and essays), and the remaining thirty-six constituted an authors' collective. By virtue of intensive work in the fall and winter of 1933 they created this unique book (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 81).

The writers' "outing" (*progulka*, perhaps it would be better to call this a cruise)[6] is hardly mentioned in the volume. It was, however, abundantly advertised by the Soviet press. A half-page-long "calendar of the work", immediately following the statement about the collective responsibility of the authors, opens the English translation; we should probably assume that it should work as a substitute – the Soviet

[6] "Except for tipping and shopping adventures, returning cruisers have little to report about encounters with the natives, but they have a great deal to say about their countrymen on tour with them", Boorstin (1964: 93)

public was supposed to be already familiar with the situation, and, when reading, for instance, in Zoshchenko's chapter, "While I was on my trip to the White Sea-Baltic Canal, a gathering of the shock-brigade workers who had built it was organised at one of the camps" (Belomor 1935: 126; the words "on my trip" are absent in the Russian version, which sounds more like "when I was at the canal", see Gorky *et al.* 1998: 494), there was no need to offer a reminder of the reasons for the writers' presence among prisoners.

A two-day cruise, when the construction was completed and most of the prisoners had already been displaced, with the writers hardly connecting with those who were left, except for a few police-organised meetings, would not have been of great consequence in gathering the factual material the six-hundred-page volume is purportedly based on (see Ruder 1998: 50–51). The Belomor shock-workers rally, which took place in Dmitrov, at the construction site of the Volga-Moscow canal, where many of them had been transferred, took place just a few days after the cruise and was attended by many writers (but not by the entire group who had taken part in the cruise, and also by some – Maksim Gorky himself, Viktor Shklovskii – who had not) was often included in reports about the trip as its final step.[7] This prominence of the discourse on the cruise served, in all evidence, as a guarantee to the truthfulness of the tale. However, it also provided a narrative mainframe. *Belomor*, in fact, while following the story of the construction, is simultaneously constructed as a journey along the canal from south to north – with the first chapter set in Moscow at the OGPU construction bureau, and then from the site of the camp administration, Medvezh'ia Gora on the banks of the Onega, northbound to Povenets, on the watershed, and further, to Soroka on the White Sea. The *Archipelago* similarly holds together the history of the camp system from the Revolution to the post-Stalin years with the story of an individual journey – the writer's own life story considered as exemplar – from the arrest, through the investigation, the journey to the camp, the years of detention, and the exile after the sentence was over.

These structural similarities originate from a polemical intent. In his tirade against *Belomor*, Solzhenitsyn highlights a passage from Gorky's introduction:

> Gorky explained in the following way why this book was necessary to the prisoners who had built the canal: "The Canal Army Men do not have the necessary vocabulary to express the

[7] At times the mix-up seems intentional. One of the pages "Ogonek" dedicated to the writers' impressions about the cruise contains two photographs with one single caption: "The writers pay a visit to the constructors of the *Belmorstroi*. Up – Maxim Gorky's speech at the Dmitrov rally of the Belmorstroi shock-workers; down – Vsevolod Ivanov speaks with one of Belmorstroi's shock-workers" ("Ogonek", 1933/20: 5). It is not clear if Ivanov's picture was taken at Dmitrov or at the canal; his widow's memoir, according to which the writer had no chance to meet the prisoners during the cruise (see Ruder 1998: 50), points to the first explanation; Ivanov himself, however, wrote: "I saw these people, I spoke to them face to face, I visited the most secluded spots in the camp, I stopped people I stumbled into by chance, and all of them, in different ways, gave me the same expression: they had seen the new and unique, the new and wonderful world of labour, the world of socialism" (Ivanov 1933).

> complex feelings of reforging" – and writers do have this vocabulary, so they will help (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 82).

Going back to *The Gulag Archipelago* preface and afterword, we can conclude that Solzhenitsyn viewed his own role in a way that was not all that different: to give voice to the anonymous prisoners, those who were writing him more and more letters about their life stories in the camps, or, as he states at one point, to "write for mute [*beziazykaia*, speechless] Russia" (*ivi*: 317) – only, this time, telling the truth.

The aim is therefore to give voice to those who are deprived of it: this program, from today's point of view, resounds with postcolonial debates. The question Solzhenitsyn tries to answer is, once more, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's: *Can the Subaltern Speak*?

A first attempt to answer this question, in the Soviet situation, has been identified in the LEF campaign for the "Literature of fact", the last incarnation of the avant-garde. In an essay entitled *The Subaltern Must Speak*, Il'ia Kalinin writes that:

> 60 years before Spivak, Tret'iakov found himself in a more promising sociopolitical situation, which let him see things from the Utopian perspective of bridging the gap between theory and practice, between the subaltern and language and even between reality and its symbolic representation. According to the LEF point of view, this gap was unbridgeable for the professional writer (the former hegemonist of culture), but it was removed in the practice of the worker-correspondent, that is to say, in the discursive activity of the former subaltern (Kalinin 2012: 610–611).

The name of Sergei Tret'iakov, who took up the editorship of the journal when Mayakovsky left, is eponymous for the whole "Novyi LEF" movement. He was one of the stronger advocates of the "literature of fact" movement, of the campaign to end with fiction and to replace it with the unmediated reporting of real events:

> Do we have to talk about books, about *War and Peace*, when every morning, when we pick up a paper, we turn another page of that most amazing novel of all, which is named our modernity? We are the characters of this novel, its writers and its readers (Tret'iakov 2000: 33).

This implies a redefinition of the role of the author and, in the future, the end of the writer as a professional figure, which could also lead to the end of individual authorship as well: "The entire nameless mass of newspaper workers, from the worker-correspondent to the central press columnist, is the collective Tolstoy of our time" (*ibidem*). Commenting on Tret'iakov, Walter Benjamin traced a somewhat utopian picture of the prospects of the Soviet press:

> For as writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public, which is upheld by the bourgeois press, begins in the Soviet press to disappear. For there the reader is at all times ready to become a writer – that is, a describer, or

> even a prescriber. As an expert – not perhaps in a discipline but perhaps in a post that he holds – he gains access to authorship. Work itself has its turn to speak (Benjamin 2008: 83).

There is no doubt that *Belomor* owes much to the LEF aesthetics (Viktor Shklovskii, by the way, one of the group's leading theorists, is not only one of the authors, but also played a major role in the montage work for the book – see Ruder 1998: 105–114) – it could be in fact considered the fullest practical realisation of the program that ever reached the press (*ivi*: 105) – a rather sombre ending for this utopian project.

As far as post-Stalin Gulag literature is concerned, Tret'iakov's example has been more frequently brought up in relation to Varlam Shalamov. Although the author of the *Kolyma Tales* was critical about Tret'iakov (having known him personally in the Twenties),[8] his principles – particularly the denouncing of the literature of invention – shows, as it has been noticed, numerous similarities to the "Literature of fact" theory (see Conio 2016: 52–3; Jurgenson 2016: 92). Igor' Chubarov (who writes "the project of the literature of fact found its definitive realisation and was confirmed in its tragic truth not in the country of the victorious communism, but at the bottom of Platonov's foundation pit and of Shalamov's labour camp", Chubarov 2019: 309) explicitly connects Shalamov's choices to the search for a way of giving voice to the voiceless:

> … he used factographic methods … trying to stand on the point of view of the most oppressed social stratum, pushed out of the borders of life, of the "*dokhodiagas*", these new proletarians of the Gulag. The methodology of the Literature of Fact helped Shalamov find the means for the literary expression of the experience in the labour camp, which is not accessible to one-sided documentation without losing what is essential. Like real poetry, Shalamov's prose can't be retold "in your own words", in the informational mode of the document, focused on plot and content (*ivi*: 312).

In accordance with this kind of interpretation, the common ground between Shalamov and Tret'iakov stands precisely where the main difference between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn (Solzhenitsyn the novelist) lies. The former's theoretical statements strongly reflect those of Tret'iakov. "The novel is dead," he writes, "and no power in the world has the strength to resurrect this literary form. People who lived through revolution, wars and concentration camps" – in another essay the writer mentions "the new prose, after Hiroshima, after the self-service at Auschwitz and the Serpantynnaia at Kolyma" (Shalamov 2013a: 157) – these people "have nothing to do with the novel".

> The author's intention, aimed at describing an invented life, artificial collisions and conflicts (the writer's tiny personal experience, which you cannot hide in literature), annoys the reader, and he puts the fat novel aside (*ivi*: 144).

[8] See his letter to Sirotinskaia in Shalamov (2013b: 488–489).

His comments about Solzhenitsyn point in exactly the same direction. His position is most clearly stated in a 1972 letter to A. A. Kremenskii:

> Solzhenitsyn is all part of the literary pattern of the classics from the 2nd half of the 19th century, of the writers who trampled Pushkin's flag. And the theme of the camps is not a literary idea, not a literary discovery, not a model for prose. The theme of the camps is huge, it can easily accommodate five writers like Lev Tolstoy, a hundred writers like Solzhenitsyn, but even in the interpretation of the camps, I strongly disagree with *Ivan Denisovich*. Solzhenitsyn does not know and does not understand the camp (Shalamov 2013b: 577).

The opinion about Solzhenitsyn is connected to a bigger picture:

> Everyone who follows Tolstoy's precepts is a cheater. They become cheaters as soon as they proffer the first word. Better not to listen to them further. Such masters, poets, prophets, fiction writers can do only harm (*ivi*: 579).[9]

All the quoted polemical statements by Shalamov come after Solzhenitsyn had started the work on the *Archipelago*; some come even after its completion, but, in all evidence, mainly concern the writer's previous work, his *fiction* about the camps. Solzhenitsyn could not have had precisely these statements in mind, but had every opportunity to be familiar with Shalamov's position; the *Archipelago* – part IV in particular – is, among other things, an answer to him, even a polemical answer, concerning one of the main philosophical themes, the moral effect of the camp on the human self (see Nivat 1980: 96–97). Could it be an answer also from the point of view of genre, the experiment of a new form capable of overcoming Shlamov's criticism? Solzhenitsyn's – euphemistically speaking – scathing opinion of modernism is well known and explicitly stated – also in the *Archipelago*.[10] But the specific quality of the work is undoubtedly closer to that of Shalamov than to Solzhenitsyn's previous novels.

Iosif Brodsky's reading of the *Archipelago* – containing another polemical statement against modernism (under the name of Beckett) – could very easily, and maybe even more appropriately, applied to Shalamov's work (which Brodsky does not seem to know, or at least did not have in mind):

> In short, literature domesticates evil. The intellectual superiority of a writer, automatically adopted by his readers, convinces them of their superiority over the subject. Solzhenitsyn achieves just the opposite effect (Brodsky 1977: 639).

Would it be too much to speculate that *The Gulag Archipelago* was an attempt to write a little like Shalamov?

---

[9] In his theoretical essay, Shalamov wrote – after Hiroshima, Auschwitz and Kolyma – "…everything that's didactic is rejected. Art is deprived of the right to preach. Nobody can teach anybody anything, nobody has no right to teach" (Shalamov 2013a: 157).

[10] See, among others, the explicit comments in Solzhenitsyn (1973: 541, 557, 567, 603) and Solzhenitsyn (1978: 478–479).

And could the model of *Belomor*, marked by a non-confessed debt to the "Novyi LEF" aesthetics, have been the key used by "traditionalist" Solzhenitsyn to produce a text that has so much in common with this modernist aesthetic?[11] Or was it just, as he repeatedly states, the pressure of the material, the "prisoners' letters" which "converged on me from all over the country" and made the writer "realize that since all this had been given to me I had a duty" (Solzhenitsyn 1978: 526).

The same question stands before the historian when confronted with the Soviet "documentary literature" of the same years: an abundant stream of books, mostly dedicated to the experience of the World War, renouncing fiction for moral reasons, in the name of unvarnished truth. A truth that had been kept hidden from the public during Stalin's rule, and that had now to be restored, much in the spirit of Khrushchev's 20th Congress speech. "Documentary literature" was much debated in the mid-Sixties (at a time when it produced some remarkable works, giving way to a tradition continued today by the likes of Svetlana Aleksievich); yet, notwithstanding the unquestionable affinity of the theoretical positions, neither Tret'iakov nor "Novyi LEF" were ever mentioned in the discussion. It is hard to say whether this was due to an official ban, or could the young authors, who had received their education in the Soviet Thirties and Forties, simply not have heard about him?

That the *Archipelago* could be connected to this stream, or even be part of it (certainly, a remarkable part; being part of something does not, however, mean being an absolute unicum) has already been observed (see Gary Harris 1991). The author himself points in this direction when he notes in the *Afterword*:

> What was really needed was a well-staffed office. To advertise in the newspapers and on the radio ("Please reply!"), to carry on open correspondence, to do what was done with the story of the Brest fortress (Solzhenitsyn 1978: 526).

Sergei Smirnov's *Brest fortress*, at the origins of the "documentary literature" movement, was a reconstruction of a real story from World War II: the nineteenth-century fortress stood on the border between the Soviet territory and Nazi-occupied Poland. Its garrison had been swept away on the first day of the war, but pockets of resistance had withstood within the territory of the several-kilometres-wide fortress for months, when the front line had moved hundreds of kilometres away to the east. Starting with this book – or rather cycle – its author was to become the centre of a nation-wide movement for the search of lost war heroes, and had become the host of extremely popular radio, and then TV, shows dedicated to the endeavour. Another reference, implicit and ironic, that brings us here was in a previous chapter:

[11] "L'*Iliade* concentrationnaire apparaît ainsi comme le laboratoire d'une modernité littéraire assimilée progressivement, presque à tâtons, par un écrivain qui, à la différence de Chalamov, n'avait guère reçu en héritage que les classiques et la littérature du réalisme socialiste" (Jurgenson 2016: 88).

> We ask the reader's pardon for the many gaps and flaws in this chapter; we have cast only a frail bridge across the whole epoch of the Archipelago – simply because we did not have any more material available. We could not broadcast pleas for more on the radio (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 138).

Here the irony is aimed at Smirnov's status as a public and official Soviet writer. This status (together with the obligations it carried, such as chairing the session of the Moscow board of the Soviet Writers' Union expelling Pasternak), had, however, come with the institutionalisation of the war cult in the Brezhnev years. Smirnov's project had risen from a typically Khrushchevite impulse to rewrite the history of the war, going beyond pompous Stalinist lies. Smirnov's *Brest Fortress* book is made up of two parts, initially published independently: *The Brest Fortress* and *Searching for the Brest Fortress Heroes*. The second is longer and appears to be the key to the work's popularity. Nearly all of Smirnov's "forgotten heroes" were writing from remote regions of the Union, nearly all of the surviving Brest fortress heroes having passed through Nazi POW camps and, as an almost unavoidable consequence, through Soviet camps after their return.[12]

Smirnov's endeavour was, at least at the beginning, progressive, revisionist. It remained confined within the strict limits of Khrushchevite revisionism, something that Solzhenitsyn, at the time of his work on *The Gulag Archipelago*, was no longer willing to allow. The impulse for this work, however, is not without analogy to Smirnov's – it was in his status of official Soviet writer, in the wake of the Khrushchev-sponsored publishing of *One Day of Ivan Denisovich*, that he became the receiver of the bulk of letters which, as he states, gave him both the possibility and the moral imperative to undertake this impressive project.

The Gulag Archipelago shares the search for authenticity at the price of the surrender of fiction with this Khrushchevite "documentary literature". This is also the very pretension Solzhenitsyn makes fun of in *Belomor*. He does it, as in the quote above, from the prisoners' perspective: "D. P. Vitkovskii … witnessed the way these people in white suits crowded on the deck during the steamer's passage through the locks". In the version of Vitkovskii's memoir published later there are no white suits – what he saw on the deck were "people with horn-rimmed glasses, notebooks and cameras" (Vitkovskii 1991: 116). If this is a misquotation and not a different, oral or *samizdat*, version of Vitkovskii's tale, it does nothing to alter the meaning: writers at the canal played the role of tourists. A role which, according to Shalamov, is to be rejected:

> According to this way of thinking, if the writer knew his material too well, he would go over to the side of the material. His evaluations would change, the scale shift. The writer would measure life by new standards, which the reader would not understand, they would scare him, disturb him. The bond between writer and reader would inevitably be broken.

[12] "It's no secret that the enemy of the people Beriia and his minions cultivated an unfair, indiscriminate attitude to the former prisoners of war…" (Smirnov 1961: 155).

> According to this way of thinking, the writer is always a little bit of a tourist, a little bit of a foreigner, a little bit more a man of letters and a craftsman than is necessary. <…>
>
> The new prose rejects this touristic concept. The writer is no observer, no viewer, he takes part in the drama of life, he takes his part not in the guise of a writer, not in the role of a writer (Shalamov 2013a: 151).

This was already stated almost literally in the "literature of fact" of the late Twenties. Osip Brik wrote:

> Our critics are outraged by the writers, who take their themes mainly from the life of the intelligentsia, that there is very few authors willing to write about the life of the workers and peasants, and critics think that there is a kind of predilection for this social group. In fact, every honest author perfectly feels that it is unthinkable for him to write about the life of the workers because he does not know this life of the workers, because for him all workers have the same face, just like the Chinese have for a tourist (Brik 1927: 36).[13]

In *The Gulag Archipelago* this issue is approached in a rather peculiar statement. The stance is the same as that taken by Shalamov and Brik but the means of expression are not. What we are concerned with is the epigraph to the third part:

> "Only those who ate from the same bowl with us can understand us".
> *Quotation from a letter of a Hutzul girl, a former zek* (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 1).

A translator's note states: "The Hutzuls are a mountain people of the Carpathians who speak a Ruthenian dialect – and this quotation is given in that dialect" (*ivi*: 673). The Hutzul region is part of western Ukraine, a region that had been forcibly annexed to the USSR during the war years and where anti-Soviet resistance had been strong, and repression fiery. Is this what Solzhenitsyn implied? For the Great-Russian-speaking reader, in any case, it is not easy to discern the Hutzul dialect from simply incorrect Russian – every word is clearly understandable: *"Tol'ko* eti mozhut *nas ponimat',* khto *kushal razom s nami s odnoi chashki*" (Solzhenitsyn 2010a: 7) – the highlighted words are the only one not corresponding to the norm, and the difference is limited to one phoneme each time. This could pass for a mark of generic "popular", "lower class" Russian, which could maybe generically be called dialect, but not localised, "dialect" as opposed to standard "literary" Russian. The difference, in other words, would be perceived as social rather than ethnic – although throughout Russia's history of the last three centuries these categories have, more often than not, tended to overlap, or to switch places.

Another instance of quotation points precisely in this direction: this is when Solzhenitsyn rather unexpectedly gives the word to his old character:

[13] As for Tret'iakov, he had written that "The most important thing, for an *ocherk* writer, is the point of observation, that is to say, the part he plays while observing. The worst thing is to observe in the position of a tourist or an honored guest: either you see as a philistine, or you see nothing" (Tret'iakov 1928: 9).

> So, what other way out can we offer Ivan Denisovich if they are unwilling to take him on as a medical assistant or a hospital attendant, and also won't even give him a day off work? <…> Let Ivan Denisovich talk about them in his own words (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 218).

Ivan Denisovich's "own words" are quite easily differentiated from the first-person narrator's speech, and closer to the dialect of the Hutzul woman:

> Tens of years the zeks bend their backs, don't get vacations, so they have Rest Points for two weeks. They feed much better there and they're not driven outside the camp compound to work, and in the compound they only put in three, four hours of real easy work… (*ivi*: 218–219).

The translation only partially renders the flavour of the original. This reminds us of the language used in *One day of Ivan Denisovich* – Mikhail Heller spoke of it as *skaz* (see Heller 1989: 7), which is, technically speaking, of course incorrect, but gives the idea: the *other's* point of view is transmitted by the *other's* language.

The *other* is the point at stake here. The problem is, let us remember, how to give voice to the subaltern. The chapter where Ivan Denisovich makes his appearance is entitled *The Way of Life and Customs of the Natives* – from here on, "natives" (*tuzemtsy*), the natives of the Archipelago, becomes the favourite euphemism for defining the prisoners in the camps. The rationale for this last term is explained in the last part, dedicated to the post-Stalin years (on one page which did not make it to the English translation, a late addition we must presume):

> But what "camps" are we talking about? There are no *camps*, this is the main innovation of the Khrushchev years! We have been freed forever from this nightmarish heritage of Stalin! Names have been changed, and instead of camps we now have… *colonies* (motherland – colony, the natives live in the colonies, isn't this the way things are supposed to be?) (Solzhenitsyn 2010b: 444).

Let us remember the "white suits" Solzhenitsyn made the writers wear during their Belomor cruise: the uniform of the tourist, but also of the colonist.

If the term *Archipelago* can be read as *colony*, the ironic nineteenth chapter of Part III *The Zeks as a Nation* (*An Ethnographical Essay by Fan Fanych*) can be read not so ironically; the irony exists, but is aimed only at the chapter's own naive narrator, a stranger to the camps with analytic pretences. As for Solzhenitsyn himself, his position is somehow ambiguous. When, in the *Archipelago*, he meditates on *The Muses in Gulag*, he treats the camp experience as a unique opportunity to solve the traditional Russian dilemma: how to properly pay one's debt to the lower classes (in other words, how to give voice to the voiceless, how to enable the subaltern to speak):

> Only from the intellectual zeks of the Archipelago did these pangs of conscience drop away once and for all, for they completely shared the evil fate of the people! Only now could an

> educated Russian write about an enserfed peasant *from the inside* – because he himself had become a serf. <…>
>
> The experience of the upper and the lower strata had merged – but the bearers of the merged experience perished.… (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 491).

An opportunity that has been missed, he concludes: because you could not write proper prose in the camp conditions, because so many talented people perished. Is it too hazardous to read these lines as a statement of intention?

Using the Post-colonial tool-box to solve this predicament, we could say that the camps become, for Solzhenitsyn, the *contact zone*.

If the parallel we tried to trace makes sense, Solzhenitsyn might have tried to appropriate the idiom of *Belomor* – its (albeit residual) avant-garde quality included. This could be the first impulse for naming the Gulag an "Archipelago" and for writing the text in the form of a cruise.

This perspective allows us to bring into focus another text which served as a model for both *Belomor* and (once again, with a polemical slant), *The Gulag Archipelago*. What we have in mind is Maxim Gorky's travelogue *Solovki*, the final, and remarkable chapter of *Around the Soviet Union*. The structure of the latter work – "a dual plot trajectory, consisting of the personal journey of author <...> and the concurrent transformation of the represented world into the 'new' world" (Papazian 2009: 139) clearly informs *Belomor* and, in turns, as shown above, the *Archipelago.* The point of view here is that of Gorky, the writer from Sorrento (or from the former Riabushinskii mansion on Moscow's Malaia Nikitskaia, a circumstance that hardly alters the picture) travelling through the mostly unknown Soviet hinterland (see Tolczyk 1999: 122); a perspective the authors of *Belomor* remain confined to, and which Solzhenitsyn strives to forsake with uncertain success.

Strategically placed at the closure of his travelogue, Gorky's treatment of the Solovki camp renders it undoubtedly the apex, the model of Soviet development – the positive model of a positive development. Can it be that, by taking possession of and reversing this very attitude, Solzhenitsyn reaches his sombre diagnosis?

> The camps are not merely the "dark side" of our postrevolutionary life. Their scale made them not an aspect, not just a side, but very nearly the very core of events. It was rare for our half-century to manifest itself so consistently, with such finality (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 145).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BELOMOR (1935): *Belomor: an account of the construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea*, Smith & Haas, New York.

BENJAMIN W. (2008): *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London.

BOORSTIN D. (1964): *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Harper & Row, New York.

Brik O. (1927): *Uchit' pisatelei*, "Novyi Lef", 10: 33–37.
Brodsky J. (1977): *The Geography of Evil*, "Partisan Review", 44/4: 637–645.
Chubarov I. (2019): *Literatura fakta post mortem levogo proekta: Sergei Tret'iakov, Val'ter Ben'iamin i Varlam Shalamov*, "Russian Literature", 103–105: 305–321.
Chukovskaia L. (1979): *Protsess iskliucheniia (Ocherk literaturnykh nravov)*, YMCA-Press, Paris.
Conio G. (2016): *Le roman face à l'Histoire : Chalamov contre Soljenitsyne*, "Mémoire en jeu", 1: 52–58.
Dobrenko E. (2007): *politekonomiia stalinizma*, NLO, Moskva.
Draskoczy J. (2018): *Belomor: Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag*, Academic Studies Press, Boston.
Erlich V. (1976): *On reading* The Gulag Archipelago*,* in: Feuer, K. (ed.), *Solzhenitsyn: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs: 120–129.
Etkind E. (1994): *"Gosstrakh" v literature*, in: *Gosbezopasnost' i literatura: na opyte Rossii i Germanii (SSSR i GDR)*, Rudomino, Moskva: 17–30.
Gary Harris J. (1991): *Solzhenitsyn's* Gulag Archipelago *and the Literature of Authenticity*, "Essays in Poetics", 16/1: 24–42.
Geller M. (1989): *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (k 70-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia)*, Overseas Publications Interchange, London.
Gor'kii M., Averbakh L., Firin S. (1998) (eds.): *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii Kanal imeni Stalina: Istoriia stroitel'stva 1931–1934 gg.,* Moskva.
Ivanov V. (1933): *Skazhu pravdu*, "Literaturnaia gazeta", August 29.
Jurgenson L. (2016): *Pourquoi Soljenitsyne et Chalamov n'ont-ils pas écrit* L'Archipel du Goulag *ensemble ?*, "Mémoire en jeu", 1: 86–92.
Kalinin I. (2012): *Ugnetennye* dolzhny *govorit': massovyi prizyv v literaturu i formirovanie sovetskogo sub''ekta: 1920-e – nachalo 1930-kh godov*, in: Etkind A., Uffelmann D., Kukulin I. (eds.), *Tam, vnutri: praktiki vnutrennei kolonizatsii v kul'turnoi istorii Rossii*, NLO, Moskva: 587–663.
Malia M. (1977): *A War on Two Fronts: Solzhenitsyn and the Gulag Archipelago*, "The Russian Review", 36/1: 46–63.
Nivat G. (1980): *Soljénitsyne*, Seuil, Paris.
Papazian E. A. (2009): *Manufacturing truth: the documentary moment in early Soviet culture*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb.
Pratt M. L. (1992): *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledege, London.
Ranchin A. (1999): *"Arckhipelag GULag" kak khudozhestvennyi tekst*, "Izvestiia RAN – Seriia literatury i iazyka", 58/5–6: 26–32.
Ruder C. (1998): *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
Shalamov V. (2013a): *Sobranie sochinenii: V 6 t. + 7 dop.: T. 5: Esse i zametki; zapisnye knizhki 1954–1979*, Knizhnyi Klub Knigovek, Moskva.
Shalamov V. (2013b): *Sobranie sochinenii: V 6 t. + 7 dop.: T. 6: Perepiska*, Knizhnyi Klub Knigovek, Moskva.
Shneerson M. (1984): *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Ocherki tvorchestva*, Posev, Frankfurt-am-Main.
Smirnov S. (1961): *Geroi Brestskoi kreposti*, Molodaia Gvardiia, Moskva.
Solzhenitsyn A. (1973): *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, I–II*, Harper & Row, New York.
Solzhenitsyn A. (1975): *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, III–IV*, Harper & Row, New York.
Solzhenitsyn A. (1977): *Interv'iu na literaturnye temy s N. A. Struve: zapis' s plenki*, "Vestnik RKhD", 120 (1–1977): 235–262.
Solzhenitsyn A. (1978): *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, V–VII*, Harper & Row, New York.

SOLZHENITSYN A. (2010a): *Sobranie sochinenii: tom 5-yi: Arkhipelag GULAG: 1918–1956: Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia, chasti III–IV*, Vremia, Moskva.

SOLZHENITSYN A. (2010b): *Sobranie sochinenii: tom 6-oi: Arkhipelag GULAG: 1918–1956: Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia, chasti V–VI–VII*, Vremia, Moskva.

TOLCZYK D. (1999): *See no Evil: Literary Cover-Ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

TRET'IAKOV S. (1928): *Na kolkhozy*, "Novyi LEF", 11: 8–14.

TRET'IAKOV S. (2000): *Novyi Lev Tolstoi*, in: CHUZHAK N. (ed.), *Literatura fakta: Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov LEFa*, Moskva, Zakharov: 29–33.

TUMARKIN N. (1994): *The living and the dead: the rise and fall of the cult of World War II in Russia*, BasicBooks, New York.

VITKOVSKII D. (1991): *Polzhizni*, "Znamia", 6: 90–138.