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Writing The Woman's Documentary Voice in Perestroika Gulag Narratives

A substantial body of fictional and factual literature discusses labor camps, imprisonment, and exile as aspects of Russian culture both before and after 1917. However, while the Thaw opened public discussion of the Gulag, women's responses have received far less attention than their male counterparts. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, the nebulous genre of life writing allowed women a framework for more visibly representing their experiences in the *lageri*.

Women's life writing published during perestroika represents individual authorial voices through factors both inside and outside the given work. These factors, uniting the variegated corpus of women's writing about the Stalinist Gulag, allow for individual variation. My analysis groups these factors into the following rubrics:

1. The documentary voice of the narrative, shaped by expectations concerning the broad category of non-fiction termed "life writing" and pressures from sanctioned ('official') and unsanctioned ('unofficial') Soviet literature.
2. Changing patterns in the reception of camp literature. The works I examine were published in 1988-1989, when literature about the Gulag had already formed a canon against which new additions were measured.
3. Commonplaces of camp literature. These set features of almost all Gulag life writing by women influence a work's theme and plot. Commonplaces are greatly influenced by gender, i.e. the role context plays in differentiating the actions and writing of women and men.

My analysis examines how individual authors use aspects of camp literature and social contexts, thus necessitating investigation and qualification of statements made by the authors.¹ This process implies a belittling neither of the author-survivor's personal tragedy, nor of the Gulag as collective horror. Instead, it is an attempt to better understand how this suffering influences a survivor's individual voice.²

In her seminal work *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors*, Leona Toker notes that "Opting for a study of atrocities is not a reason for self-congratulation, yet it is an ethically positive act, if only because the victims usually *want* the world at large to know of their plight" (2). In this respect, it is difficult to understand how a given Gulag work was publicized without examining its author's individual motivations and how these motivations relate to external context.

For reasons of length and simplicity, I have examined only life writing by Soviet women imprisoned between 1925-1953. While there is an enormous amount of Gulag documentary literature by women from East Europe, these works come with a set of cultural and historical complexities placing them beyond the scope of this study.

The unsanctioned nature of these works in pre-perestroika Soviet society means that there is a significant gap between the date of writing and publication. As discussions of the Stalinist Gulag, many of these works were written during the period 1927-1956 (with 1956 often being the author's date of rehabilitation). Literary developments in Thaw and Stagnation camp and general Soviet literature were influential: the publication of *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (1962) is one obvious example, while changing conceptions in documentary genres are another. In addition, works published during perestroika

contended with a new set of expectations oriented toward using literature as rediscovery of a lost or distorted past.

Defining the Documentary Voice in Camp Literature

The idea of the documentary voice results from expectations surrounding the role of the author in life writing.³ “Life writing” itself is a broad and flexible category, including various genres that appeal to objectivity: *avtobiografiia*, *memuary*, *dokumental'nye rasskazy* and *povesti*, and *dnevniki*. Non-fictional camp literature usually falls into one of the above categories, whose boundaries by the onset of perestroika had become constantly blurred.⁴ Life writing unifies all of the above under the expectation that what is presented is ‘truthful’ and depicted in an ‘objective’ manner. The specifics of these expectations, however, vary by time and context.

Iakov Iavchunovskii, discussing “dokumental'nye zhanry” during Stagnation, notes that in Soviet literature these genres proliferated, as did arguments concerning the limits of this category. The result is a clear need for “imenno teoreticheskogo osmysleniia” of this section of literature (Iavchunovskii 4).

The beginning of perestroika reoriented literature towards a closer relationship with previously distorted history. Rosalind Marsh notes that “one of the most important issues raised by the newly-published fiction and memoirs was the long-term effect of Stalin’s prisons and camps on the psychology of the Soviet people” (92-93). This emphasis in turn focused attention on life writing, a branch of literature more connected with ‘honest’ assessment of the past. This topicality was partially inherited from Stagnation-era sanctioned literature. Nina Dikushina argues in 1971 that,

“Dokumental'naia proza zaniala vazhnoe mesto v nashei literature. Eto—fakt ochevidnyi. ‘Dokumental'nost’ stala trebovaniiem samogo vremeni” (149). *Dokumental'naia proza* is literature made contemporary via its ‘objective’ relationship with reality. Citing Lidiia Ginzburg, Dikushina sees no contradiction between ‘objectivity’ and literature. Indeed, “interesa chitatel'ia k dokumental'noi literature ob"iasniasetsia ‘vseobshchei tiagoi k ob"ektivnosti, k dostovernosti, k pravdivoi informatsii, ne otiagoshchennoi domyslami i belletrizatsiei” (154). Life writing is thus the literature least likely to be distorted by literary embellishment or *lakirovka*.

Valorization of life writing as objective disregards the omnipresent role of irony in Stagnation literature. This period is crucial in marking the changed literary environment encountered by camp narratives written in the 1950s and 1960s but only published in the 1980s. As Anatoly Vishevsky notes, irony dominated Soviet culture during the era of gerontocracy: “Irony is a major component of many works of leading writers during the 1970s [. . .] Skepticism, pessimism, lack of belief in humankind, and disillusionment in human potential” found their way into literature, film, humor, and songs (Vishevsky 8). Irony corrodes any sense of a work’s right (or ability) to transmit a unified view of reality to the increasingly cynical Soviet reader.

Life writing by women has both the general problems of this group of literature, plus an additional set of difficulties related to entrenched sexism. Irina Savkina, commenting on women’s autobiographies, asserts that the genre has suffered from a sense of “ ‘vtorosortnost' i somnitel'nost; kotorykh ‘ochevidna’ dlia patriarkhatnoi kritiki” and from its status as the ‘poor relation’ of better investigated Western women’s autobiographies (178).

Significantly, Dikushina, Ginzburg, and Savkina all associate life writing with ‘obvious’ attributes and usefulness, indicating an underlying assumption that this branch of literature is ‘naturally’ more trustworthy than fiction. My analysis relies on Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology to examine how these works themselves help produce this ‘innately’ close relation with described reality (Althusser 172).⁵

Marianne Liljeström, discussing sanctioned women’s revolutionary autobiographies published during the 1970s, argues that these are “testimonial narratives” illuminating and enhancing women’s involvement as builders of Communism. “[T]he testimonial text becomes a site for construction of identity: the writer is represented as an inseparable part of the whole” (Liljeström 82). This aim shapes how individuals are described in relation to their community.

In testimonial texts individuality is presented as an identity which is formed as a continuation of the collective. Individual and identity are not necessarily the same, but the identity in question is constructed as that part of the individuality, which is worth writing about. Hence, the testimonial text becomes a site for construction of identity: the writer is represented as an inseparable part of the whole [. . .] a metanarrative of the collective’s struggle to win political ground and aims. (Liljeström 82)

In revolutionary “testimonial” autobiographies, the part of the individual presented depends on that individual’s utility to the collective.

This same pattern occurs in Gulag writing: the individual serves the collective, albeit one literally and metaphorically isolated from Soviet society. In both cases, however, the individual serves ‘the cause’. Elena Glinka makes this clear in a prefatory

note to the editorial staff of *Neva*, who subsequently published both the note and her *dokumental'nyi rasskaz*. “ ‘Kolymskii tramvai’ srednei tiazhesti” (1989):

...Мы много и долго, десятилетиями, молчали, мучились и уносили свою боль в могилу. Так дайте же тем, кто дожил, возможность сказать свое слово во благо будущего—теперь, когда, наконец, пршло их время! Пекусь не за себя—за них. (Glinka 111)

Glinka establishes her narrative as a moral act of reclamation, in which she allegedly subsumes her individual identity in order to let others speak.

Speaking for the living and the dead is a highly ritualized position, which Liljeström sees as crucial to sanctioned “testimonial narratives.” These contain both “rituality” (“narrated practices [. . .] constructed as culturally and socially the most significant”) and “performativity” (that “which cannot be reduced to mere rules or rubrics”) (Liljeström 82). Each work moves between ritual (expectation) and performativity (how each expectation is realized). In effect, each author’s voice comes from writing a narrative measuring itself against a collective script (“rituality”), but in an individuated manner (“performativity”).

Beth Holmgren notes that women authors of autobiographies not only responded individually to collective norms, but also changed them. In particular, women’s memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag helped trigger the post-1953 shift from public to private life in Soviet literature (Holmgren 132). The documentary voice, whether conveyed through sanctioned or unsanctioned forms of literature, both shapes and reacts to general trends in culture and *slovesnost*.

Women and the Changing Reception of Camp Literature

Changes in reception and assessment of Gulag writing also shaped women's camp literature published during perestroika. Toker notes the 1988 flood of Gulag works appearing in the USSR, with camp-related publications occurring in all major journals and most minor ones.

The situation had the marks of the massive resurgence of Holocaust testimonials thirty years after the event: a new generation was growing up, for which the major atrocity of Russian history was neither a living presence nor a subdued background. It was therefore necessary to introduce this atrocity into the canon of national education—partly in the hope that if the lessons of history were remembered, they would not repeat. (Toker 67)

Discussion of the *lageri* was both a warning for future generations and an attack on neo-Stalinists, who were identified as 'responsible' for the camp system.

It was in this context that the anthology *Zapiski vashei sovremennitsy* was issued by the newly-established *Vozvrashchenie* organization as the first volume of the series *Dodnes' tiagoteet*. This was the first collection of Russian women's camp narratives to be published. Editor Semen Vilenskii notes:

Авторы этого сборника—женщины, в разные годы находившиеся в заключении [. . .] и реабилитированные после XX съезда партии. Почти все вошедшие в сборнике материалы (в основном это—фрагменты из воспоминаний) ранее не опубликовались. Они переданы издательству «Советский писатель» с согласия их авторов

или, когда речь шла о посмертной публикации, с согласия тех, кто сохранил эти рукописи. В числе таких душеприказчиков—и сам составитель сборника. (4)

Vilenskii, introducing the anthology, discusses its credentials as life writing: these are not indirect accounts. The materials, previously unpublished, appear out of the authors' own desire that their stories be heard—this was a publication independent of the state and its manufactured enthusiasm. Vilenskii himself, as he notes, is both “*dusheprikazchik*” and a former *zek*, bridging the gap between past and present as he document horrors shared by others.

This short introduction contains no history of the Gulag: by 1989, such already common knowledge would have been redundant. Instead, it asserts the authenticity of the individual narratives and locates them within a specific niche: that of *women* prisoners. The volume's need for a special ‘image’ is the result of the decades-long traditions of camp literature. Toker divides this tradition into several broad periods. From 1918-1945, literature published about the Gulag and its predecessors tended to be sensationalized and confined to the experiences of a single prisoner. This ‘first wave’, written by actual (not imagined) state enemies, was not available to Soviet readers (Toker 28-33).

Publications in the 1940s and 1950s were better informed and received greater publicity in the West, where two trials in Paris (1949 and 1950) focused attention on the Gulag and foreign apologists. Several authors compared imprisonment in Stalinist and Nazi camps (Toker 37-46).

From 1953-1956 accounts appeared by repatriated Germans and other Europeans. “[A]uthors are already aware of not being the first to bear witness. Hence, their main emphasis is not so much on the camp regulations and routine as on concrete historical particulars, personal discoveries” and the multiethnic population of post-war camps (Toker 46). This shift towards representing a more individualized camp experience reappears in perestroika-era publications, emphasizing the often maligned literary links between the Thaw and *glasnost*.

From 1953-1966 (and in particular from the publication of *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* to 1966), sanctioned works about the camps appeared in the USSR. These accounts conformed to two guidelines: 1. Criticism of the Gulag had to be directed at Stalinism and, 2. The camps needed to be described as survivable and limited in their horrors (Toker 48-49). Beginning in 1966, the camp theme fell out of favor. The next major milestone was the 1973 *tamizdat* publication of the first part of *Arkhipelag GULAG* (Toker 60). This work became the standard against which all camp literature would be implicitly measured, a situation some authors resented.⁶

By the late 1980s camp literature was a sanctioned portion of culture. This facilitated a crucial shift in reception: from assessment as ‘documentation’ to discussion of its aesthetic elements. At the same time, there was both a preventative “future-oriented ethical drive” and a “past-oriented drive—the wish to commemorate and honor the victims of the regime and to fill in gaps in historiography” (Toker 68).

In an undated manuscript published in *Voprosy literatury* (1989), Varlam Shalamov outlines a more rigid view:

В новой прозе—после Хиросимы, после самообслуживания в Освенциме и Серпантинной на Колыме, после войн и революций—все дидактическое отвергается. Искусство лишено [?] права на проповедь. Никто никого учить не может, не имеет права учить. [. . .] Новая проза—само событие, бой, а не его описание. То есть—документ, прямое участие автора в событиях жизни. Проза, пережитая как документ. (Shalamov 241, commentary in original)

Literature cannot teach, but it can recount moral struggle. Perestroika-era women’s Gulag writing, however, often conflates these two functions, instructing through documentation at the level of plot and theme.

Women’s life writing about the camps, like perestroika-era Gulag literature as a whole, is motivated by both the need to uphold the mission of documentation and to do so in a new and compelling manner. These expectations exist alongside the problems of marginality Savkina notes with respect to women’s autobiographies as a genre.

Commonplaces of Women’s Camp Literature

The factors previously discussed (expectations of life writing, changing reception of camp literature) originate outside individual women’s narratives. There is, however, a set of internal features that Toker terms “topoi”: “which connect the selection of material with recurrent structural features” (82). A narrative usually contains at least seven of nine topoi: the arrest, dignity and the struggle to maintain it, stages (“well-defined periods of the author’s stay in different prisons and camps”), escape (whether real or imaginary), moments of reprieve, Room 101 (an Orwellian reference to the worst experience a *zek*

can or cannot describe), chance, the zone and the larger zone, end-of-term fatigue (Toker 82-94). Various camp works emphasize different topoi: one could argue that Ivan Denisovich's infamously 'mild' day is nothing but a collection of moments of reprieve, while Glinka's description of gang rape is an extended development of Room 101.

These topoi are a ritualized unification of individual examples of camp literature. However, for Toker they are primarily associated with plot-level activity. My analysis expands on this idea, using the idea of "commonplaces": structural units that are both plot-oriented and thematic, sometimes combining several of Toker's topoi. I have identified three such commonplaces: community, transformation, and bearing witness, all of which reflect expectations of life writing as a whole and changes in the reception of camp literature.

The commonplace of community refers to the actual or imagined relations between prisoners. Perceptions of community are a function of the author's pre-arrest identity. Since almost all authors of women's (and men's) camp literature are members of the intelligentsia, this community reflects the identity of women intellectuals in the *bol'shaia zona*.

Community between political women prisoners is described in tones sometimes approaching the idealistic. Ol'ga Adama Sliozberg, arrested in 1936 for unknown reasons, describes her communal cell in the Solovki prison as a locus for education (Adamova-Sliozberg 8).

Мы установили такой порядок: вставали в восемь часов и час делали гимнастику при открытом окне. Потом завтракали и садились за учебу. Два часа в день Женя занималась с нами английским языком,

два часа Зина учила нас математике. Час я занималась с Женей французским и час с Лидой—русским. Потом я читала французские книги, которые было двести пятьдесят томов, и все очень хорошие.

(Adamova-Sliozberg 37)

In addition, Zhenia insists that her cellmates read *Pravda* cover to cover, an indication of her continuing staunch support for Stalin. (Support of the Soviet state is found throughout women's camp writing produced by the intelligentsia.)

Obviously, the above relatively humane conditions were greatly facilitated by the fact that the women were in a prison, not in a camp, where they would have been expected to work. Likewise, within the zone access to books was almost nonexistent.

When conditions were less bearable, the sense of community solidarity sometimes increased and sometimes frayed. Nadedzhda Grankina, arrested in 1936 (probably in connection with having admitted to reading Trotskii), describes annoyance at her fellow women prisoners while being transported by train through Siberia. As others (including Evgeniia Ginzburg) composed or recited songs and poems,

Мне казалось, что передавать чужие мысли и чувства, хотя бы и красиво изложенные, сейчас не время. Я мучительно искала ответа на свой вопросы и оправдания всему происходившему с нами, а они старались уйти от этих вопросов в бездумье, в музыку стихов Блока, Ахматова, Гумилева. (Grankina 169)

Grankina, refusing to be distracted by 'untimely' thoughts, isolates herself from her companions. Occasionally, such isolation is the result of political disagreements,

especially between ‘real’ political enemies (Socialist Revolutionaries) and the ‘accidental’ political prisoners still convinced of Stalin’s justness.

Relations between political and criminal prisoners (*blatnye*) vary from supportive to horribly exploitative, often oscillating between these two extremes within the same work. Glinka, imprisoned in 1950 for being in Nazi-occupied Novorossiisk, describes one encounter between political and criminal prisoners after both have been transported across the Sea of Okhotsk (Trofimova 215). Local ‘free’ men and prisoners, having heard that women have arrived, come to greet them:

Большинство мужиков загодя запаслись снедью, кто дома, кто в поселковом ларьке; в толпу штрафниц через головы полетели пачки чая и папирос, ломти хлеба, консервы... Бросить изголодавшемуся арестанту корку хлеба—было поступком, наводившим на мысль о неблагонадежности и наказуемым, случись это *там*, на сострадательной матушке-Руси: *там* полагалось верноподданно опустить глаза, пройти мимо и навсегда забыт. Но тут—потому ли, что почти здешние мужики имели лагерное прошлое?—тут был иной закон... (Glinka 112)

At this moment the entire *poselok* of Bugurchan is a community, if only in opposition to the less humane attitudes towards prisoners in European Russia. The distribution of badly needed food is followed by an exchange of songs between the males in the crowd (Glinka terms them all “muzhiki”) and the women *blatnye*. This is followed by the main event of the *rasskaz*: an unspecified number of women prisoners are dragged

into a nearby building and raped for two days (Glinka 112-113). While the political prisoners are among the victims, it is unclear whether they are the only ones.

Glinka's description shows that the nature of community varies by time, context, and constituent members. Community relations between politicals and non-politicals are much more tenuous than those between politicals. Nevertheless, the initial kindness shown in "Kolymskii tramvai" is apparently not an isolated incident. When Grankina arrives in her *lager* in the Far East, her appearance and that of her fellow prisoners arouses pity from the camp's criminals:

Наш вид, истощенный и бледный, и отсутствие у нас вещей поразили даже уголовников, и когда мы появились в лагере, то многие плакали, а мужчины бросали нам через зону майки и трусы, и кое-кто из женщин переоделись. (172)

Camp life per se may not have been marked by such compassion, yet Grankina's arrival confirms a basic level of humanity uniting both politicals and criminals.

Holmgren identifies discussion of community as a common feature of women's life writing about the camps:

[T]hese writers exhibit the other-directedness and sense of community so often noted in women's autobiographies [. . .]. It not only indicates that women chose to assign inherent value to other members of their sex (regardless of their political utility), but it conveys, I think, a more fundamental shift in societal values. (132)

Holmgren sees positive visions of community as a triumph in circumstances deliberately created to exacerbate misery and strife.

A similar feature of community is listing the names of fellow prisoners, and not only the famous personages encountered in the camps, prisons, and transports. Liljeström notes a similar tendency in women's sanctioned life writing: "The enumeration of names [. . .] increases the amount of women connected to the otherwise so gender-neutral revolutionary image" (90). While for Liljeström's authors listing directs attention to women's participation in sanctioned history, Gulag writing creates a parallel but heretical account of the 'building of socialism'. Here, community is joined with the commonplace of bearing witness. What also results is the solidification of the author's status: she is the center of a group of friends and acquaintances.

Holmgren asserts that this depiction of community had far-reaching results, albeit indirectly: "these women both reflect and help facilitate the movement of post-Stalin Soviet society away from public life and specific political commitment to the private sphere, personal attachment, and individual fulfillment" (132). While it would be rash to assume that women's writing about the camps redirected Soviet literature, there is certainly a connection between depictions of *byt* and *chastnaia zhizn'* in the camps and in post-1953 literature as a whole.

The commonplace of transformation unifies life writing both within and outside of the camps. Transformation refers to an often spiritual change in the self described as originating within the individual. It may refer to something as slight as political disillusionment, or connote an entire shift in worldview. Transformation is a commonplace of both male and female life writing about the camps.

Sometimes one form of transformation foreshadows another. Adamova-Sliozberg recalls a pre-arrest conversation with her husband concerning dekulakization:

Он еще много говорил об исторической необходимости перестройки деревни, об огромных масштабах творимого на наших глазах дела, о том, что приходится примириться с жертвами... [. . .] Я потом много раз отмечала, что особенно легко с жертвами примиряются те, кто в число жертв не попал. (Adamova-Sliozberg 10)

The “potom” is the post-arrest ‘re-education’ transforming Adamova-Sliozberg from a reluctant supporter of the “perestroika derevni” to one identifying with its victims. This first moment of transformation is later subsumed by another, which I will shortly discuss.

Transformation sometimes occurs as an extension of what Toker identifies as the “escape” topos. However, escape here refers to a mental departure:

before the leveling exhaustion set in, both men and women would also “escape” in the figurative sense of the word—into dreams, imagination, memories, or poetry. Cultivation of friendships would create haven enclaves amidst the filth and vexation of camp life. The ultimate escape consisted in relinquishing the hold on one’s sanity. Dementia, however, was most often a lethal symptom of advanced pellagra. (Toker 86)

Those who reached the dementia stage of suffering from pellagra were less likely to record their experiences.

Elena Vladimirova, arrested first in 1937 and then almost shot in 1944 for circulating an underground political pamphlet, notes that poetry helped her survive. First memorizing a long narrative poem concerning the camps, she then artfully transcribed it: “Nakonets ia vse zapisala, strok po dvadtsat', na bumazhke, znachit, vse bylo bumazhek dvesti, nosila ikh v marlevom meshochke na shee, beregla, chtoby ne ochen' smiat', poka

ne spriatala v toi zheleznoi korobochke” (Vladimirova 129). Poetry is first an alternate reality, then a precious talisman. Here, unlike in Grankina’s account, escapism is positive, removing the individual from a daily reality tedious at best and horrific all too often.

The type of transformation depends on individual talent and “chance,” another of Toker’s topoi. Tat’iana Leshchenko-Sukhomlina, arrested in 1947, worked in the Vorkuta camp theater thanks to previous acting experience. She was ecstatic: “V teatr otbirali liudei talantlivykh, a my vse ne tol’ko liubili nash teatr, no i byli emu tak blagodarny, ved’ on byl ne tol’ko pribezhishchem, no i daval vozmozhnost’ soprikosnoveniia s iskusstvom. Ne khlebom edinyh...” (Leshchenko-Sukhomlina 456). For Leshchenko-Sukhomlina, this involvement has material consequences: she avoids the life-threatening general labor and is not in her barracks when *blatnye* rape its occupants on Christmas Eve, 1950 (Leshchenko-Sukhomlina 460).

This experience blurs the distinction between the commonplaces of community and transformation. Indeed, transformation of an individual’s experience in the camps is often linked to joining or leaving a certain group, especially following the period of arrest or when in transit from European Russia to the Far East.

Not all narratives contain the commonplace of transformation. Its absence signals a camp experience bereft of any redemptive experience or the “moments of reprieve” in which to experience it. Glinka’s “Kolymskii tramvai” is one example. By focusing and generalizing from a single incident, the gang rape of the women prisoners, the author traps both reader and victim into a single, horrifically extended moment of narrated time. The rape is not even described as an initiation experience, since the narrator notes that the

women know what will happen to them from the minute the crowd of men gathers (Glinka 112).

Khama Volovich, one of the few non-intellectuals to write about her camp experiences, describes the period following her arrest and imprisonment in 1937 without indicating any sort of positive transformation (Volovich 461). There is only a loss of innocence and an all-encompassing feeling of shame. Commenting on prisoner construction projects, she observes:

Если бы все было по-доброму, можно было бы и погордиться немного своей работой. Но кто побывал там, не гордится и не очень-то любит вспоминать свое прошлое. Судя по себе, могу сказать, что это не только желание вычеркнуть из памяти годы мук и лишения, но и чувство стыда. Такое чувство должна испытывать девушка, обещенная любимым человеком. (Volovich 477)

For Volovich, there is no redemptive transformation through suffering. Nothing comes from the camp experience except torment, privation, and a feeling of shame. This unadorned bitterness differentiates her life writing from other women's accounts.

Bearing witness, the most noticeable commonplace, is often the stated justification for writing. This almost always implies describing others' sufferings as well as the narrator's, including both political prisoners and "zhalkie sushchestva," as Glinka refers to the *blatnye* (111). This raises an issue of implicit 'vanguardism', a role all too often assumed by the Russian intelligentsia vis-à-vis the less fortunate. Holmgren ascribes this practice to Russian intellectual women's autobiographies as a whole: "they speak *for*, not *from* or *with* the people" (131, italics in original). In examining the Stalinist

Gulag, we must rely on these potentially alienated and elitist viewpoints: the large number of intellectuals in the camps from 1934-1953 makes this era the best-documented but distorts its depiction (Toker 20).

Narrators describe bearing witness as an individual choice. This decision usually is itself a type of transformation, dividing the life writing into ‘before’ and ‘after’ periods. Adamova-Sliozberg makes this explicit in her introduction, noting that writing her narrative is the best decision she has ever made (Adamova-Sliozberg 8). Accordingly, the decision to bear witness is the key moment in her work, occurring after she states that she is unable to comprehend evil (Adamova-Sliozberg 49).

Я буду свидетельствовать!

Это решение, созревшее во мне, наполнило новым содержанием мою жизнь. Я стала вникать в каждую повесть, которую рассказывали мне мои товарищи, запоминать все, что вижу вокруг.

Жизнь моя обрела смысл. (Adamova-Sliozberg 49)

The decision reconfigures how external events and traumas shape her life. Adamova-Sliozberg implicitly reiterates one of the fundamental purposes of any narrative: organizing external realities in a way meaningful to the author.

For Glinka, bearing witness is more topically political, creating a direct link between the Stalinist past and a need to challenge its supporters. “Kolymskii tramvai,” published in 1989, appeared only a year after Nina Andreeva's letter. Throughout the *dokumental'nyi rasskaz*, the first-person “I” narrator is associated with generalizing comments underscoring the brutality of the Stalinist camps. These moments reinforce the work’s anti-Stalinist message while giving it an overbearing didacticism:

Этот документальный рассказ я отдаю всем приверженцам Сталина, которые и по сей день не желают верить, что беззаконие и садистские расправы их кумир насаждал сознательно. Пусть они хоть на миг представит своих жен, дочерей и сестер среди той бугурчанской штрафбригады; ведь это только случайно вышло, что там были не они, а мы... (Glinka 112-113)

The pronoun “we” is significant. Glinka’s “I” narrator, although explicitly committed to bearing witness, does not explain how she has access to the events surrounding the rape at Burgurchan, which is recounted via a third-person narrator. It is, however, extremely likely that both the “I” and third-person narrator reflect the experiences of Glinka herself. Glinka’s works are usually autobiographical (Trofimova 215). Like the young student who is assaulted, Glinka was arrested during the post-war period. Both are from Leningrad. However, the link between Glinka and the student is never made explicit, thus frustrating the reader attempting to determine why a first-person narrator suddenly appears in a work dominated by the third person. Bearing witness for Glinka means speaking for others while preserving a distance between their suffering and her own. “Kolymskii tramvai,” although a crudely written work, unintentionally shows the narrator's options in interpreting the commonplace of bearing witness.

These options give the narrative its individual appearance. Women's life writing about the Gulag published during perestroika negotiates between expectations concerning documentary genres, changing receptions of camp literature, and commonplaces that shape the internal makeup of each work. Like their male counterparts, women emphasize the camp as a negative experience that is at times redeemed by feelings of community,

personal transformation, and the decision to become a witness. These commonplaces, in turn, are suggested both by immediate demands of the camp environment and the prisoner's pre-arrest identity. The narrative formed by the above factors is both personal and societal, allowing a given author to shape her work within the set of prescriptions governing camp prose.

Notes

¹ I rely on Wayne Booth's fundamental distinctions between narrator, implied author, and author (71-76). The unmodified term "author" denotes Booth's "implied author": that personage suggested to us by the work rather than by any objective external reality.

² Leona Toker compares both the Stalinist and Nazi camp systems in terms of their multinational populations (28-72). This aspect of the camp experience is a common theme in Western Holocaust literature, as well as some Russian works (e.g., the inmates' mixture of languages in Vasilii Grossman's *Zhizn' i sud'ba*.)

³ I am grateful to Jane Gary Harris (University of Pittsburgh) for bringing this crucial yet chronically imprecise term to my attention.

⁴ As Alastair Fowler notes in *Kinds of Literature*, "genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon" (37). This is especially true in Russian literature, e.g., Solzhenitsyn terming *Arhipelag GULAG* a "khudozhestvennoe issledovanie."

⁵ In characteristically elliptical fashion, Althusser outlines how the omnipresent force of ideology creates the appearance of the 'obvious' or 'natural':

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are 'obviousnesses') obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we

cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the ‘still, small voice of conscience’): ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’ (172, italics in original)

⁶ In *Zona*, Sergei Dovlatov’s autobiographical frame narrator petulantly bemoans the fact that all Russians writing about the camps are compared to Solzhenitsyn: “Razumeetsia, ia ne Solzhenitsyn. Razve eto lishaet menia prava na sushchestvovanie?” (3).