

slipped, like his character, between the cracks of political repression. By making *That Third Guy* and his theatre criticism available to Anglophone readers, this excellent critical edition makes the case for reinstating Krzhizhanovskii as a modernist playwright, an original essayist and as a case study in intellectual survival.

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Nezakonnaia kometa. Varlam Shalamov: Opyt medlennogo chteniya. By Elena Mikhailik. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018. 376 pp. P360, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2020.139

Elena Mikhailik, Professor of Russian literature and herself a strong poet, is an expert on Varlam Shalamov, a Gulag writer and, as recently recognized, a classic of Russian literature. Most of her work on Shalamov has now appeared under one roof, in a book that will be a must for new scholarship in the field. Its title translates as “An Illegitimate Comet. Varlam Shalamov: An Experiment in Slow Reading.”

The book starts by demonstrating that Shalamov’s economical and yet at times eerily poetic texts are suffused with meaning. The opening essay, on his short story “Berries,” analyzes the density of meaning in terms of suggestive intratextual links, understated allusiveness, and transformations of the literal into the figurative. Mikhailik believes that when the text achieves a certain level of semantic saturation, its internal links and external associations begin to arise spontaneously, beyond the author’s or the audience’s control.

The next three essays, each focusing on a specific short story, examine the relationship between the concentration of meaning in Shalamov’s prose and its multiple intertextual links—open or submerged allusions, reminiscences, and different ways of both inscribing the texts within the Russian humanistic literary tradition and swerving away from it. This tradition is criticized for its tendency to dismiss “calories” for the sake of the “spirit” (172) and to expect apotheosis at the expense of human life and individual self-identification (282).

The book then turns to the nature of Shalamov’s *dokumental’nost’*: the factographic character of what he conceptualized as “New Prose”; his relationship with the “faktoviki” (“fact writers”) of the 1920s; and the tension between his truthful representation of camp fates with the non-referentiality evident in his repetitions, self-contradictions, variations on the same plot situations, and other methods of constructing plots out of recombined pieces of experience. Mikhailik argues that Shalamov effected a revolution in Russian prose, all the more effective for having passed unnoticed. She opposes the view that the factographic character of Shalamov’s prose denies its status as art. Her study explains the sense of authenticity produced by Shalamov’s works in terms of the artistic blending of the author and his material. The author is not just a witness, he is testimony itself; he is “evidence,” a part rather than just the agent of the narrative (173)—in Shalamov’s own metaphor, Pluto who has risen from Hades rather than Orpheus (278) who visited it on a mission. The readers, especially those who tend to assimilate into their world-view mainly that which has been recognized and processed by literary art (223), receive the “document” as their own experience with which they have to come to terms.

Mikhailik places this aspect of Shalamov’s poetics in the context of audience reception of various works of Gulag literature, in particular of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Evgeniia Ginzburg, and Anatolii Zhigulin. While dwelling on the difference between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn, she points out an analogy between their works: camp

realities have to be represented in the language that is *not* the language of the camps. (Her remarks, following Ilya Kukulkin's research, on the discussion of Sergei Eisenstein's film in Solzhenitsyn's "Ivan Denisovich" are important in this and other respects.)

Mikhailik's well-informed analysis demonstrates, among other things, that Shalamov's intertextual agenda offers something to every reader, from those whose knowledge of literature is confined to the Soviet school curricula to those in the intellectual "inner circle" of twentieth-century poetry and prose. Her study is well grounded in literary theory but shows constant awareness of the human suffering and the injustice of the dystopian system of the camps as represented in Shalamov's stories. She has avoided both the pitfalls of emotional gut response and those of intellectualization abstracted from the record of human pain.

With close attention to detail, Mikhailik discusses Shalamov's late work "Vishera: Antiroman," and, in contrast with Josefina Lundblad Janjić, who reads "Vishera" as a *Bildungsroman*, represents it as an artistic failure owing to a *too complete blending* of the authorial position with that of the still insufficiently-experienced first-person protagonist. This controversial view is in tune with Mikhailik's analysis of the nature of Shalamov's *dokumental'nost'*—her occasionally polemical statements should be read in context. Their courage, along with the non-exhaustiveness of her insightful analyses, stimulates further discussion. Indeed, the conversation about Shalamov's complex axiology must continue—the constantly changing cultural realities will further deepen and modify the appreciation of his work.

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Der Nister's Soviet Years: Yiddish Writer as Witness to the People. By Mikhail Krutikov. Jews in Eastern Europe Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019. ix, 308 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00, hard bound; \$38.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2020.140

Mikhail Krutikov's monograph on *Der Nister's Soviet Years* demonstrates the transformative potential of a richly contextual, culturally informed approach to Yiddish literary studies even as it adroitly reconsiders the whole of the premier Yiddish symbolist's writing career.

Der Nister, the pseudonym of Pinchas Kahanovich, has long been seen as a writer whose work splits into two distinct phases: an early, symbolist phase, in which he brilliantly reworked the form of the Hassidic tale to reflect on the relationship between the real world and the world of fantasy, and a later Soviet phase in which he was seen as abandoning his early literary ambitions in a doomed attempt to fit himself into a mold acceptable to the Stalinist regime. This reading reflected the values of North American literary scholars of the mid- to late-twentieth century, taught to value literary innovation, and trained in close reading techniques that foregrounded the words on the page over the context in which they were written.

In contrast, Krutikov demonstrates in a skillful blending of close reading and historical research that Der Nister's shift to a more realist style was an organic development of his aesthetic. One of Krutikov's most exciting insights that this type of analysis allows is that Der Nister's writing was fundamentally performative. Works such as the famous "Unter a ployt," a dizzying and disturbing symbolist piece, were intended to create a reaction among his contemporaries that would mirror and extend the meaning of the piece itself. For this reason, reading this work in modernist isolation misses half of the story.