

## The issue of the genre of *Kolyma stories* by Varlam Shalamov and its editions in Polish\*

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*Kolyma stories* by Varlam Shalamov, still considered by researchers one of the most remarkable works of the time not only among other Gulag-themed works, has not been fortunate when it came to editions in Polish. In fact, not only in Polish. For a quarter of a century it was almost completely unknown in the author's homeland. In the USSR it was not approved for printing for obvious reasons. It was only circulated as *samizdat*, but in that case the circle of readers was naturally small, almost entirely limited to Moscow-based dissident groups. Through *samizdat* it made its way, though it is unclear in what condition, to the West. Furthermore, in 1966 Shalamov himself prepared, with help from Leonid Pinski, a volume that consisted of three series (*Kolyma stories*, *The spade artist*, *The left bank*), and passed it through the slavist Clarence Brown, an acquaintance of Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam, a researcher of Osip Mandelstam's output, to the United States, most probably to Gleb Struve, an editor, with a stipulation to publish the series in a book form as an indivisible whole<sup>1</sup>.

It remains unclear why the huge volume of six hundred pages went to Roman Gul, editor of the New York-based *Novyi zhurnal* [The New Journal] periodical, who, against the author's will, published in it over a period of eleven years two to three stories per issue and introduced many unsolicited corrections. For example,

\* First printed as "Problem gatunku 'Opowiadań kołymskich' Warłama Szalamowa a ich edycje w języku polskim", in: *Napis* issue XXIV (2018), pp. 179-196. *Кольмские рассказы* [*Kolyma stories*, transl. John Glad (1980); transl. Donald Rayfield (2018)].

1 D. Nicz, *Конспект послелазерной биографии Варлама Шаламова*, Личное издание [An outline of Varlam Shalamov's post-camp biography, personal edition] (2016), p. 16.

he abridged the outstanding short story *Cherry brandy* about the death of a poet and edited it heavily transforming it into a regular factual testimony about the final days of Mandelstam.<sup>2</sup>

Roman Gul failed to notice the literary value of Shalamov's masterpiece. He treated it not as literature but as something of an account or a memoir. When he published the first four short stories from different series (*Sententious*, *The parcel*, *Kant* and *Dry ration*) in a December 1966 issue of his periodical, in the editor's note he described the author as a long-term prisoner of Kolyma and his work as a 'human account of exceptional value'.<sup>3</sup> The name Shalamov was basically unknown to him back then, which was why he took so many liberties in handling the writer's works. Many years later he proudly stated in his memoir that by publishing Shalamov in the periodical, 'they were the first to reveal the outstanding writer to the West, a writer who showed the terrible and inhuman inferno of Kolyma'.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Shalamov's work remained practically unknown to Russian émigré readers, even more so because the other periodicals, including the *Grani* [Facets] and the *Posiew* [Seeding] circulated in West Germany, employed similar practices which prevented it from being appreciated on a fuller and deeper level.<sup>5</sup> The situation did not change until 1978 when Mikhail Geller, an outstanding historian and literary historian, published in the London-based Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd a complete (as it was assumed at that time) edition of *Kolyma stories*, which, interestingly enough, became the base for almost all Polish translations of Shalamov's Kolyma-themed prose.

2 J. Klotz, *Варлам Шаламов между тамиздатом и Союзом советских писателей (1966-1978). К 50-летию выхода "Колымских рассказов" на Западе* [Varlam Shalamov between tamizdat and the Soviet Writer's Association (1966-1978). To the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Kolyma stories* in the West], <http://www.colta.ru/articles/literature/13546> (accessed on: 15 February 2017).

3 *Новый журнал* [The New Journal] no. 85 (1966), p. 5. Gul inserted there texts from two series: *Kolyma stories*, which was also the title of the entire volume, and *The left bank*. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish.]

4 "Мы печатали Шаламова больше десяти лет и были первыми, кто открыл Западу этого замечательного писателя, взявшего своей темой – страшный и бесчеловечный ад КОЛЫМЫ" [We printed Shalamov for more than a decade and were the first to discover to the West this remarkable writer, who took as his theme the terrible and inhumane hell of Kolyma]. R. Gul, *Я унес Россию. Апология русской эмиграции* [I carried Russia. An apology of Russian emigration], vol. 3. *Россия в Америке* [Russia in America] (New York: 1989), p. 179.

5 I should add that the situation of the translations of *Kolyma stories* into other languages was similarly problematic. Editors were extremely liberal with choosing which stories they would publish, they intervened in their texts, sometimes changed the title of the whole, and even distorted the author's name on several occasions: in Polish Szalanow instead of the correct Polish version Szalamow. See, e.g., M. Goloviznin, *К вопросу о происхождении первых зарубежных изданий "Колымских рассказов" В.Т. Шаламова* [On the origin of the first foreign editions of *Kolyma stories* by V.T. Shalamov], <https://shalamov.ru/research/219/> (accessed on: 10 May 2018).

That mode of publication of a major work, which entailed ripping it apart, was particularly infuriating for the writer who expressed his irritation resoundingly in a letter he sent to the *Literaturnaya gazeta* [Literary Newspaper], in which he described that practice as despicable<sup>6</sup>. He treated the *Kolyma stories* series, and the later and following *Kolyma* series, as one work. That was an outcome of his concept of literature, or more specifically of contemporary prose, which he formulated in his essays and letters, which often constituted nearly artistic manifestos. In them he argued that when discussing the new unimaginable experiences that modern humans had been subjected to in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the age of Auschwitz and *Kolyma*, a writer ought to reject former literary conventions, the worn-out and inadequate modes of talking about the world, and he stipulated the need to seek new rules of text building that would not refer readers to everyday experiences nor suggest the already spent literary patterns. In his concept, which stemmed from the traditions of Russian avant-garde, with which he came into contact in the 1920's, there was no place for the novel, especially in its 19<sup>th</sup>-century realistic variant, a genre which was extremely conventionalised and thus incapable of stating anything new, i.e., a genre which was essentially dead. He asserted that the experiences humans had endured, unimaginable from the perspective of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, required innovative modes of discussing reality, which remained outside the realm of the possibilities of the traditional novel. In fact, for art in general to be able to exist it would need to offer, according to Shalamov, 'constant novelty'.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn from 1966 he thus wrote about this subject:

» The novel is dead. (...) For readers who survived the war, Hiroshima, the gas chambers of Auschwitz and concentration camps, any made-up stories are offensive. In modern prose and in the nearest future it is important to step outside the limits and forms of literature.<sup>8</sup>

6 "Подлый способ публикации [...] – по рассказу-два в номере – имеет целью создать у читателя впечатление, что я – их постоянный сотрудник" [The sneaky way of publishing (...) – one story or two per issue – is intended to give the reader the impression that I am – their regular employee]. V. Shalamov, *Письмо в редакцию "Литературной газеты"* [Letter to the editors of *Literaturnaya gazeta*], in: *idem, Собрание сочинений* [Collected works], in: vol. 6 + vol. 7, ext. 7, дополнительный: *Рассказы и очерки 1960-1970* [supplementary: Stories and essays 1960-1970]; *Стихотворения 1950-1970* [Poems 1950-1970]; *Статьи, эссе, публицистика; Из архива писателя* [Articles, essays, journalism; From the writer's archive] (Moscow: 2013), p. 365.

7 V. Shalamov, *О моей прозе (Из письма к И.П. Сиротинской)* [About my prose (From a letter to I.P. Sirotinskaya)], in: *idem, Собрание сочинений в четырех томах* [Collected works in four volumes], vol. 4 (Moscow: 1998), p. 475.

8 V. Shalamov, *Письма к А.И. Солженицыну* [Letters to A.I. Solzhenitsyn], in: *idem, Собрание сочинений в четырех томах* [Collected works in four volumes], vol. 4, p. 472. Translation into English from a translation into Polish by the author of the article from the original.

One should, he continued, ‘not describe new phenomena which exist in reality but create new modes of describing them’, so that it is ‘no [longer] literature’, but not a document either, rather ‘prose experienced as a document’.<sup>9</sup>

He described his own Gulag (and other) short stories as *new prose* and treated them as a fight against literary conventions viewed by today’s readers as literature, i.e., falsehood. The name *new prose* helped him avoid any straightforward genre classification that could place his works either under the heading of belles-lettres or quasi-literary forms. He did, however, propose a specific circle of meanings: the designation ‘new’ indicated a severing from previous literary norms while the word ‘prose’ enabled one to associate his texts with the category of artistic works. Therefore, he devised it as a genological term, which was visible in his attempts to create an entire theory of *new prose*, which offered the most general description of its artistic objectives and some rules of its poetics, and which justified its emergence at a certain point of the history of literature as an alternative to the dead novel.<sup>10</sup>

Incidentally, the death of the novel was proclaimed several times throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Soviet context, LEF argued in the 1920’s against the novel from the factographic position and one of the group’s activists even accused it of causing a ‘detachment of a writer’s works from the revolutionary pace of our days’ due to its ‘massiveness and a lack of flexibility’.<sup>11</sup> Yet that was an extreme case. A more justified theory of the ‘death of the novel’ was created in 1923 by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in the article *Ideas on the novel*, the discussions of which together with the first releases in the USSR of the author’s texts in Russian were published in the press and in book editions at the turn of the 1960’s, i.e., exactly when Shalamov was writing *Kolyma stories*.<sup>12</sup> It was in the 1950’s that discussions about the dusk of the novel erupted anew, initially in France, where in 1953 Émile Michel Cioran’s famous essay entitled *The end of the novel*<sup>13</sup> was released, and later in other countries, including in Eastern Europe. The traditional novel was criticised by the representative of the French *new novel*, including Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute; the latter argued that the novel could not exist in

9 *Ibid.*

10 More on the topic – see: F. Apanowicz, *‘Nowa proza’ Warłama Szalamowa. Problemy wypowiedzi artystycznej* [Varlam Shalamov’s ‘new prose’. Problems of artistic expression] (Gdańsk: 1996), pp. 75-94.

11 T. Motyleva, *Зарубежный роман сегодня* [The foreign novel today] (Moscow: 1966), p. 6.

12 See: J. Ortega y Gasset, “Дегуманизация искусства” [The dehumanisation of art], in: *Современная книга по эстетике* [A modern book on aesthetics] (Москва: 1957), p. 63-64; J. N. Davudov, *Искусство и элита* [Art and the elite] (Moscow: 1966); I. Terterjan, “Гуманизоваться или погибнуть?” [Humanise or perish?], in: *Вопросы литературы* [Literature questions] no. 6 (1961).

13 É.M. Cioran, “La fin du roman” [The end of the novel], in: *La Nouvelle Revue Française* [The New French Review] issue 12 (1953).

the modern world, similarly to Shalamov: 'What made-up story could compete with the tragedy of the POWs in Poitiers, with concentration camps or the Battle of Stalingrad?'<sup>14</sup>

Spurred by the thaw period, those discussions echoed in the Soviet Union in publications devoted to the French *new novel*, and they were particularly strongly promoted after the 1963 Leningrad meeting of European writers, which was broadly commented upon in Soviet literary press and in books.<sup>15</sup> The many statements made by the writer indicate that he followed the unfolding debate, he noticed in it many notions from the LEF period, as well as those which he used as the criteria for his own works, which assured him about his choices even further. He also saw how close his own strife was to the propositions of *nouveau roman* (though he also stressed the differences between them), which is maybe why he applied the term *new prose* on a regular basis to *Kolyma stories*, a collection which, according to him, met the notion's stipulations and was supposed to replace the worn genre of the novel. It also seems significant that one of his later works, the 1971 series of short stories entitled *Visbera*, even received from him the telling subtitle of *anti-roman*, a term which was usually applied to, following the example of Jean Paul Sartre, novelistic productions of the French school. That was intended as a statement that from the point of view of traditional notions the texts he wrote were anti-novels or even anti-literature.

He included an extensive and detailed discussion of *Kolyma stories* as a new genre that was supposed to replace the novel in his superb essay, which he wrote with a deep understanding of theory of literature, entitled *On prose*.<sup>16</sup> His stipulations about the coherence of the text in which individual short stories were supposed to form a uniform whole, superior to each constituent part, even if at first glance they seemed different and unrelated, were particularly significant for the discussion. Aleksander Madyda, a Polish researcher, tried to explain that by starting with the genre model of a novel series and noticed that the established order 'does not reflect any logical object-based organisation'; the composition does not feature the 'progression typical for a series of stories'; there is no 'compositional framework that could bind them together'; and the type of narration or the identity of narrators do not constitute the criterion of cycle-building.<sup>17</sup> I would add the diversity of

14 As quoted in: T. Bałaszowa, "Споры о 'новом романе'" [The 'new novel' debate], in: *Вопросы литературы* [Literature questions] no. 12 (1963), p. 101.

15 T. Bałaszowa, *Французский роман шестидесятых годов* [A French novel of the sixties] (Moscow: 1965); T. Motyleva, *Зарубежный роман сегодня*. See also footnote no. 13.

16 In this essay Shalamov meant the first *Kolyma* series, but he also applied a similar principle in his later series.

17 A. Madyda, "Problematyka genologiczna i moralna 'Opowiadań kołymskich' Warłama Szalamowa"

genres in Shalamov's series: it includes not only short stories but also novellas, physiological, historical, and literary sketches, reportages, vignettes, and even lyrical miniatures. One might assume that the series was anything but a coherent whole.

Yet the author argued that *Kolyma stories* was compositionally coherent and stipulated it be treated as a whole. He stressed in his essay that they are exceptional for their compositional coherence and that only some could switch places while the main base ones must remain where they are. According to him that was proven by the fact that the book made a great impression on whoever read the work as a whole, as a complete book and not a collection of individual stories. And that was stressed by all readers. That was an outcome of the intentional organisation of the stories and a careful consideration for the composition of the whole.<sup>18</sup> A few lines further he even argued that all the stories were placed perfectly. He concluded his argument with a convincing illustration: the story *The typhus quarantine*, concluding the series and the description of the progression of the circles of hell and which depicts the machine that tossed people into a new stage and subjected them to new kinds of suffering, could not open the series.<sup>19</sup> He also argued that its coherence was proven by the transitions in the narration from the first to third person, the fact of using actual and invented names, of introducing characters that appear in several stories, as well as of introducing into the narration documentary parts and the fact that all the stories contained a uniform melody devised by the author. He concluded that those devices were intended to achieve one goal.<sup>20</sup>

[Genological and moral issues of Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma stories*], in: *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Nauki Human.-Spot. IV, Filologia Rosyjska* [Humanities and Social Sciences IV, Russian Philology] col. 281 (1994), pp. 53-54.

- 18 “Композиционная цельность – немалое качество *Колымских рассказов*. В сборнике можно заменить и переставить лишь некоторые рассказы, а главные, опорные, должны стоять на своих местах. Все, кто читал *Колымские рассказы* как целую книгу, а не отдельными рассказами, – отметили сильнейшее впечатление [...]. Это объясняется неслучайностью отбора, вниманием к композиции” [Compositional integrity is a considerable quality of the *Kolyma stories*. Only some of the stories in the collection can be replaced and rearranged, but the main, supporting stories must stand in their places. Everyone who read *Kolyma stories* as a whole book, rather than as separate stories, noted the strongest impression (...). This is due to the non-randomness of the selection, the attention to composition]. V. Shalamov, *Собрание сочинений в четырех томах* [Collected works in four volumes], vol. 4, p. 367.
- 19 “*Тифозный карантин* – кончающий описание кругов ада, и машина, выбрасывающая людей на новые страдания, на новый этап (этап!) – рассказ, который не может начинать книги” [*Typhus quarantine* – ending the description of the circles of hell, and a machine that throws people into new suffering, to a new stage (*etap!*) – a story that cannot start a book]. *Ibid.*
- 20 “Переход от первого лица к третьему, ввод документа. Употребление то подлинных, то вымышленных имен, переходящий герой – все это средства, служащие одной цели. Все рассказы имеют единый музыкальный строй, известный автору” [Transition from first person to third person, entering a document. The use of real names and fictitious names, the passing hero

The compositional coherence of *Kolyma stories*, which somewhat approximates it to the novel, even though it differs considerably from the classical realistic novel, has been indicated by some researchers of Shalamov's works. For example, the already-mentioned Mikhail Geller once wrote about it that 'the many short stories constitute as if chapters of one book' or a mosaic and, therefore, none of them individually 'can offer an overview of the whole', just as a single tile cannot indicate anything about an entire mosaic.<sup>21</sup> Another émigré researcher Leonid Kornev even considered it a version of the modern novel (or rather of anti-novel).<sup>22</sup> One of its Polish translators who used the *nom de plume* of Stefan Wodnik (born Adam Bal), who published his translation in the famous unlicensed publishing house Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza NOWA, also considered it a novel. When discussing Shalamov's work, which he knew from its London edition, he argued that its constituent stories were 'precisely mixed' and added that 'despite appearances that was not caused by the sloppiness or ill will of the publisher but was an intended device'.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, in the introduction to his translation, he expressed a peculiar hypothesis, which justified the opinion that the work was actually a novel:

» In London, as per the instructions of the absent author, a book was emerging, a novel consisting of over a hundred chapters. *Kolyma stories* is only seemingly a collection of separate short stories, while in fact they constitute a complete whole.<sup>24</sup>

However, Shalamov prepared the volume in question in Moscow, and he did not send any directions to London to Mikhail Geller, with whom he had no contact.

Naum Leiderman, a well-known Russian literary historian, also compared the *Kolyma* works to a mosaic, arguing that it presented an image of 'a world that is

are all means to one end. All stories have a common musical structure known to the author.] *Ibid.*, p. 363.

21 M. Geller, *Świat obozów koncentracyjnych a literatura sowiecka* [The world of concentration camps and Soviet literature], transl. from Russian M. Kaniowski (Warsaw: 1981), pp. 269-270.

22 L. Kornev, *Геологическая тайна* [A geological mystery], *Вестник Русского христианского движения* [Bulletin of the Russian Christian Movement] no. 137 (Paris-New York-Moscow: 1982), p. 169.

23 S. Wodnik, *Wstęp* [Introduction], in: V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kolymskie* [*Kolyma stories*], selection, transl. and notes by S. Wodnik, Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza NOWA (Warsaw: 1987), p. 9. Both here and in later footnotes regarding the Polish editions of Shalamov's works I indicate the name of the publishing house as this piece of information is important for the article.

24 *Ibid.*

broken, cut into pieces, and not susceptible to epic synthesis'.<sup>25</sup> That was why it utilised short prose forms. Each short story on the one hand formed 'a closed image which reflected the relationship between man and the world', and, on the other, 'is a part of a large genological formation, one tile in a huge mosaic'.<sup>26</sup> Aleksander Madyda found in the prose, apart from its disintegrating qualities, many major indicators of a classical novella series, e.g., 'the recurrence of some elements'<sup>27</sup> and 'the problems common for most works together with the related attitude towards reality'. He also made an exceptionally important observation stating that Shalamov 'shaped his stories in a way which suggested to readers that they were dealing with statements made not by a fictional narrator but the author himself'. He argued that the autobiographical attitude present in *Kolyma stories* was manifested not in the traditional way, i.e., directly, as if naively, but indirectly, through such measures as the recurrence of motifs, plots and characters, covert quotes, and the mode of storytelling. All the narrators and characters who fulfilled the function of the personal medium 'displayed many common personality and intellectual features – they were usually highly cultured people, with broad horizons, and considerable education'. That 'on the one hand cements the stories into one whole and, on the other, is a clear indication by the author of their autobiographical nature'.

In this context it is worth noting that literary accounts about the Gulag system were usually autobiographical in nature: they included first-person narration, the narrator equalled the protagonist, and the story line usually began with an arrest, continued through a Gulag camp, and concluded with a release home. Thus, the story was told *ex post* and from the outside, from the position of a free person, i.e., the pattern included a *happy ending*. Yet in *Kolyma stories*, particularly in book one, which bears the same title, the stories were narrated from inside the camp and, moreover, from the centre of events described in the present in each story. So there was no question about any *happy ending*. Nevertheless, as the writer himself indicated, even though switching between the first and the third person, the narration was always personal and the narrator's point of view was similar or even identical to that of the protagonist experiencing the events. Characters also changed, yet they were always inside a Gulag camp and in the centre of events. Even Shalamov appeared among them, so he was not only an author describing the events from a later perspective, but a regular prisoner (a *zek*), stuck in the there and then of the

25 M. Lejderman, "...В метельный, ледянящий век" [...In a blizzard, freezing age'], in: *Урал [Ural]* no. 3 (1992), p. 173.

26 *Ibid.*

27 This and further quotes in this paragraph: A. Madyda, "Problematyka genologiczna i moralna 'Opowiadań kolymskich' Warłama Szalamowa", p. 57.



camp. The characters of Andreyev, Krista and Golubev who appear in several of the stories deserve particular attention as their actions are perversely associated with the roles assigned to the members of the Holy Trinity, but these three continue to confuse, swap and mix their roles. There emerges (as was probably the intention of the author, or at least that is what readers can find) a Menippean image of the Trinity in hell, deformed by the place's terrible power.<sup>28</sup> All that is imperceptible at the level of individual stories. Hence the stipulation by the translator of *Kolyma stories* to translate not individual stories but the whole, making sure to retain the intricate associations between them.

Before I proceed to Polish editions of Shalamov's work, I will focus on its 1978 London edition which, as I have indicated, became the basis for most Polish translations. It was, of course, entitled *Колымские рассказы* [*Kolyma stories*] and it consisted of three series, i.e., *Первая смерть* [*The first death*], *Артист лопаты* [*The spade artist*] and *Левый берег* [*The left bank*], as well as an introduction from its editor and publisher Mikhail Geller.<sup>29</sup> A major error immediately stands out: the first series in the author's version was actually called *Колымские рассказы* [*Kolyma stories*], as was the entire volume. Also the order of the series was different from that in the author's version; in the latter, the second series was *The left bank*, and *The spade artist* was the final one. What caused the errors? Mikhail Geller was extremely careful when editing the volume and tried to retain the assumed author's order that existed in the volume that he had been delivered. It is unclear what was the state of the typescript he received from Roman Gul, who had kept it for over a decade – it is possible that it featured this order and that title of the opening series. There must have been a legitimate reason why Geller approved the title *The first death*, which unexpectedly altered the significance of the whole. The story with the same title features a murder of jealousy, like in a romance, completely mismatched with the spirit of *Kolyma stories*, though all its other elements were very much Kolyma-like in nature. Additionally, the London edition of *Kolyma stories* included a total of seventeen short stories from a later series, i.e., *Resurrection of the larch*, which Shalamov wrote after the typescript was sent to the West, and two texts from *Sketches of the criminal world*, while three short stories from the series *The left bank* were omitted. The remaining stories survived with almost no distortions.

The first Polish translations of *Kolyma stories* started to appear as *samizdat* already in the mid-1980's. Grzegorz Przebinda, a well-known Cracow-based researcher,

28 More on the topic – see: F. Apanowicz, “Сошествие в ад (Образ Троицы в ‘Колымских рассказах’)” [The descent into hell (The image of the Trinity in *Kolyma stories*)], in: *Shalamov Collection*, vol. 3, ed. V. Esipova (Vologda: 2002), pp. 129-143.

29 V. Shalamov, *Колымские рассказы*, Russian edition, Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd (London: 1978).

even argued that Varlam Shalamov was a major writer in Poland at that time, similarly to Mikhail Bulgakov, Osip Mandelstam, Iosif Brodsky, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Venedikt Yerofeyev, Andrei Platonov, and Isaac Babel a bit earlier. In fact, already by the late 1970's a rumour broke out, according to which in Russia there was a writer more remarkable than Solzhenitsyn, who had been imprisoned for many years in Kolyma and later wrote it all down in shocking and terrifying stories. He was even discussed during the famous academic conference in Cracow, when Anna Rażny, a beginner researcher at that time, delivered a paper on *Kolyma stories*, a day before martial law was declared in Poland.<sup>30</sup> Afterwards, the issue subsided, though for a very short moment.

Very few people knew Shalamov's works in Poland at that time. Censorship authorities prevented his works from entering official circulation almost until the end of the 1980's, while in unofficial circles outside the reach of the censorship few of his texts made their way to readers. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who is now often mentioned together with Shalamov, was another Russian Gulag writer much more widely known at that time. Several works by Solzhenitsyn were published in the USSR after First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev himself approved the publication in the now legendary eleventh issue of the *Novy mir* [The New World] monthly (1962) of *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*, which became an instant global must-read. Very soon afterwards *One day*, as well as several other works by Solzhenitsyn, were released also in Poland; the famous story was printed in Poland in ten consecutive issues of the *Polityka* [The Politics] weekly, starting with the 1 December 1962 issue (48/500), i.e., following closely the steps of the Soviet publication, in a superb translation by a well-known translation duo of Irena Lewandowska and Witold Dąbrowski. It is worth noting that the *Polityka* was probably one of the best and most independent periodicals throughout the Eastern Bloc. It was headed by the influential editor Mieczysław Rakowski, later First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR); in fact, he disbanded the party at the beginning of the transformation period.

After 1966 Solzhenitsyn was banned in Poland, yet he remained in the thoughts of a significant part of readers of literature, who knew much about his further fortunes, about *The Gulag Archipelago*, the Nobel Prize in literature and his acceptance lecture, and about his various speeches. He was often discussed in *samizdat*, sometimes quite critically, especially when it came to his statements about the 'depraved' Western democracy. He was also the topic of conversations in Radio

30 A. Rażny, *Świat Kolymy. Warłam Szalamow* [The world of Kolyma. Varlam Shalamov], *Oblicza Rosji* [The Faces of Russia] academic conference organised by the Institute of East Slavic Philology, Jagiellonian University and the National Student Union on 11–12 December 1981 at Collegium Novum.

Free Europe and Voice of America, both of which were eagerly listened to in Poland.

The first Polish translations of *Kolyma stories*, released as *samizdat*, included only a dozen or so stories and it seems that they were only supposed to indicate to Polish readers that they existed, before they could receive a complete edition. A few short stories, translated by Michał Jagiełło (*nom de plume* Michał Liniewski), were released already in 1981 in the London-based *Puls* periodical. Afterwards the same short stories plus a few more translated by Barbara Rzepecka (*nom de plume* Natalia Niemeńska) and with the introduction by Mikhail Geller from the London edition were released as *samizdat* in the form of a small booklet of ninety-one pages, without an indication of the place or date of publication – those were later established as Warsaw and 1983.<sup>31</sup> In total, the collection comprised seventeen short stories, including ten from the first series, five from *The spade artist* and two from *The left bank*, as was indicated in the publication. The selection opened with the short story *Próg piekła* (*How it began*) from *The spade artist* and closed with *Sentencja* (*Sententious*), a short story that concluded *The left bank*, which created a structure with its own dynamics, independent of the dynamics of any original series, particularly when one considers the fact that the remaining stories were rearranged in relation to the London edition. One could find legitimacy in the placement of *Próg piekła* first and *Sentencja* last, which could suggest a journey through hell, from stepping through the threshold [the Polish title could be translated into English as *The threshold of hell*] to eventual resurrection, yet it remains unclear why *Próg piekła* was followed by the symbolic vignette *Po śniegu* [*Trampling the snow*]. The same applies to the organisation of the other stories; it did not imply any interpretative strategy. This translation was reprinted several times by other underground publishing houses: Unia (Warsaw: 1984), Rota (Cracow: 1984), Oficyna Wydawnicza „Rytm” (Warsaw: 1985), and Solidarność Narodu (Warsaw: 1986). One of the editions (Wydawnictwo „Unia”, Warsaw: 1984) included an error in the author’s name: both on the cover and in the introduction it was inscribed as Szarłamow (instead of Szalamow). It was most probably a spelling mistake, but the fact that similar errors also occurred in Western editions indicates how obscure Shalamov was at that time compared to Solzhenitsyn, not only in Poland but also in the West, even among publishers.

In 1985, unlicensed publishing house Wydawnictwo „Słowo” published one more small selection of *Kolyma stories*, this time translated by a person concealed under

31 *Puls* [Pulse] issue 11/12 (1981) and V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie* [*Kolyma stories*], transl. N. Niemeńska (*nom de plume*) and M. Liniewski (*nom de plume*), introduction by M. Geller [Warsaw: 1983].

the *nom de plume* of M. K. (Mata); it was later established that the translator was Maria Kotowska.<sup>32</sup> It included ten stories from all three series: three from *The first death*, five from *The spade artist*, and two from *The left bank*. Five were new translations of previously released texts, while the remaining five were translations of previously unreleased (in Poland) stories. The selection opened with the same story as was the case in the previous book, but under a different title, better formed than the previous one, i.e., *U wrót piekiel* [*At the gate of hell*], and closed with *Atak* (*Heart attack*) from *The spade artist*.

Two years later, in 1987, the most extensive selection to date was released, this time translated by Stefan Wodnik. The sizeable volume, particularly for a *samizdat* publication, included sixty-two short stories, i.e., half of all the stories Shalamov had sent westwards. Their organisation proposed by Wodnik is especially interesting and sufficiently telling. The volume opens with the vignette *Przez śnieg* (*Trampling the snow*), with the name “Szałamow” inscribed underneath, and it is followed by an extensive introduction by the translator. In the author’s version, as well as in the London volume, this text was also placed first, but it was part of the *Kolyma stories* series (while of *The first death* in the London volume). By moving it to precede the introduction, the translator tore it out of the core of *Kolyma stories* and transformed it into a kind of a motto. He thus justified his decision: ‘The *Przez śnieg* short story, not highlighted in any way in the original apart from its placement as the opening one, moved to its rightful place [emphasis – F. A.], for which it has been predisposed by its inherent metaphor, Shalamov’s message discussing the role of the writer and role of every human’.<sup>33</sup> Even though I find his decision absolutely relevant, it did violate the writer’s intentions. Wodnik stepped out of his role of the translator and assumed the role of the author.

The special role of the *Trampling the snow* vignette was indicated by some specialists in Shalamov’s works, including Yakov Klotz, a Russian literary scholar, who has argued that its structure reflects the composition of the entire *Kolyma stories* series, if not that of Shalamov’s entire output even; or even more so, that of Gulag literature as a whole. ‘Every step of each prisoner stamping their way through deep snow leaves a trace only when it lands outside the footprints of others wandering through the snow’,<sup>34</sup> he wrote. Moreover, it designed the internal organisation of

32 V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie* [*Kolyma stories*], transl. M. K. (Mata) (*nom de plume*), Wydawnictwo „Słowo” (Warsaw: 1985). The article’s Reviewer indicated the translator’s name Maria Kotowska to me, even specifying the source, which I had browsed and apparently missed that piece of information. See: J. Kandziora, Z. Szymańska, K. Tokarzówna, *Bez cenzury 1976-1989* [Without censorship 1976-1989] (Warsaw: 1999), p. 830.

33 S. Wodnik, *Wstęp*, in: V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie*, p. 15.

34 J. Klotz, *Варлам Шаламов между тамиздатом и Союзом советских писателей (1966-1978)*...

*Kolyma stories*, in which each consecutive text was intended to leave a new trace in the original vision they conveyed. That was why, according to the scholar, from 1978 onwards, all known editions of *Kolyma stories* opened, 'as per the author's conception', with the "Trampling the snow" vignette<sup>35</sup>. It remains unclear to me why only since 1978, i.e., since the publication of the London volume, and not, say, since 1966, i.e., when Shalamov eventually completed his *Kolyma stories*, including the opening vignette, a manuscript of which he sent to the West. Nonetheless, one has to agree that the unique role of the very short text is clear without any additional devices, apart from those applied by the author himself.

Allow me to return to Wodnik's translation: it diverged considerably from the London version. In fact, the translator justified the differences in his original translation manifesto included in the foreword. He has argued that Shalamov's prose features a 'condensed multi-layer structure' which 'does not lend itself eagerly' to translation, which is why 'one must often recreate the structure and only then fashion it with words'.<sup>36</sup> Yet there is something even more important, which, in my opinion, constitutes the core of Shalamov's writing method, and which causes translators, as Wodnik has posited, 'the greatest difficulty' that 'multiplies basically insurmountable obstacles', i.e., 'the vagueness, repetitions, omissions, and inconsistencies lurking in the Russian text'. He continued: 'there are "better" short stories, as if preserved whole, and there are "worse", full of holes and mutilations'. He even considered some to be 'later, fully refined' vignettes, which, he has argued, 'has the advantage that sometimes helps fill a gap that spoils the beautiful logically organised work'. Faced with that, he concluded that 'a translation must entail a redaction and reconstruction of the text', i.e., (and allow me to be blunt here) improve Shalamov's text and 'fill the gaps'.

The original author, however, considered all those 'shortcomings' to be intended, purposeful and necessary even. He argued that in *Kolyma stories* 'no repetition or twist of the tongue was accidental'; they were introduced on purpose, to emphasise 'the authenticity, the original character of the experience'.<sup>37</sup> Even the fact that the story *How it began* abruptly stops mid-sentence (similarly to *A Sentimental Journey* by Laurence Sterne, a fact indicated by the writer himself) was no omission, but an intentional device fulfilling an important function for the work's semantics. The idea was for even the text's structure to be meaningful – to carefully reflect the structure of the world. That was a direct result of his 'Plutonic' theory of *new prose*,

35 *Ibid.*

36 This and further quotes in this paragraph: S. Wodnik, *Wstęp*, in: V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kolymskie*.

37 V. Shalamov, *O prozie* [On prose], in: *idem, Zbieranie sochinenij v czetyreh tomach* [Collected works in four volumes], vol. 4, p. 369.

according to which a writer was not a mere observer or a spectator, but rather a 'character in the drama called life; not just as some man of letters, but a legitimate participant. He is Pluto emerging from hell, not Orpheus descending into it'.<sup>38</sup> For only Pluto, a resident and the rightful ruler of the land of the dead, knows the whole untainted truth about it, so only his howl can tell the complete account of the real essence of Hades. A writer eager to delve into the Gulag theme, the inferno topic, should, therefore, assume the role of Pluto and speak in his voice, a voice coming from inside a camp, even if it is not entirely clear to someone on the outside. Thus, vagueness and a lack of complete understanding was part and parcel of Shalamov's writing method.<sup>39</sup>

When translating *Kolyma stories*, Stefan Wodnik was not aware of the *On prose* essay or other statements by the writer about the theory behind *new prose*, though he intuitively noted in *Kolyma stories* its compositional coherence that enabled it to be considered a novel, and the individual stories its chapters, and yet he did reorder several of them in his translation. Moreover, in his remarks in the introduction, he argued that it was absolutely legitimate, and justified his decision by stating that in the case of selected works he was forced to fill the resulting gaps: 'In the translation (...) some stories switched places to fill the gaps that formed due to the selection process and to balance the contents of the three parts, i.e., three stages in the journey of a person sent to a camp'.<sup>40</sup> That meant that the translator translated selected chapters of the 'novel' while moving the remaining ones around.

Wodnik's entire translation consists, apart from the vignette and the introduction, of three parts, organised as per the London edition, i.e. *The first death*, *The spade artist*, and *The left bank*, and it concludes with a recollection by gen. Władysław Anders about Kolyma, from *Bez ostatniego rozdziału*, as well as an extensive and extremely useful glossary section. The first part opens with, as does the 1983 edition translated by Michał Liniewski and Natalia Niemeńska and the collection translated by M. K. (Mata), *Próg piekła*, and concludes with *Kwarantanna tyfusowa*, as did the London edition (and the original version, which was unknown to the translator). All the remaining stories came from *The first death*, but were reorganised. Suffice to say that *Próg piekła* is followed by the 22nd story from the London edition, i.e., *Termometr Griszki Łoguna* [Grishka Logun's thermometer] (original included by the writer in *The resurrection of the larch*), which is followed by *Na przedstawkę* [On the slate], which was second in the London edition. Further in

38 *Ibid.*, p. 365.

39 More on the Plutonic theory of new prose, see: F. Apanowicz, 'Nowa proza' Warłama Szalamowa. *Problemy wypowiedzi artystycznej*, pp. 87-90.

40 S. Wodnik, *Wstęp*, in: V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie*.

the book, the stories were also moved around. In the second part, fifteen stories came from *The spade artist* from the London edition, distributed without any apparent order, five from *The first death*, and one from *The left bank*. Finally, the third part includes eleven stories from *The left bank* from the London version, three from *The first death*, and five from *The spade artist*. All that clearly shows that the translator treated Shalamov's work as a 'model kit' to be assembled, like the famous novel by Julio Cortázar.

A complete translation of *Kolyma stories*, based on the 1978 London edition, produced by Juliusz Baczyński, was published, with the introduction by Mikhail Geller and a short story *Piętno* by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński instead of the afterword, by the Gdańsk-based Wydawnictwo „Atekst” publishing house in 1991, i.e., two years after the Polish political transformation. In 1999, the Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie publishing house published in Wrocław once again the same translation, this time without Geller's introduction or Herling-Grudziński's short story, and instead with an afterword by Tadeusz Klimowicz,<sup>41</sup> a Wrocław-based scholar. Both editions included that same inconsistencies as those in the London edition, which I have already discussed.

Allow me to reference Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's recollection of how, immediately after Shalamov was discovered, the editors of the Paris-based *Kultura* wanted to present him to their readers and how they searched for a translator. By chance, an engineer from Gdańsk came to the office and after returning to Poland he found a man he knew, who was not a writer. It could be said that he had never held a pen in his hand, but he did spend a decade in Soviet camps and decided to have a go at translating the difficult prose of *Kolyma stories*. And he managed it. A few years later that translation was ready. Herling was absolutely amazed.

» 'When I read his translation', he recalled, 'I exclaimed: "This is it!" There might have been some mistakes in it, but that was irrelevant. The engineer had spent several years working on those three volumes and he was able to convey the jargon, the circumstances, and the details that were known only to those who spent time in a Gulag camp, because that required a particular atmosphere, a special rhythm of the prose (...) This prose has an atmosphere which uniquely combines analytical realism with the unspeakable horror. The horror of living in a Gulag camp becomes part of the realistic description

41 V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie* [*Kolyma stories*], vol. 1-3, transl. J. Baczyński, Wydawnictwo „Atekst” (Gdańsk: 1991); V. Shalamov, *Opowiadania kołymskie*, transl. J. Baczyński, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie (Wrocław: 1999).

of everyday life and it permeates it completely. It would seem that the writer simply described the reality, yet he did that as if he was describing a dream, or a nightmare rather. That is a matter of perception: someone who had never been in a Gulag camp could not have coped with that, something seemingly insignificant would have vanished, disappeared.<sup>42</sup>

Juliusz Baczyński did not stop at this translation. In 1996, the Atekst and Marabut publishing houses jointly published his translation of *Bez powrotu* [No return]. It included Shalamov's autobiographic essay "The Fourth Vologda", recollections about Moscow of the 1920's and 1930's, two short stories about Butyrka, and "Vishera". Then in 2000, the „Czytelnik” [The Reader] publishing house released a complete translation of the *Vishera anti-roman* in the prestigious Nike series<sup>43</sup>. Finally, in 1991 the same publishing house released a collection of Shalamov's short stories entitled *Procurator Judei i inne utwory* [The Procurator of Judea and other works], which comprised some of the Kolyma texts, the short story *Resurrection of the larch* and the play *Anna Iwanowna*, selected by Lech Budrecki and translated by Maria Kotowska, Zbigniew Podgórzec and Adam Pomorski.<sup>44</sup> As of now there has not yet been a Polish edition of *Kolyma stories* in the original author's version.

*Translated by Jakub Wosik,  
verified by Maja Jaros*

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42 G. Przebinda, *Между Краковом, Римом и Москвой. Русская идея в новой Польше* [Between Cracow, Rome and Moscow. The Russian idea in a new Poland] (Moscow: 2013), p. 121. Liberal translation into Polish by the author – F. A.

43 V. Shalamov, *Bez powrotu*, Polish transl. J. Baczyński, Wydawnictwo „Atekst”, Wydawnictwo „Marabut” (Gdańsk: 1996); V. Shalamov, *Wiszera. Antypowieść* [Vishera. Anti-roman], transl. J. Baczyński, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik” (Warsaw: 2000).

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## ABSTRACT

The article discusses the translations and the history of publishing of *Kolyma stories* in Poland, from the first underground booklets released in the 1980's, which contained merely a dozen or so stories selected from the famous London publication, *Колымские рассказы* [*Kolyma stories*], published by Mikhail Geller in 1978. They were the first presentations of the work. Thus, for translators, it was essential that such important pieces reached Polish readers as quickly as possible, at least in excerpts. One of the translators, Stefan Wodnik (born Adam Bal), took on the task of rendering a significantly larger selection of the stories accessible, but it was still not the entirety. In the introduction, he offered an interpretation of Shalamov's work, combined with a justification of his translational choices, including the necessity to change the order of many of the stories in relation to their London original. It was only the next translator, engineer Juliusz Baczyński, who had not up until then been professionally involved in translation, who rendered the entire London volume. In Poland, it is still considered the full translation of *Kolyma stories* by Varlam Shalamov, although, as we know today, it diverges significantly from the author's version in terms of the selection and organisation of individual stories. His translation was very highly regarded by, among others, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, a distinguished writer and prominent expert in Gulag literature and the works of Shalamov.

**KEYWORDS:** Shalamov Varlam (1907-1982), *samizdat*, secondary circulation, émigré publications, translation, edition, internal organisation of *Kolyma stories*