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Narratives of Confinement, Annihilation, and Survival:

CAMP LITERATURE IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE



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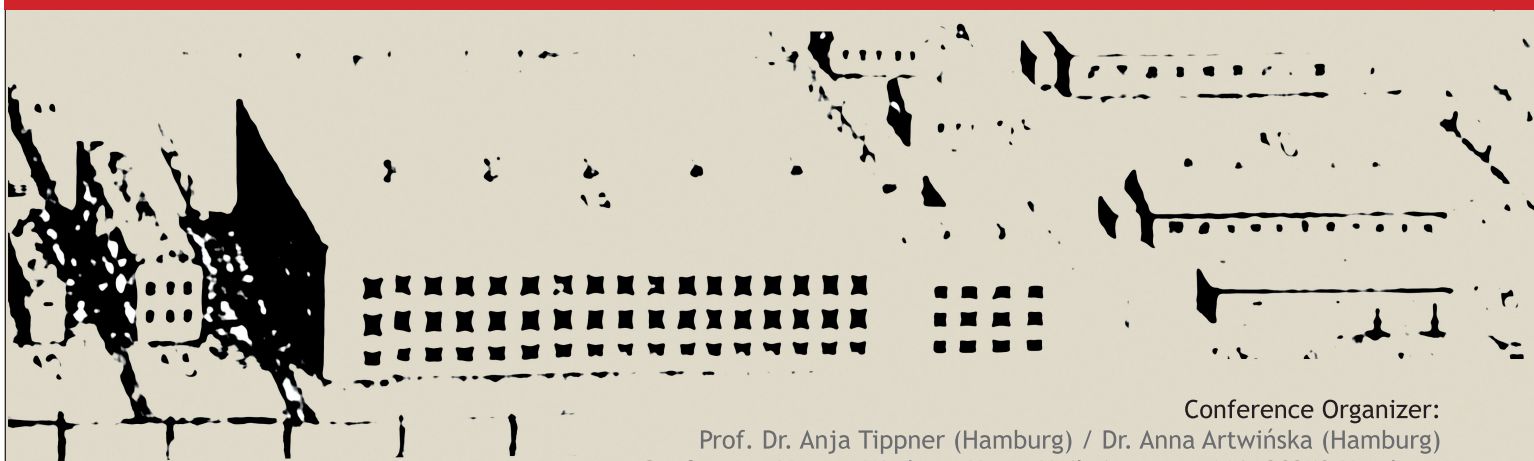
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Anna Artwińska

University of Hamburg

Being Communist in the Gulag. Ideology, Gender and Limit Experience in Texts by Polish and Russian Female Prisoners

No one today needs to be convinced that tools of feminist and gender critique are useful in the analysis of Soviet camps, both on the sociological plane and with reference to the narrative practices of writing camp memoirs and experiences by women. In my paper I intend to focus on a specific type of female camp stories: memoirs of women communists who were ardent party members both at the time of their arrest and while serving time, and remained so - albeit differently - after regaining freedom. Based on the example of memoirs by Celina Budzyńska entitled *Shreds of a Family Saga* and of *Journey into the Whirlwind* by Evgeniia Ginzburg, I would like to analyze how feminist topics combines with the ideological perspective and whether it is possible to distinguish formal features and theme motives of this type of writing. Another point of interest in my presentation is the role that the time in the camp

played in the auto-narratives of Budzyńska and Ginzburg and what significance the authors attribute to it in the process of shaping their communist identities.

Anna Artwińska studied Polish Literature, Journalism and Slavic Literature at the University of Posen and at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau. She worked on doctoral thesis at the University of Posen as well as at Collgium Polonicum / Europa University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). She received her PhD in 2007 at the University of Posen (*Poetry in the Service of Politics. The Case of Adam Mickiewicz in Communist Poland and Johann Wolfgang Goethe in Communist Germany*). Currently she is a postdoctoral fellow (teacher and researcher) at the department of Slavic Literature in Hamburg. Recent publications: *Asymmetrie der Erinnerung. Vasilij Grossmans Erzählung „Vce tečēt“*. In: *Slavische Identitäten. Paradigmen, Poetiken, Perspektiven*. Hrsg. v. Gernot Howanitz et al., München 2014, 33-44; *Jacek Dehnels widersprüchliche Positionen? Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung eines polnischen Autors*. In: *Künstlerinszenierungen. Performatives Selbst und biographische Narration im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ch. Laferl and A. Tippner, Bielefeld 2014, 251-272; *Studies on Socialist Realism. Polish View*, ed. by A. Artwińska and G. Wołowiec Frankfurt am Main 2015 (forthcoming).

Davor Beganović

University of Tübingen

Sun and Stone. Yugoslav „Re-education“ Camps in Literary Representations

The totalitarian camps in Yugoslavia were established after the land's break with Stalin. The Yugoslav communists largely followed the models founded by their Soviet colleagues. Their first aim was complete isolation of enemies (or potential enemies). Any kind of work that could be considered economically meaningful was abandoned. Re-education was only possible as a long process of torture – physical as well as psychological – that could brain-wash the detainees and convinces them that their trust in the Stalinist variety of communism is false. The death-toll in Yugoslav detention camps was not that high (413 out of something 16000 prisoners) as in the Soviet ones. Still, those who returned were forced to keep silent about their experiences at in the place of terror. There was a tacit prohibition on any kind of expression concerning the camps, especially the artistic ones. This prohibition was, wordless, lifted only in the early eighties, after Tito's death.

In my paper I will try to follow the slow progression of the written texts dealing with the most prominent of all the camps – Naked Island: from the first attempts (novel *When Pumpkins Blossomed* by Dragoslav Mihailović), to texts without autobiographic background (*The Moment II* by Antonije Isaković), to the novels with autobiographic elements written in the fictional form (*Night until Day* by Branko Hofman). Additionally, I will shortly discuss the novel *Blindly* by Claudio Magris, dealing with the destiny of Italian communists detained on the island. Out of this corpus of texts, I will examine both the universality and the specificity of Yugoslav detention camps.

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Dörte Bischoff

University of Hamburg

„Ich habe das Lager und das Lager hat mich“. Towards a Poetics of Camp Literature in Herta Müller’s „Atemschaukel“

Herta Müller’s novel *The Hunger Angel* (*Atemschaukel*, 2009) describes the camp experience of a young man from German-speaking Transylvania who is deported to a Russian camp in Ukraine shortly after the Second World War. Not relying on personal experience, the novel raises questions about the possibility and limits of vicarious writing of ‘autofiction’, of the scope of literary testimony to life under extreme conditions and – since the text cites intertexts concerned with the Gulag as well as Auschwitz – with a language and literature in view of and after the realities of the various camps in the 20th century. As a central aspect of the totalitarian seizure of the human being a process of objectification is depicted. The bureaucratic and brutal order that transforms humans into numbered material and subjects them to a logic of consumption and exchange is registered by a writing devoted to minute descriptions of the things of the camp which are such close companions that the difference of living being and inanimate object tends to disperse. The narrator’s observation ‘I have the camp, and the camp has me’ signals the point where the notion of possession (of personal things, orientation, self esteem) collapses into the opposite: the feeling of being possessed, of

having being transformed into an object, a functioning small cog in a big machine. While this point of reversal is clearly marked as the point zero where humans are bereaved of all achievements and materializations of the civilized world it also constitutes the angle from which this poetics of things – which is characteristic for Müller’s texts in general but is transformed here into a specific mode of writing the camp – unfolds.

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Andrea Gullotta

University of Venice

The Four Corpora of Gulag Literature: A New Framework on Russian Gulag Literature

Regardless of the importance of the Gulag-motif in Russian culture and literature, Gulag literature has to date been understudied. While Holocaust literature has been analyzed in depth, Gulag literature has never been studied as a united body of texts (apart from rare exceptions). The typical tendency of the studies on Russian Gulag literature is to privilege the analysis of single authors rather than having a wide perspective on the literary corpus. The result is that research on Gulag literature is particularly fragmented and dispersed.

It seems necessary to provide a new assessment of Russian Gulag literature. A starting point is to propose a new systematization of the corpus, one comprised of four different types of texts (1: Fiction written by former Gulag inmates; 2: Memoirs and autobiographies; 3: Gulag poetry; 4: Literary texts published in the press organs inside the camps) which share common stylistic and narrative features. The current idea of

Gulag literature, which is now limited to points 1 and 2, needs to be widened by addressing two types of texts (Gulag press literature and Gulag poetry) that have never been considered under the perspective of Gulag literature studies before.

The paper therefore aims to propose this new perspective of studies and to highlight some features of each body of texts. Its overall aim is to show the adequacy of the proposed framework.

Andrea Gullotta, Dr.; obtained in 2011 a Ph.D. in Slavic Studies with a thesis on the Solovki Prison Camp between 1923 and 1930 and the additional title of “Doctor Europaeus” at the University of Padua; 2011 research fellow in Padua and lecturer in Palermo; member of academic associations and of research groups both in Italy and abroad; currently, research fellow in Russian Studies at the “Ca’ Foscari” University of Venice. Publications: “Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki 1923-1930. The Paris of the Northern Concentration Camps”, Oxford (forthcoming 2015); together with Claudia Crivelli, editor and founder of the international peer-reviewed journal “AvtobiografiЯ. Journal on Life Writing and the Representation of the Self in Russian Culture”.

Alexander Kratochvil

Czech Academy of Science Prague

Gulag and Prison Experience as an Adventure Novel: Ivan Bahrjanyj's "Tigerhunters"

The Ukrainian writer Ivan Bahrjanyj (1906-1963) was arrested for political reasons in 1932 and spent several years in jail and labor camps in the Far East. How and when he managed to return home is unknown, but 1938 he has been re-arrested and placed in Kharkiv NKVD jail. He reflected on his experiences in two novels (*Tigerhunters* and *Garden of Gethsemane*). The focus will lie on *Tigerhunters* (*Tyhrolovi*), an adventure novel (translated into English „The Hunters and the Hunted” 1956). The interpretation of Bahrjanyj’s novel will link memory studies, popular literature and the cultural history of Communist repressions. It will analyze the deconstruction processes and the reconfiguration of the self and includes the shift of being a mere object exposed pressure or violence from others to being a subject of the own history.

Alexander Kratochvil, Dr.; J.E. Purkyně Fellow, Czech Academy of Science, Prague; 1993
MA in Slavic literatures and East European History, University of Freiburg; 1999

dissertation (Dr. phil.) on Ukrainian literature in the 1920s; 2005-2009; research and teaching at the universities of Plzeň (CZ), Greifswald, Konstanz and Humboldt University Berlin. Research interests: memory studies and literary history, comics, PC-games and narratives of popular media. Recent publications: *Aufbruch und Rückkehr. Ukrainische und tschechische Prosa im Zeichen der Postmoderne*, Berlin 2013; edited, together with Makarska, Schwitin, Werberger, *Kulturgrenzen im transkulturellen Kontext*, Münster 2012. "Postkoloniale Lektüre postmoderner ukrainischer Literatur" in *Anzeiger für Slavische Philologie (XXXVI)* 2010; "Das Kriegsende als Topos literarischer Erinnerungen" in: *Erinnern - Erzählen - Europa*, Innsbruck/Wien/Bozen 2014 (forthcoming).

Eneken Laanes

Tallinn University

Concealed Multidirectionality in post-Soviet Estonian Narratives of Gulag: Imbi Paju's "Memories Denied"

The paper will discuss the shift in memorial forms used to articulate the experience of the Gulag in post-Soviet Estonia. In the past half-century the Estonian narratives of the Gulag have come in many different media such as literature, theatre, life stories and film. Whereas in the Soviet period and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union these narratives highlighted the experiences of survival in camp, recent attempts tap in increasingly in the international culture of memory and concentrate on trauma and testimony. The paper explores the multidirectional use of memorial forms of testimony and postmemory in Imbi Paju's film *Memories Denied* (2005) and her book of the same title (2006), which was an internationally successful attempt to communicate the experiences of deportation and camps from the Estonian perspective. The paper will focus particularly on the intermedial life of memorial forms in the post-Soviet Estonian memory culture.

Eneken Laanes, Prof. Dr.; Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Tallinn University and Senior Research Fellow at Under and Tuglas Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences; 2013-2014 Juris Padešs Research Fellow at the MacMillan Center, Yale University. Research interests: the representation of violent history in literature and visual arts. Publications: *Unresolved Dialogues: Memory and Subjectivity in Post-Soviet Estonian Novel*, Tartu 2009.

Inessa Medzhibovskaya

New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College, New York

Tools of Punishment, Agents of Salvation: How to Write and Analyze Narratives of the Extreme

The paper examine several case studies of confinement culled from literature, nonfiction, theatre, and the screen in order to examine the extent to which they may lend themselves as exemplary stories and model narratives for survival, submission and annihilation. I put to test the term “camp” by taking up the points of these reigning theories: 1) that of Arendt’s systemic repression through terror vis-à-vis the dilemmas of the human condition and judgment; 2) that of Foucault’s disciplinary political regulation of bios at the background of his arguments about the power of words; 3) that of Agamben’s explanations of utilization of bare life in the camp understood as the nomos of the modern, separate from his works in the artistic mode that speak of the poetics of life and death. I consider why, through a rather consistently continuing model that sometimes supports and at other times disputes the above theories, the characters or individuals representing power are portrayed as subsidiaries, the “tools of punishment,” unable to live without the need to restrain and coerce. I consider how the parties finding themselves in a proximally closer human encounter

with the visions or stories of “bare life” personify a reversible link between punishment and salvation, that is, an opportunity for either salvation or mutual destruction. In this sense, the problem of annihilation and survival showcased through Primo Levi’s juxtaposition of “the drowned and the saved” must fall within the purview of absolute categories, which Arendt calls “radical goodness” as the necessary ethical apposite to Kant’s “radical evil.” With this in mind, I look at cases that are known in philosophy as “genuine, essential salvation,” distinct from the tasks of simple protection from evil. I take controversial cases, for example those of harboring a victim, non-executing an order and more, and question whether the facilitation of the well-being of others in the world is solely a material, external task or if narratives do also participate as agents in the cause of reparation, mitigation, purgation or exacerbation of the extreme.

Inessa Medzhibovskaya, Prof. Dr.; Associate Professor of Literature and Liberal Studies at the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College in New York. Publications: *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845-1887*, Lanham 2009; “Dostoevsky and Education” in *Dostoevsky-in-Context Cambridge 2014 (forthcoming)*; “Prison and the Human Condition” in *Punishment as a Crime?*, Uppsala 2014 (forthcoming); “Punishment and the Human Condition,” “Russian Classics on Trial: Reflections on Critics and Criticism” in *Clio. A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History*, fall 2012; forthcoming books include *Tolstoy and the Fates of the Twentieth Century*, and a philosophical-literary study titled *Writing and Confinement*.

Arkadiusz Morawiec

University of Łódź

From the Metaphorization of Konzentrationslager to the Konzentrationslager as a Metaphor (in Polish Literature)

The aim of the presentation is to identify the basic evolutionary stages of Polish concentration-camp literature (relating to Nazi German concentration camps) created before, during and after the World War II, both in and outside the camps. The main determinants of this evolution and its conceptualization include fact, theme and metaphor (understood in the broad sense). Fact and experience form the basis and then lead to theme and metaphor. It needs to be pointed out, however, that this sequence (fact—theme—metaphor) is a sort of idealization. It does express certain chronology, though only in terms of basic, dominant tendencies (proportions). The texts with the concentration camp as a theme and metaphor appeared as early as during the war and the German occupation of Poland. This fact was immediately afterwards (in the camps and literature created there and outside) deprived of autonomy and turned into a pretext for reflection of moral, social, ideological, philosophical, historiosophical, and religious nature. With time a concentration camp

turned out to be not only a handy notion, but also an attractive literary theme — especially in the 1960s — suitable for a novel, drama, and poetry. The last period in the Polish literature, with its censorship of 1989 (in the case of ideologically controlled historical and literary content, the abolition of censorship is of crucial importance) shows that the theme has not only been used all the time but also abused.

Arkadiusz Morawiec, Prof. Dr.; literary critic; professor in the Department of Polish Literature of the 20th and 21th Century, University of Łódź. Research interests: contemporary Polish literature, especially concentration-camp writings and literature of Holocaust, problems of literariness, literary representation, and literary axiology. Publications: *Poetyka opowiadań Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego. Autentyzm—dyskursywność—paraboliczność*, Krakow 2000; *Seweryna Szmaglewska (1916-1992). Bibliografia*, Łódź 2007; *Literatura w lagrze, lager w literaturze. Fakt—temat—metafora*, Łódź 2009; *Polityczne, prywatne, metafizyczne. Szkice o literaturze polskiej ostatnich dziesięcioleci*, Toruń 2014.

Silke Segler-Meißner

University of Hamburg

Gray zones: Witnessing and the Comparability of Extreme Situations in “The Drowned and the Saved” by Primo Levi

One year before Primo Levi commits suicide in the staircase of his home in Turin, he published a collection of essays entitled *The drowned and the saved (I sommersi e i salvati 1986)*, which represents a critical rereading of his testimony *If this is a man*. Primo Levi explains the need for a reexamination of the moral and ethical consequences of Auschwitz with the emergence of Holocaust revisionism in the 1980s. In his first essay that deals not only with the trauma of the survivors but also with the trauma of the perpetrators he mentions the French revisionist Louis Darquier de Pellepoix who denies the fact of Auschwitz. Another reason for this second intervention of Levi as moral witness is his awareness of the proliferation of extreme situations after the liberation of the concentration camps. He sees the moral imperative “Never again”, that was formulated after the end of the Second World War, refuted by a series of catastrophes starting with Hiroshima and Nagasaki and ending with the terror in Argentine.

In several places of *The Drowned and the Saved* Levi cites *The Gulag Archipelago* of Aleksandre Solzhenthsyn and opens a dialogue with the Russian intellectual about the vulnerability of the human being in an extreme situation. His focus lies on the relationship between victim and perpetrator, who cannot be perceived as two clearly distinct groups, but rather as two interchanging categories of man due to the state of exception. By enlarging his experience of dehumanization to the Sovjet terror Primo Levi questions the classical narration of history which tries to put the events in a chronological order without taking account of the victims' experiences. In this perspective Auschwitz and the Gulag constitute an experimental field of ethical gray zones undermining our ideas of violence and responsibility, of culpability and innocence. The aim of my contribution is to ask for the consequences of the dissolution of clear attributions and judgments and to discuss the comparability of extreme situations.

Silke Segler-Meißner, Professor of French and Italian Literature at the University of Hamburg, Germany. Studies of Italian and French Literature in Bonn. Research interests: trauma and memory, victims and perpetrators, testimonial literature or the Holocaust in France and Italy, French Literatures of the Maghreb, gender studies (esp. Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Futuristinnen, Nouvelles scandaleuses). Recent publications: *Archive der Erinnerung: Literarische Zeugnisse des Überlebens nach der Shoah in Frankreich*. Köln/Weimar 2005; Eggeling, Giulia/ Segler-Meißner, Silke (Eds.): *Europäische Verlage und romanische Gegenwartsliteraturen. Profile, Tendenzen, Strategien*. Tübingen 2003; Kuon, Peter/ Neuhofer, Monika/ Segler-Meißner, Silke (Eds.): *Vom Zeugnis zur Fiktion. Repräsentation von Lagerwirklichkeit und Shoah in der französischen Literatur nach 1945*. Frankfurt a.M. 2006; Claudia Nickel/Silke Segler-Meißner (Eds.): *Von Tätern und Opfern. Zur medialen Darstellung politisch und ethnisch motivierter Gewalt im 20./21. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt am Main 2013.

Karoline Thaidigsmann

University of Heidelberg

Crossing Borders: Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski's Trilogy on Soviet Deportation and Polish Cultural Identity after 1989

My paper focuses on the subject of Stalinist repression in Polish literature written after 1989. Do works of Polish literature after 1989 offer new perspectives on Soviet deportation and forced labor? Do they lead the subject to new ends? One of the most intriguing works in this context lies at the periphery of the Gulag subject. Mixing childhood experiences, fantasy, and heavy eroticism, Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski's trilogy, including *Rzeczy nienasycone* (1998; *Insatiable Things*), *Cud w Esfahanie* (2001; *Miracle in Esfahan*) and *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* (2011; *Never enough. Miracle*), describes the deportation of the author's family to Kazakhstan, the boy's release and his odyssey back to Poland. Narrated from the child's perspective, the trilogy is generally understood as an expression of private memory which has withdrawn itself from official historiography by escaping into the mythologized realm of childhood. In my paper I will look at the texts from a different angle. I argue that the trilogy can be read as much as a commentary on Soviet repression and its consequences as on Poland's

quest for identity after 1989. I will examine how the author, by systematically crossing borders in his texts, uses his childhood experiences of repression as a means to propose an alternative cultural identity for Poland at the end of the 20th century.

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Anja Tippner

University of Hamburg

Narratives of Confinement, Annihilation, and Survival: Camp Literature in a Comparative Perspective

The presentation will take a closer look at practices of comparison with regard to narratives about Nazi concentration camps and the Gulag. While comparing experiences of the two camps was still a taboo during the time of the “Historikerstreit” (historian’s dispute) in the 1980s, the last two decades seen a change in attitude towards comparison. Especially, historiographic and political studies now cross-reference narratives about the Gulag and Nazi camps. At least from a Western point of view, this seems to confirm Michael Rothberg’s concept of „multidirectional“ memory and the conviction that memorial cultures enable each other. Departing from this starting point, the presentation will then go on to point out some of the differences between Gulag narratives and Nazi camp narratives, as e.g. the different place in the cultural imaginary and different types of canonization.

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Studies of German, English, and Slavic Literatures in Frankfurt/M., Hamburg and St. Petersburg. Research interests: concepts of documentation and life-writing as well as representations of catastrophes and extreme experiences in Russian, Polish, and Czech literature, Jewish literature and culture in Eastern Europe (esp. aspects of transnationality and cultural translation). Recent publications: *Die permanente Avantgarde? Surrealismus in Prag*. Köln u.a. 2009; "The Writings of a Soviet Anne Frank. Masha Rol'nikaite's Holocaust Memoir 'I have to tell' and its place in Soviet literature", in *Representations of the Holocaust in Soviet Literature and Film. Yad Vashem Lectures and Papers* 2013, 59-80; *Künstlerinszenierungen. Performatives Selbst und auto/biographische Narration*. Ed. by A. Tippner and Ch. F. Laferl. Bielefeld 2014; *Po Zagładzie. Narracje postkatastroficzne [After the Holocaust. Postcatastrophic narratives]*. Special edition of *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne* (2015) (forthcoming); *Extreme Erfahrungen. Grenzen des Erlebens und der Darstellung*. Ed. by A. Tippner and Ch. F. Laferl. Berlin 2015 (forthcoming).

Leona Toker

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Towards a Literary History of Concentration Camps: Comparative or “Entangled”?

Comparing the literature of the Holocaust with the literature of the Gulag is particularly valuable when prominent features of one of the terms of comparison illuminate veiled features of the other. By collocating an episode in chapter 3 of Imre Kertész’s *Fateless* with episodes from the Gulag memoirs collected in *Voices from the Gulag* (edited by Solzhenitsyn) and from Varlam Shalamov’s story “The Lawyers’ Plot” one may see how accounts of the human experience under the Nazi rule and that of the Gulag can provide comments on one another in terms of the content of testimony. Yet the narratives can also yield indirect comments on each other’s *literary rendering* of analogous experience: this can be shown by juxtaposing Shalamov’s “An Individual Assignment” and Chapter 13 of Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man*. The paper also raises the question of the possibility of not merely comparing the two strands of the literary history of concentration camps but also of remaining alert to the cases and kinds of their “entanglement.”

Leona Toker, Prof. Dr.: Professor in the English Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Research interests: Techniques of narrative fiction, Nabokov, interdisciplinary study of literature and moral philosophy, documentary prose. Recent Publications: *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors*, Bloomington 2000; *Towards the Ethics of Form in Fiction: Narratives of Cultural Remission*, Columbus 2010; and articles on English, American, and Russian literature; edited *Commitment in Reflection: Essays in Literature and Moral Philosophy*, New York 1994 and co-edited *Rereading Texts / Rethinking Critical Presuppositions: Essays in Honour of H. M. Daleski*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996; *Knowledge and Pain*, Amsterdam 2012; she has founded and is editor of *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, a semiannual academic periodical published by Johns Hopkins University Press.