

Literary Reflections of Elitocide: Georgy Demidov and Precursors

Reflexiones literarias del elitocidio: Georgy Demidov y precursores

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Resumen

Mientras que el asesinato de elites data de épocas antiguas, ya sea como parte de un genocidio, como oferta a cambio de esclavitud de una comunidad, o bien como expresión de un *resentimiento* social, debido a las atrocidades cometidas en el siglo XX las historias de elitocidio han reunido la masa crítica suficiente como para que surja este concepto. El presente artículo se centra en las reflexiones literarias sobre el elitocidio, muchas de las cuales solo se pueden reconocer como tales una vez que el fenómeno en sí ha cristalizado en la memoria colectiva. Tratamientos de carácter literario sobre la cuestión del elitocidio incluyen obras de Dostoyevski (traducida al español como *Los endemoniados* o *Demonios* [*Бесы*], 1871–1872), de H. G. Wells (*La máquina del tiempo*, 1895) y de Nabokov (*Barra sinestra*, 1947), aunque el ejemplo fundamental abordado aquí es el tema de la destrucción de las personas de mayor talento que aparecen en las historias del Gulag de Georgy Demidov.

Palabras clave: elitocidio; Gulag; distopía; *resentimiento*; abyección

Abstract

Whereas the killing of the elites, whether as part of genocide, as a bid for enslavement of a community, or as an expression of a social *ressentiment*, dates back to ancient times, it is owing to the atrocities of the twentieth century that histories of elitocide assembled the critical mass for the concept to emerge. This paper is devoted to literary reflections of elitocide, many of which can likewise be recognized as such only after the phenomenon itself has crystallized in collective memory. Literary treatments of the issue of elitocide include works by Dostoevsky (*The Devils* [*Бесы*], 1871–1872), H. G. Wells (*The Time*

Machine, 1895), and Nabokov (*Bend Sinister*, 1947), but my main example is the theme of the destruction of the most talented in the Gulag stories by Georgy Demidov.

Keywords: elitocide; Gulag; dystopia; *ressentiment*; abjection.

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of “elitocide” was launched in 1992 by the British journalist Michael Nicholson, reporting from the war-torn Yugoslavia. Based on Raphael Lemkin’s term “genocide,” introduced in 1944,¹ *elitocide* means the killing of the educated or of the leadership of an ethnic group. The practice of decapitating an ethnic group, whether by murder or by deportation, is old (the latter was the case of the Babylonian exile of the Jewish elite in the sixth century BC), but in collective memory it seems to have reached a critical mass only in the twentieth century, with the killing of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople in April of 1915 and the conscription (followed by lethal abuse) of able-bodied male Armenians, the killings of Polish intellectuals and officers by the Nazis and then by the Soviets during World War II, the preemptive abuse and killings of Jewish intellectuals and potential young ghetto fighters at the start of ghettoization in Vilnius, Theresienstadt, and elsewhere, the massacre of educated urban Cambodians, or just wearers of spectacles, by the Pol Pot regime, the priority targeting of the educated in the Rwanda genocides in the 1970s,² and the massacres of the Bosnian intelligentsia in the early 1990s.³

Literary reflections of elitocide can be found in the memoirs of survivors, such as Grigoris Balakian’s (Գրիգորիս Պալազեան) *The Armenian Golgotha* (Հայ Գողգոթան, 2009); their echoes appear in the works by the next generations, e.g. Peter Balakian’s *The Black Dog of Fate* (1997) or Michael J. Arlen’s *Passage to Ararat* (1975). Elitocidal eventualities are refracted in dystopian fictions—Zamiatin’s (Замятин) *We* (Мы, 1924), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), or Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953): outstandingly gifted or cultivated characters are given a choice of either harnessing their abilities to the agenda of the regime or being annihilated, the two options not mutually exclusive.

I believe that though representations of vices that fuel the killing of the elites made the specter of elitocide haunt literature since ancient times, it was the history of the twentieth-century atrocities that has allowed the literary theme of actual or virtual elitocide to be

¹ See Lemkin (1944: 79–95); for a detailed historical survey of genocidal events, see Kiernan (2007).

² Consult Goldhagen (2009: 137–139).

³ For an extended analysis of this issue, see Gratz (2011).

retroactively recognized as a topos. My test-case for the redescription of some conventional fictional narrative choices as representations of elitocide is the fictionalized Gulag testimony of the scientist and writer Georgy Demidov (Георгий Демидов, 1908–1987).

2. ELITOCIDE FROM ABOVE AND FROM BELOW. LITERARY REFRACTIONS

In his 2011 article on elitocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, Dennis Graz notes that destruction of the elites is likely to be (and in Yugoslavia was) a preface to and facilitation of genocide. This is true of elitocide as part of ethnic warfare—the fate of Armenians in 1915, Jews in 1939–1945, Rwandans in 1994, Bosniaks in 1992–1995. It is less true in class warfare, where two different phenomenological motivations of elitocide transpire.

One is the decapitation of a population with the purpose of enslaving or subduing it. In general, and in the twentieth century in particular, resistance movements needed leadership not only for the direction of their activities but also for their very existence; hence elitocide was expected to preempt wide-scale resistance. When Western Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltic republics were forcibly joined to the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940, not only were the “bourgeois” political leaders and businessmen arrested and transported to Siberia but also great numbers of intellectuals, including lawyers, teachers, and other authority-wielding professionals. The German invasion of 1941 put an end to this process, but then continued it in its own way, shooting or incarcerating the chosen, sometimes otherwise identified and sometimes the same—such as the 48 Lithuanian intellectuals (including the writer Balys Sruoga), arrested in March 1943 and sent to the Stutthof concentration camp.⁴ Soviet deportations of intellectuals were resumed after the liberation of the territories from the Germans. Even when the victims were not incarcerated in labor-camps, exile in Siberia meant high mortality from hunger and disease. This is elitocide from above. In the Soviet Union it was accompanied by mobilization of the new elites, to create a culture that, according to the Soviet formula, would be “national in form and socialist in content.”

Less historically specific is the motive for elitocide from below, a violently vengeful form of *ressentiment*, turning the tables on the elites under the slogan of equality. Both classical and modern literatures recognize the threat of popular *ressentiment*, as if writers were apprehensive of the fate of Orpheus at the hands the Maenads. Under despotic regimes,

⁴ See Sruoga’s Stutthof memoir *The Forest of the Gods* (2005 [1957]) – *Dievų miškas* (1989 [1957]).

the elitocidal tendency from below, usually either absent, repressed, or sublimated, gains sway when the affects behind it resonate with the agenda of the authorities. It is the phenomenon of the grass-roots elitocidal resentment implicitly sanctioned from above that is represented in the fiction of Georgy Demidov, with Fedor Dostoevsky (Фёдор Достоевский) as his precursor, Vladimir Nabokov (Владимир Набоков) as his oblique supporter, and Varlam Shalamov (Варлам Шаламов) as his literary opponent.

Arguably, however, the pre-history of the literary theme of elitocide also includes classical tragedy, a genre dominated by the elevated stature of the hero, “the leader,” who is superior to his or her human environment and “has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours” (Frye 1990 [1957]: 34). The fall of the mighty, with the concomitant horror and pity, grants the elite audience a metaphysical experience with a reach beyond catharsis. The “truly aesthetic listener” of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 1872) “sees the tragic hero . . . in his epic clearness and beauty, and nevertheless rejoices in his annihilation. . . . He feels the actions of the hero as justified and is nevertheless still more elated when these actions annihilate their agent” (Nietzsche 1966 [1872]: 131).⁵ For the tragic artist himself, the destruction of the mighty, as individuality is devoured by the Dionysian impulse, is a path to the “highest artistic primal joy, in the bosom of the primordially One” (131).⁶ Yet one might speculate about the effect of tragedy on the audience with a less “truly aesthetic” mind-set, some of the “groundlings” of the Shakespearean theater: what part may have been played by the satisfied resentment at the fall of a stuck-up Hamlet, a crotchety Lear, or an upstart Othello? If Elias Canetti is right that we feel superior to the dead owing to the very fact that we are alive and they are not (1978: 227; 1980: 281), then perhaps the tragic fall of the leader on the theater stage caters to the vengefulness of those made to feel abject.

An everyday refraction of sublimated resentment transpires in post- or late-romantic 19th-century English and French novels, where the dominant concern is with the clash between the individual and society. Against the background of what was perceived as the despotism of mediocrity, one’s romantic or otherwise exceptional personality—that of a Julien Sorrel, a Dorothea Brooke, or a Michael Henchard—dooms one to destruction or, less radically, to the loss of status, power, or promise: indeed, the very title of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871) points to the power of those who march in the middle. In these novels, however, the diffusion or erasure of the outstanding individual’s potential is an

5 “sieht den tragischen Helden . . . in epischer Deutlichkeit und Schönheit und erfreut sich doch an seiner Vernichtung. . . . Er fühlt die Handlungen des Helden als gerechtfertigt und ist doch noch mehr erhoben, wenn diese Handlungen den Urheber vernichten” (1988 [1872]: 140-141).

6 “eine höchste künstlerische Urfreude im Schoosse des Ur-Einen” (1988 [1872]: 140).

epiphenomenon of the perceived social trends rather than anyone's deliberately sought goal.

In a recognizable form, a top-down elitocide is adumbrated in Dostoevsky's 1871–1872 novel *The Devils* (*Бесы*). Like Socrates' (Σωκράτης) utopia in Plato's (Πλάτων) *Republic* (*Πολιτεία*, c. 380 BCE), the imaginary society is not staged in the storyworld but is offered as a social-engineering theory in a text-within-a-text, viz. in the radically pseudo-Marxist socio-philosophical reflections of the character Shigalev (Шигалев). The "Shigalev system" (Dostoyevsky 1953: 419), the so-called "Shigalevshchina" ("шигалёвщина," Dostoyevsky 1982 I: 403, the suffix echoing the names of rebellions of the past—Khovanshchina (Хованщина), Pugachevshchina [Пугачёвщина]), is socially rather than ethnically oriented. It is a paradoxical combination of Socratean elitism with elitocide, mainly the destruction of the talented representatives of the lower class. It posits a division of society into "two unequal parts. One-tenth is to be granted absolute freedom and unrestricted powers over the remaining nine-tenths" (Dostoyevsky 1953: 405).⁷ The one-tenth is the ruling class—harking back to Socrates' wise men and anticipating Aldous Huxley's alpha meritocrats or, *mutatis mutandis*, Stalin's (Сталин) apparatchiks (аппаратчики). They are invested with "absolute freedom" not of the negative but of the positive kind, as power over the others. It is among those others, the nine-tenths of the population, that total equality is to be enforced. These nine-tenths "must give up their individuality and be turned into something like a herd, and by their boundless obedience will by a series of regenerations attain a state of primeval innocence, something like the original paradise" though having to work (405).⁸ According to the enthusiastic gloss of the aggressively neurotic anarchist Peter Verkhovensky (Пётр Верховенский), the evil force of *The Devils*, "All slaves are equal in slavery" (418),⁹ and the means of achieving the desired stratification include a deliberate lowering of

the level of education, science, and talents, [because a] high level of scientific thought and talents is open only to men of highest abilities; no need for the highest abilities! Men of the highest ability have always seized the power and become autocrats, and

⁷ "две неравные части. Одна десятая доля получает свободу личности и безграничное право над остальными девятью десятыми" (1982, VIII: 390).

⁸ "[Те же] должны потерять личность и обратиться вроде как в стадо и при безграничном повиновении достигнуть рядом перерождений первобытной невинности, вроде как бы первобытного рая [хотя, впрочем, и будут работать]" (1982, VIII: 390).

⁹ "Все рабы и в рабстве равны" (1982: VIII: 403). The foundational idea of Shigalev's dystopia may remind one of the grim serf-falanstery dystopia of Ugrium-Burcheev in Saltykov-Shchedrin's 1870 novel *The History of a Town* (*История одного города*; see Ermilov 215–16). Demidov uses the non-capitalized "ugrium-burcheev" ("угрюм бурчеев") as a common appellation for obtusely cruel camp commanders (2008: 184).

they've always done more harm than good; they are either banished or executed. A Cicero will have his tongue cut out, Copernicus will have his eyes gouged out, a Shakespeare will be stoned. . . . We shall reduce everything to one common denominator. Full equality." (418–19, translation amended)¹⁰

Order and uniformity are to be achieved through a variety of means, including blood baths, drunkenness, slander, denunciations—all quite to Peter Verkhovensky's taste.

And yet Verkhovensky feels that he is powerless without the support of an outstanding individual, the exquisitely handsome and rich young aristocrat Nikolai Stavrogin (Николай Ставрогин), deeply attractive to Verkhovensky owing, among other things, to his experimentation with absolute freedom as entailed by disbelief in God: Stavrogin keeps testing whether, indeed, in the language of *The Brothers Karamazov* (Братья Карамазовы, 1879-1880), if there is no God, then everything is permitted. *Pace* Socrates, he does evil for the sake of doing evil. Hence, Verkhovensky takes him for a candidate to the "one-tenth," or rather mistakes him for one, since for the one-tenth problems with conscience are expected to be as non-existent as for an accomplished agent of genocide in Himmler's Posen speeches. Though Stavrogin repulses "Shigeevshchina" as insane and Verkhovensky as abject, the latter kisses his hand in a burst of adulation.

Seven decades later this gesture is replicated in Vladimir Nabokov's dystopian novel *Bend Sinister* (1947)¹¹: in their schooldays, the future dictator Paduk stealthily kisses the hand of his bullying classmate, the future philosopher Adam Krug, despite Krug's viscerally disgusted rejection (Nabokov 1974: 88). Both Dostoyevsky's creepy anarchist and Nabokov's Paduk are akin to what, in his book on Gogol (Гоголь), Nabokov described as the Russian subspecies of the "geographical races" of Devils: "the 'Chort' is for good Russians a shrimpy foreigner, a shivering puny green-blooded imp, with thin German, Polish, French legs, a sneaking little cad ('podlenky') with something inexpressibly repellent ('gadenky') about him" (Nabokov 1961: 5–6)—a far cry from Bulgakov's (Булгаков) Westernized Volland yet akin to him in the threat of contamination. "To squash him is a mixture of nausea and ecstasy; but so revolting is his squirming black essence that no force on earth could make one perform this business with the bare hand; and a shock of electric disgust darts up any instrument used, transforming the latter into a prolongation

¹⁰ "[Первым делом] понижается уровень образования, наук и талантов. Высокий уровень наук и талантов доступен только высшим способностям, не надо высших способностей! Высшие способности всегда захватывали власть и были деспотами. Высшие способности не могут не быть деспотами и всегда развращали более, чем приносили пользы; их изгоняют или казнят. Цицерону отрезывается язык, Копернику выкалывают глаза, Шекспир побивается камнями. . . . Всё к одному знаменателю, полное равенство" (1982: VIII: 403).

¹¹ See also Toker (2001: 333-341).

of one's very body" (6). What aligns this type of the abject with Milton's magnetizing Satan and his debased avatars such as Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd* (1924) is vengeful ressentiment. In *Bend Sinister* the theme of ressentiment is borne by the characters of the newly empowered, such as the arriviste Dr. Alexander, the oversexed enforcer Max, or the University cafeteria employee Pietro. Tellingly, only the latter seems to survive by the end of the novel: the former two fall victim of the regime that they have faithfully served, as in the leap-frog history of Stalin's Great Terror.

The counterpart of the "Shigalevschina" of *The Devils* is "Ekwilism," the foundational idea of Paduk's dystopia in *Bend Sinister*.¹² As in Dostoevsky, the inventor of the theory is not the one to implement it. The former, Fradrik Skotoma, Nabokov's version of Shigalev, demands total equality of the citizens not only in terms of property but also in terms of individual capacities. Here the dead metaphor of "capacity" is awakened and literalized with the help of the fantasy of the One as "world consciousness." People are represented as "vessels" that contain "unequal portions of human consciousness" (1974: 75), so that "the difference between the proudest intellect and the humblest stupidity depend[s] entirely upon the degree of 'world consciousness' condensed in this or that individual" (76). This metaphor degrades "human consciousness" to a uniform material substance containing a "certain computable amount" at every "given level of world-time." So long as this given amount of consciousness is "contained in a given number of heterogeneous bottles—wine bottles, flagons and vials of varying shape and size," its distribution is "uneven and unjust, but could be made even and just either by grading the contents or by eliminating the fancy vessels and adopting a standard size" (75). The assumption of the finite amount of consciousness at any time contrasts with Krug's wish to believe in "infinite consciousness" possibly attainable after death (192).

In non-metaphorical terms, if "socialism had advocated uniformity on an economic plane" and if "religion had grimly promised the same in spiritual terms as an inevitable status beyond the grave," Ekwilism maintains that "no levelling of wealth could be successfully accomplished, nor indeed was of any real moment, so long as there existed some individuals with more brains or guts than others" (75). Nor would metaphysical, spiritual equality be achieved so long as there existed

those favoured ones (men of bizarre genius, big game hunters, chess players, prodigiously robust and versatile lovers, the radiant woman taking her necklace off after the ball) for whom this world was a paradise in itself and who would be always

¹² I agree with Julian Connolly (1999) that Nabokov's attitude to Dostoyevsky was complex and dynamic, and at times closer than his later-life rejection may suggest.

one point up no matter what happened to everyone in the melting pot of eternity.
(76)

According to this conception, therefore, the restructuring or the “liquidation” of the most capacious of the vessels would lead to a more equitable redistribution of the “world consciousness” among the rest of humanity. When Ekwilism becomes the state’s official ideology, an outstanding intellectual, regarded by others as an epitome of their own intellectual strivings and powers, begins to encounter more and more frequent varieties of the vengeful resentment of the servants of the regime, especially people of the kind that in the Soviet Union were known as *vydvizhentsy* (выдвиженцы), those put forward, chosen for promotion by the regime.

Nabokov’s sensitivity to possible resentment against intellectuals is also evident in his 1935 dystopia *Invitation to a Beheading*, where the peasant-jailor Rodion first lavishes plain-folk tenderness on the imprisoned puny intellectual Cincinnatus but eventually loses patience with his needs:

“Wait a minute!” cried Cincinnatus. “I have finished all the books. Bring me again the catalogue.”
“Books...” Rodion scoffed huffily and locked the door behind him with pronounced resonance. (1979: 48)

A dystopian reversal of Shigalev’s point about the treatment of the nine-tenths as the herd is staged in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895), where the hard-worked ape-like Morlocks underground cater to the beautiful elf-like Eloi while actually raising them as cattle to feed upon. The Morlocks’ hunting sallies for Eloi are scavenging expeditions after those left behind by the flight of others, the older and weaker ones.¹³

H. G. Wells takes Disraeli’s representation of British classes as “the two nations” a few steps further: humanity seems to have diverged into two different species. Yet the resentment against the cultivated is often shown pertaining even to those born in the downtrodden masses’ own midst. This is reflected in the adventures of the guillotine during the French Revolution (refracted in such literary works as Anatole France’s 1912 *The Gods are Athirst [Les dieux ont soif]*): once erected, the guillotine demands food; the aristocrats and their supporters no longer suffice and the supply has to come from elsewhere. As an emblem of resentment, this “national shaver” eventually allows its frenzy to trump class solidarity: the revolutionary terror devours its own. It seems that on

¹³ In Andrey Platonov’s (Андрей Платонов) *Chevengur* (Чевенгур, 1972) the revolutionary masses do not cannibalize the educated (the “bourgeoisie”) whom they perceive as “weaklings” (квелье), but slaughter or drive them to death, purging the sense of abjection from themselves by transferring it to their victims.

facing the social rise of the talented from one's own midst, it is oneself who becomes abject, discarded, left behind. The Shigalevian Ekwilist Stalin hated to see brilliant people around himself,¹⁴ but he also managed to get thousands of working-class demonstrators to demand death penalties for "bourgeois specialists" accused of "wrecking," as well as for yesterday's revered leaders now playing the roles of agents of Western imperialism. Social sciences can hardly account for his success in mobilizing the masses without the phenomenological rule of thumb: the endemic individual resentment can get pooled into elitocidal waves.

3. WASTED TALENTS

Dominance of the concern with the regime's destruction of particularly talented people is the distinctive feature of the Gulag stories of Georgy Demidov, a camp survivor whose work about prisons and camps appeared relatively late on the Russian literary scene. Demidov belonged to the younger generation of Soviet scientists and engineers whom the regime promoted in parallel with persecuting the "bourgeois specialists." Whereas Lenin (Ленин) considered the old-time intellectuals and scientists indispensable during the transition period, Stalin was hostile to this social stratum and made the transition period one of a short duration. But the younger generation of scientists and engineers fostered by the regime were not necessarily its thoughtless slaves either; high IQ favors critical or at least autonomous thinking. As Demidov put it in the story "The Intellectual (the Cauchy Criterion)" – "Интеллектуал (Признак Коши)," by contrast to the proletariat "that was not burdened by any doubts regarding its historical justification, Russian intelligentsia, *even its new representatives*, still bore the load of political, ethical, and various other doubts" (2008: 101; emphasis mine).¹⁵ A large percentage of this new scientific elite was also eventually sent to the camps, leaving their social berths open for newly raised successors: a leap-frog process that among those who escaped the purges often created the illusion of a progressively wider distribution of status, goods, and well-being.

¹⁴ Telling in this respect is the famous story of the journalist Mikhail Koltsov's (Михаил Кольцов) conversation with Stalin about the Spanish Civil War. As Koltsov told his brother Boris Efimov (Борис Ефимов), the look that Stalin had given him on parting meant "Slishkom prytoch" ("Слишком прыток," "Too quick/smart"). Koltsov read his own death sentence in Stalin's eyes (Beliaev et al. 1989: 95).

¹⁵ "[В отличие от пролетариата,] не отягощенного никакими сомнениями относительно ее исторической оправданности, русская интеллигенция, даже в лице новых своих представителей, все еще несла на себе груз политических, этических и всяких иных сомнений" (2008: 101).

Unless otherwise noted in "Bibliographical References," the translations from Russian are mine.

Demidov was arrested in 1938, during the Great Terror; he was badly beaten during interrogations and on one occasion attacked his interrogator. However, he did sign a self-incrimination, not as a result of torture but when threatened with the arrest of his wife and daughter. He was sent to Kolyma (Колыма) camps. In the early post-war years he made friends with Varlam Shalamov (Варлам Шаламов) in the Debin (Дёбин) hospital for prisoners, where Shalamov was a medic and Demidov maintained the X-ray laboratory. Shalamov's play "Anna Ivanovna" ("Анна Ивановна") is dedicated to Demidov. When in 1965 a typescript of the play fell into the hands of mutual friends, a connection was reestablished between them. Yet their renewed friendship did not last: apparently, in their conversations about Demidov's writing Shalamov took a mentor's tone which alienated Demidov, always an independent thinker and rebel (like, for that matter, Shalamov himself). Shalamov's 1967 near-hagiographic story "The Life of Engineer Kipreev" ("Житие инженера Кипреева") is based on Demidov's camp biography, but has been interpreted as expressive of Shalamov's doubt about Demidov's ability "to write not only about Kolyma but also his own story" (Lundblad-Janjić 2016: 51).¹⁶ Demidov appears under his own name, and with reference to the major facts of his camp biography, in Shalamov's 1965 story "Ivan Fyodorovich" ("Иван Федорович"). In Shalamov's corpus this story is one of the few that dwell on elitocide. Its protagonist is a fictionalized extension of the historical Ivan Fedorovich Nikishov (Никишов), the brutal, autocratic, and corrupt official who headed the Kolyma enterprises in 1839–1948. If the imprisoned intellectuals, be they the famous theater director like Leonid Varpakhovskii (Леонид Варпаховский) or the brilliant inventor Demidov, refuse to kowtow to him, he dismisses them from their professional jobs and condemns them to murderous hard labor.

When his original sentence was extended for another eight years in 1946, Demidov decided that he had to liberate his wife and daughter from "his existence" in their lives (Demidova 2008: 6; translation mine, here and hereafter)¹⁷: a telegram was sent to his wife with the false news of his death. She did not believe it. After 1956 the contact between them was renewed, in the shape of letters and visits. Unable to catch up with the fast-moving progress of science and barred from residence in the central big cities, Demidov remained in the North, working as an engineer in Ukhta (Ухтá), and writing at nights and on Sundays. Literary testimony about the Gulag became the purpose of his life.

¹⁶ See also Lundblad-Janjić (2016: 53–63) for a detailed discussion of the personal/professional relationship between the two writers and its refractions in "The Life of Engineer Kipreev." On the significance of anachronisms in the story see the annotations of Valerii Esipov (Валерий Ёсипов, 2013).

¹⁷ "избавить [тебя и маму] от своего существования" (2008: 6).

His works circulated among friends and friends of friends, apparently a circle too narrow to be called the Samizdat (самиздат); he refused to have the typescripts smuggled abroad. His literary work soon got the attention of the authorities: he was offered admission to the Writers' Union on condition that he change his subject—why not write about workers in modern factories, material that he also knew well? Demidov refused, and again found himself under a cloud. Upon retirement he settled in Kaluga (Калуга). A disabling blow was dealt to him in 1980, when the KGB confiscated all his manuscripts, and all their copies held by friends.¹⁸ After that, up to his death in 1987, Demidov was depressed and no longer able to write; his autobiographical novel *From Dawn to Twilight* (*От рассвета до сумерек*), in which he was going to give a systematic representation of his camp ordeal, remained unfinished, ending with the mid-1930s (so far only its first part, ending on the year 1920, has been published). Ironically, he died shortly after the Chernobyl (Чернобыль) disaster: *glasnost'* and *perestroika* (Гласность / перестройка) were beginning, and Gulag literature (лагерная литература) was about to start coming out again in Russia. In 1988, his daughter Valentina Demidova (Валентина Демидова), with whom he had developed a warm friendship, managed to obtain his manuscripts from the KGB archives (with the help of A. N. Yakovlev [А. Н. Яковлев], secretary of the Politburo) and started the long labor of their publication.

Demidov's great intellectual potential became evident early in his life. He was not exactly one of the *vydvizhentsy*: it was the great Soviet physicist Lev Landau ([Лев Ландау], also eventually arrested in 1938 but released after Petr Kapitsa [Пётр Капица] intervened on his behalf) who recognized the talent of a third-year student of Kharkov University (Харковский университет) and transferred him to his own laboratory. When Demidov's former fellow-students were working on their graduation papers, he was already completing his PhD thesis. Yet in later life he had to watch how far behind he was left by the careers of those not plucked out. His daughter records his saying that, on realizing that his arrest was not a matter of some temporary mistake, he wept not for his family or his child but for losing his place in physics (Demidova 2011: 67). The quashing of talents by the regime became the most insistently recurring theme of his tales. Referring to a purge in the shipbuilding institute in the story "Without a Tag" ("Без бирки"), the narrator mentions that arrests for "wrecking" swept away both veteran and new shipbuilding-scientists as well as some students "from among the most gifted" – "из числа наиболее способных" (2008: 144). The protagonist of "The Intellectual (The Cauchy Criterion)"

¹⁸ My sources for this biographical information are his daughter's reminiscences (Demidova 2008 and 2011).

wonders “[w]hat was the use of having been born exceptionally gifted . . . if one perished in such an absurd anomalous way among the gloomy hills somewhere at the very edge of the world” (2008: 107).¹⁹ Demidov’s most famous short story, “The Stiff” (“Дýбapь”), which appeared in the popular weekly *Ogoniok* (*Ozonék*) in 1990, is actually one of the few of his works that do not explicitly deal with elitocide, except symbolically: the eponymous “stiff” of the story is a beautiful baby who has died four hours after being born in the Gulag.

4. THE GULAG FATE OF SCIENTISTS IN GEORGY DEMIDOV’S STORIES

The most concentrated of the numerous representations of elitocide in Demidov’s corpus are the stories “The Intellectual (the Cauchy Criterion)” and “Without a Tag.” In the former, the protagonist, nicknamed “the Scientist” (“Учёный”) in the camps, is to some extent Demidov’s self-portrait. He is a former scientist who has survived two years in a horrible camp, where prisoners worked in a mine at the top of a steep hill which they had to climb every morning in preparation for the full work-day. This talented person used to escape the misery of his predicament with the help of scientific or philosophical thought. It helped that he had inherited the strong constitution of his peasant ancestry; in his student days, moreover, not having been of a pure proletarian origin, he did not get a government scholarship and earned a living loading and unloading railway freight cars in the evenings.²⁰ On the day staged in the story, while climbing the hill in the morning, he again attempts to distract his attention from physical suffering and occupy his mind with, for instance, mathematical calculations. These calculations give a precise explanation of the “vicious spiral” (Ekart 1954: 60) down which, metaphorically speaking, he is sliding while literally climbing the hill: the climb consumes half the daily calories which the most productive workers receive in their food ration; the remaining half cannot cover the work-day at the mine; with the workers’ weakening and the decrease in their production results, the food ration is reduced, and the workers start moving down to complete exhaustion.²¹ Many of them die of heart attacks during the climb. Whoever collapses on the way gets viciously kicked by the guards on a fake suspicion of malingering but mainly out of the guards’ resentment of this nuisance and their total unconcern for human life. The Scientist begins to fear that on this day he will not be able to conquer the last and steepest lap of the

¹⁹ “Стоило родиться на свет на редкость одаренным человеком..., чтобы таким нелепым, противоестественным образом погибнуть среди угрюмых гор, где-то на самом краю света” (2008: 107).

²⁰ This is also an autobiographical touch: Demidov himself lacked “pure” proletarian origins: his mother was a peasant and his father a country mechanic.

²¹ On Shalamov’s and Kafka’s treatment of prolonged starvation, see Toker (2010: 191–201).

ascent, to surmount the Cauchy maximum of the climb. He thinks also of the socio-political views of the French mathematician August-Luis Cauchy (whose criterion for the maximum of the function he has adopted for conceptualizing his effort): Cauchy believed that attempts of “violent transformation of society, no matter how benevolent their intentions, are inevitably pernicious” (Demidov 2008: 111).²² This thought leads him to the one about the age-old hostility of the authorities, who claim a monopoly on thinking, to “professionals of intellectual labor,” and “hence the permanent struggle of dictatorships with their own intelligentsia,” a struggle that “started in ancient Egypt, ran through the history of the imperial Rome like a red thread, let alone through that of the semi-theocratic medieval European states with their inquisition” (111–112), but was first rationalized by the Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang (3rd century BC), who, “starting the epoch of absolute autocracy, ordered to put all philosophers in his empire to death. In, moreover, such ways as drowning them in outhouses.”²³ The Scientist muses that the methods of the despot’s elitocidal campaign against free-thinking scholars have become obsolete (some were revived by the Nazis) but not his political principles: “Otherwise a mathematics professor would not be climbing this mountain instead of working on the theory of divergent series” (112).²⁴

During the last lap of the climb, the neighboring hill, called “The Bacchante” (“Вакханка,” 113), suddenly lives up to its name—it sways drunkenly: the Scientist has fallen down to the ground. The last thoughts of this Orpheus (the Scientist had played a cello in the orchestra in his youth) are a comparison of the spring season in his native parts with the gloomy spring in Kolyma. After an effort he recollects one of the signs of spring in the camps: the guards have started wearing hard summer boots instead of the felt boots of winter. Which means that now the Scientist is well aware of his death’s approach: the pain from a blow of the guard’s hard-booted foot penetrates his waning consciousness. The last line of the story, partly reminiscent of the grim punchlines in the stories of Shalamov, is

²² “попытки насильственного преобразования общества, с какими благими намерениями они не производились, неизменно пагубны” (2008: 111).

²³ “профессионалам мыслительной работы” . . . “извечная война единоличных диктатур и деспотий с собственной интеллигенцией” . . . “началась еще в древнем Египте, красной нитью прошла через историю императорского Рима, не говоря уже о средневековых политеократических европейских государствах с их инквизицией. [Но первым, кто поставил эту войну на продуманную, рационалистическую основу, был, наверное, китайский император Цинь Ши-Хуанди.] Для начала эпохи абсолютного единоличного управления он повелел в своей империи умертвить всех философов. И, притом, такими способами, как утопление в нужниках, например” (2008: 111–112). This information has been called into question by some recent historians of China.

²⁴ “Иначе профессор математики не карабкался бы на эту сопку вместо того, чтобы заниматься теорией расходящихся рядов” (2008: 112).

“The second blow the Scientist already did not feel” – “Второй удар Ученый уже не почувствовал” (114).

In the collection *Wonder Planet* (*Чудная планета*) this story, dated 1973, is followed by the 1966 story “Without a Tag,” forming a mini-cycle.²⁵ The protagonist of that story, Mikhail Kushnarev (Михаил Кушнарев), is, unlike the Scientist of “The Intellectual,” a descendant of the hereditary Russian intelligentsia. A talented shipbuilding engineer, he is represented as a version of the archetype of an eccentric. Having read Schopenhauer and Spengler preserved in his deceased father’s library (his stepfather is, on the contrary, a professor of dialectical materialism), he developed a depressively pessimistic viewpoint from which he was only distracted by his work in hydromechanics but which amply sufficed for him to be targeted during the Great Terror. The viewpoint came back in full force in the camps, especially since his first job in Kolyma was in the grave-diggers’ team. For all his philosophical skepticism, Kushnarev came to see the mode of burying Kolyma prisoners as sacrilege. The corpses would be placed in common graves with the plywood tags bearing their file numbers attached to their left feet. Kushnarev becomes obsessed with aversion to being buried this way. Therefore he escapes from the camps twice, hoping to die in the taiga so that his body would not be found. However, whereas “the Scientist” uses his mental and spiritual powers to extend his body’s survival, Kushnarev finds that his body’s instinct for self-preservation keeps overpowering his wish to die and merge with the universe, avoiding the false individuation represented by the plywood tag (with its durable graphite inscription, as we learn from the stories of Shalamov). The bulk of the story is devoted, with some suspense, to his finding a way to the desired return to nature. A great deal of ingenuity is expended on that pursuit, making it clear that in a society that did not practice elitocide such ingenuity would be much more fruitfully employed, as would that of the diesel-engine designer who is fortunate to work as a diesel operator in the camps (“Batsilla the Artist and His Masterpiece” [“Художник Бацилла и его шедевр”]), a genetics researcher who works as a porter (“The Decembrist” [“Декабристка”]), or the bridge-constructor who loses his fingers to frost in mining camps (“On the Crossroads of Captivity” [“На перекрестках невольничьих путей”]).

Kushnarev is not the only victim of elitocide in the story. Before he makes his entrance, the story tells us about the erection of special-regime camps in Kolyma in 1948, for, as it were, particularly dangerous enemies of the Soviet state. The curiosity of the prisoners about this extraordinary contingent of alleged enemies is replaced by surprise: the transport of

²⁵ I have not succeeded in finding out whether this felicitous decision about the sequence of the stories was made by the author himself or by his daughter.

prisoners to the new grim barracks largely consists of the intelligentsia and the valued professionals, whose services in the more centrally located Kolyma enterprises and camps are now being dispensed with. The elderly agronomist who has managed to grow vegetables in the tundra, the surgeon whose scalpel had saved many lives, the doctor who could see what was inside the patient without any X-rays; the automobile mechanic who was called a “doctor” too—a doctor for cars (2008: 127–29). In Demidov’s story there is no *Schadenfreude* among the regular prisoners who now find themselves in better conditions than these victims of in-camp repressions. What has operated against these professionals is a combination of the “[p]athological cruelty and suspiciousness in the higher echelons” and “toadying, thoughtlessness, and careerism” in the lower rungs of the apparatus (131)²⁶; during the renewed wave of terror three years after the war, the local commanders’ upward responsibility, to be reflected in their accounts of the “measures” taken in their own autocratic domains, had been translated into digging up the files of surviving prisoners with “enemy-of-the-people” charges and condemning them to special-regime hard-labor camps without any regard to their positive influence on the Kolyma economy and society. Here it is not the diffuse resentment but a direct causality that has been at work—“the forms of the oppressive ugliness of autocratic dictatorship were concentrated [in the Gulag] as in the focus of a magnifying glass” (130).²⁷ By contrast, in the stories “The Boss” (“Начальник”) and, in particular, “People Perish for Metal” (“Люди гибнут за металл”) Demidov does show how the accelerated demise of the talented people and members of intelligentsia in the camps is further speeded up by the resentment of the semi-literate camps bosses who feel abjectly left behind by their better educated colleagues but, unable to direct their anger at the latter, vent it on prisoners who have been through Universities.

Talented scientists victimized by the regime are also the protagonists of Demidov’s stories “Fone-Kvas” (“Фонэ квас”) and “The Orange Lampshade” (“Оранжевый абажур”) in the collection *The Orange Lampshade* (*Оранжевый абажур*, 2009) dealing with the arrests and interrogations of 1937, the peak year of the Great Terror. Demidov implicitly enters a dialogue with Solzhenitsyn’s (Солженицын) representation of the similar theme in the novel *The First Circle* (*В круге первом*, 1968/1990). There the scientists are made to work in an in-camp research institute, a so-called “*sharashka*” (“шарашка”) based on the Marfino research-institute (Марфино) where Solzhenitsyn himself was employed for

²⁶ “Патологическая жестокость и подозрительность на самом верху, [сочетаясь с] угодливостью, недоумием и карьеризмом [снизу]” (2008: 131).

²⁷ “Довлеющие над страной уродства единоличной диктатуры сконцентрировались здесь как в фокусе увеличительного стекла” (2008: 130).

some time after his arrest. The protagonist of that novel, however, practically *chooses* to descend to the further circles of the camp hell, and so experience what the hard-labor camps are really about.

5. OTHER VICTIMS OF ELITOCIDE

Demidov's theme of the waste of talents in the Gulag is not limited to the representations of scientists. The story "The Duet" ("Дуэт") tells of gifted and well trained opera soloists in a transit prison, heading for the camps in which there will be no place for their singing. If the protagonist of that story is, like Kushnarev, obviously a hereditary member of the intelligentsia, the opera-singer Lokshin (Локшин) in the story "People Perish for Metal" (allusion to the Russian version of Mephistopheles' song about the Golden Calf in Gounod's *Faust*), a well-trained lyrical tenor, is of peasant origin, which does not prevent a sadistic camp commander to drive him to his death, represented as considerably more heroic than his life had been. In "Literary Classics and Camp Amateur Art Activities" ("Классики литературы и лагерная самодеятельность") the frustrated creative energies of a literary scholar find expression in malicious practical jokes,²⁸ while distinguished professional actors, directors, and performers among prisoners are first forbidden to touch the musical instruments for which they long and then are allowed to stage, ironically, "amateur" performances (*самодеятельность*), eventually quashed by a humorless and malevolently resentful commander. The story "Batsilla the Artist and His Masterpiece" focuses on a talented and largely self-taught graphic artist who might have become a great painter under normal circumstances.²⁹ The third story of *The Orange Lampshade*, "The Two Procurators" ("Два прокурора"), deals with a young and idealistic Soviet lawyer whose conscience does not allow him to play by the new rules.

In the story "The Little Ring" ("Перстенок") in Demidov's third collection, *Love Behind the Barbed Wire* (*Любовь за колючей проволокой*, 2010), criminal convicts are likewise represented as a waste of human potential. In her preface to that volume, Marietta Chudakova (Мариэтта Чудакова), who had served on the Presidential pardons commission in the 1990s, notes that a large proportion of the cases that she reviewed were those of recidivists who were first set on the criminal track and arrested as teenagers in the Stalin years (2010: 7). Many of these youngsters were children of the repressed, who were never helped to build up their lives in normative society. Whereas in

²⁸ Near-sadistic practical jokes are also an issue in Demidov's *From Dawn to Sunset*, where they are likewise indulged in by young people who find no better outlets for creative energies.

²⁹ The story includes details that can be read as autodescriptive comments on Demidov's own art as a self-taught writer (see Toker 2019).

the early years of the Soviet regime professional petty crime was considered a relic of the bourgeois past, Demidov's criminal characters are products of socialist conditions. His view of them is less uncompromisingly negative than that of Shalamov. Scenically rendered episodes in some of Demidov's stories, including "Amok" ("Амок" in *Wonder Planet*) and "The Little Ring," come a little too close to an admiring romantization of the criminals' defiant ways (Shalamov regarded such a romantization as a belletristic error).³⁰ In this respect Demidov's scenes tend to swerve away from the condemnation of the practices of professional criminals in his ample authorial comments.

6. TESTIMONY AND "LITERARINESS"

Judging by Valentina Demidova's memoirs, one of the main points of Demidov's disagreement with Shalamov concerned the life of emotion: as he said to his daughter after an intense quarrel with Shalamov, "You have to understand: we lived there. . . . Not many survived after general works, and all the same—people lived there. These people loved, had friendships... And I must write about that" (Demidova 2011: 63–64).³¹ Partly, the difference lay in their temperament and physical strength: in his youth Demidov could boast robust health (despite deprivation in the years of World War I), though even he was repeatedly driven to near-death in the camps, whereas the tall and handsome Shalamov was "asthenic" since his early teens, when his father, the orthodox priest, was denied ways of making a living.³² In the camps tall people were more vulnerable to hunger than those of smaller stature, since food rations did not take body size into account. A recurrent motif of Shalamov's stories is the levelling down or even erasure of most emotions with the depletion of the body; Demidov supplements this testimony by representing a kind of

³⁰ See Toker (2017b).

³¹ "Ну ты пойми, мы там жили. [Это страшная, невозможная каторга.] Там немногие выживали после общих работ, и все равно—там жили люди. Эти люди любили, дружили... И не писать об этом я не могу" (2008: 63–64).

³² In his autobiographical tale of childhood, "The Fourth Vologda" ("Четвертая Вологда"), Shalamov writes: "The family was suddenly reduced to indigence. Most ordinary hunger. . . . Mother wept later too, saying that from such a sturdy child I turned into an asthenic, but mother's natural beliefs were Lamarckian, and she is wrong. It is my genes that are asthenic. And mother wept, kissed my hands, asked me to forgive her that she raised me not physically strong. But the real tests of my asthenic body were still ahead—in the gold mines of Kolyma": "Семья осталась нищей внезапно. Самый обыкновенный голод. . . . Мама и позже плакала, что из меня, из такого крепыша в детстве, вышел астеник, но мама, стихийная ламаркистка, – ошибается. Это у меня гены только астенические. А мама ведь плакала, целовала мне руки – просила прощения, что вырастила меня таким физически некрепким. Но моему астеническому телосложению главные испытания были еще впереди – в золотых колымских забоях» (1998, IV: 129).

suspended animation, when the suffering body and mind enter a trance-like state, as a defense mechanism: long years of forced labor have taught the prisoners

to fall into a half-insensate state, somewhat similar to the anabiosis of lower organisms. . . . With most people this blunting reached the stage when we no longer felt not only spiritual but also physical suffering, at least not keenly. Tormenting emotions and countless pain signals that the suffering body sends to the brain were ultimately just turned off. (2008: 179)³³

Shalamov likewise testifies that consciousness of sundry pains awakens only after the main suffering is removed, yet what for Demidov is explicable by analogy with anabiosis is for Shalamov, in particular in the story "Sententia" ("Сентенция"), a state verging on a mystical unity with the seemingly inanimate world. A further difference in the two writers' interpretation of psychological processes on the way to total exhaustion is that in Shalamov the erasure of most emotions is a symptom of the hunger disease,³⁴ whereas in Demidov it too is a matter of self-protection.

Mainly, however, though both the writers sought ways of testifying to camp experience through their narratives, there is a striking difference in their thematic agenda. Shalamov's protagonists, most of them intellectuals persecuted by the regime, undergo the kind of suffering that is part of a general human predicament; the pain of the wasted individual talent is, in their cases, blotted out, like most of their individual feelings. The state in which Shalamov's protagonists find themselves is that of depletion of physical, mental, and emotional energies, when their former intellectual flowering seems too remote and irrelevant or even to be regretted. When a character of the 1954 story "At Night" ("Ночью") makes a medical remark and is asked "Are you a doctor, then?" – "Ты врач, что ли?" – he remains silent:

It seemed a very long time ago that he had been a doctor. And had he ever been one? Far too often, the world beyond these mountains and seas seemed to him like a dream or a fiction. What was real was the minute, the hour, the day from reveille to the order to stop work. He never let his mind wander any further and he could not have found the strength to do so. Like everyone else. (Shalamov 2018: 12)³⁵

³³ "впадать в полубесчувственное состояние, нечто подобное анабиозу низших животных. . . . У большинства из нас это притупление достигало такой степени, что не только душевных, но даже особенно острых физических страданий мы уже не испытывали. Мучительные эмоции и бесчисленные болевые сигналы, посылаемые в мозг страдающим телом, в конце концов были просто выключены" (2008: 179).

³⁴ See Winick (1979).

³⁵ "Время, когда он был врачом, казалось очень далеким. Да и было ли такое время? Слишком часто тот мир за горами, за морями казался ему каким-то сном, выдумкой. Реальной была минута, час, день от подъема до отбоя – дальше он не загадывал и не находил в себе сил загадывать. Как и все" (1998: 14).

The brain is usually the last body organ to be preserved when the proteins of the muscles have been attacked by prolonged starvation. The first-person protagonist narrator of Shalamov's "Sententia"—translated by John Glad as "Sententious" (in Shalamov 1994) and by Donald Rayfield as "Maxim" (in Shalamov 2018), has already shed long-term memory, which is of no help with functioning in the goner's state. When that state is somewhat improved, long-forgotten words return to the protagonist's consciousness, giving him extraordinary joy. Yet in the absence of words, memories, thinking, what the consciousness of the protagonist registers is the remainder of his life-force and its kinship with the would-be inanimate world around him: "Not even a stone seemed dead to me, let alone the grass, the trees, the river" (1998 I: 362).³⁶ By withholding the protagonist-narrator's name, Shalamov suggests that this experience is of a general, serial kind, not restricted to refined intellectuals: it is the literary representation of that experience, by a Lazarus returned from the dead, that endows it with the intellectual nuance.

The theme of the regime's waste of the talents of extraordinary people is stronger in Shalamov's "Vishera: An Anti-Novel" ("Вишера. Антироман") than in his *Kolyma Stories* (*Колымские рассказы*). "Vishera" contains a string of portraits of outstanding talented personalities whom Shalamov had met during his first imprisonment, in the camps around Vishera in Northern Urals, in 1929–1931. In contrast to Demidov's treatment of his heroes, however, the insistently recurrent though oblique motif of these tales is not so much the criminal waste of these people's talents but the reduction of their own spiritual stature under the pressure of camp realities.

In his disputes with Demidov, Shalamov objected to any kind of "literaturnost'" ("литературность") or belletristic quality, in camp testimony. One of the aspect of his "literariness" is, indeed, Demidov's choice of extraordinary incidents or personalities in the camps, in lieu of focusing on routine experience, as in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day of Ivan Denisovich* (*Один день Ивана Денисовича*, 1962), or on serial fates, as in Shalamov's stories. In other words, Demidov foregrounds "the typifying" rather than the typical (Toker 2017a: 134–136), that is, not the common experience of life and death in the camps (which is, indeed, massively present in the background of his plots) but striking events that typify the camps in the sense that only in the camps could they take such shapes—a technique also present in the work of many other Gulag writers (such as Gustav Herling-Grudziński or Isaak Filshhtinskii [Исаак Фильштинский]). After the waning of the supernatural in fictional narratives, the extraordinary, in the shape of most handsome or

³⁶ "Даже камень не казался мне мертвым, не говоря уже о траве, деревьях, реке" (1998 I: 362). See discussion in Toker (2019).

gifted heroes and heroines, the coincidences, the unexpected encounters, the tantalizing enigmas, turned into the most narratable vehicle of storyworlds—until modernist narrative experiments in which the main action unfolded in individual inner life. Shalamov regarded himself as an heir of the Russian modernist literature of the Silver Age; Demidov's literary training seems to have largely elided that corpus.

Toward the end of the story "Batsilla the Artist and His Masterpiece" Demidov's first-person narrator walks to his own barracks through the Kolyma terrain, still under the impression of a painting by the camp artist that he had just seen in the living quarters of the free workers. Suddenly his mind's eye begins to see "a multitude of crosses with crucified victims on the neighboring slopes" (280–281),³⁷ as in the background of that painting, the foreground being taken by the crucifixion of the artist himself, the extraordinary as one of the many. Under the slopes, moreover, the narrator's spontaneous imagination conjurs up "innumerable camps cemeteries" – "бесчисленные лагерные кладбища." Under the influence of the artist's "grim allegory" ("мрачной аллегории"), combined with those of the gloomy landscape and the narrator's fatigue, "the real and the imaginary" become almost "indivisible" in his perception: "I saw, almost physically, the endless forest of crucifixes, blending in the somber distance" (281).³⁸ The episode can be read as autometadescriptive. Painstakingly constructing the camp setting and staging a polyphony of testifying camp voices, his own voice now blending with them now separating out, Demidov at times seems to yield to dreams of larger-than-life heroes and martyrs, as if to mythologize the composite figures of the wasted human potential.

The typifying extraordinary in Demidov's stories may strike one as a regression from Shalamov's economic modernist prose into earlier narrative modes. It may also be read as recording the author's Apollonian dream amidst the intoxication of camp and post-camp weariness. Mainly, however, I see it as thematically conditioned: the extraordinary is not just a plot mechanism but the main exponent of the theme of war against the most gifted, waged from above by the regime that distrusts the power and freedom of their minds and from below by the resentful stunted guards and petty camp tyrants staving off their own sense of abjection. It is, however, the critical mass of the elitocidal events of the recent decades that allows one to recognize Demidov's stories as direct or oblique accounts of serial elitocide.

³⁷ "на окрестных склонах множество крестов с распятыми на них людьми" (280–281).

³⁸ "реальное и воображаемое оказались почти неразделимыми. . . . Я почти физически видел бесконечный лес распятий, теряющихся в мрачной дали" (281).

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