“A Taste for the Eternal”:

Poetry and the Baroque in unofficial Leningrad literature.

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Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter One: On the Eve of Collapse	14
Chapter Two: Mapping Shvarts's Metarealist "Paradise"	34
Chapter Three: The (Neo-) Baroque and Allegory	50
Chapter Four: The Last Temptation	66
Chapter Five: Cycling Back and Forth	76
Discussion and Conclusion	86
List of Works Cited	91

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the baroque in Elena Shvarts's 1970s poetry, as well as its connections to the various layers of "underground" existence and literariness in the late-Soviet Union. Observing this poet primarily through an analysis of her 1974 poem cycle "Black Easter", my thesis will examine her relationships with Russian history, underground society, and the history of her native city of Leningrad. This analysis will incorporate careful close reading of the Russian text within the theoretical framework of the baroque, as it is understood in Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), as a timeless concept. Additionally, I engage with Walter Benjamin's theory of baroque allegory as an important component for Deleuze's timeless baroque, and also as a phenomenon present in Shvarts's cycle. Lastly, I arrive at Omar Calabrese's concept of the Neo-Baroque to highlight tendencies that tie Shvarts to the postmodern era. I will argue that the baroque, as a historic era and timeless concept, plays an essential role in both her construction of a poetic self and her positioning of this self within Leningrad underground society. Exploring how she builds this poetic self will also reveal the layers of her "Petersburg myth", the mystical setting for her poem cycle, and thus shed light on her important role in the history of Russian literature.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore le rôle du baroque dans la poésie d'Elena Shvarts des années 1970, et ses liens avec les différentes niveaux d'existence et de littérarité « souterraine » de la fin de l'Union soviétique. En examinant cette poétesse principalement par une analyse de son cycle de poèmes de 1974 « Pâques noires », ma thèse examinera ses relations avec l'histoire russe, la société souterraine et l'histoire de sa ville natale, Leningrad. Cette analyse consistera une lecture attentive du texte russe dans le cadre théorique du baroque, tel qu'il est conçu comme un concept intemporel dans *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroqu*e de Gilles Deleuze (1988). De plus, je m'engage avec la théorie de l'allégorie baroque proposée par Walter Benjamin, comme une partie intégrante du baroque intemporel de Deleuze, et aussi comme un phénomène présent dans le cycle de Shvarts. Enfin, j'arrive au concept de néo-baroque d'Omar Calabrese pour souligner les tendances qui rattachent Shvarts à l`époque postmoderne. Je soutiendrai que le baroque, en tant qu'époque historique et concept intemporel, joue un rôle essentiel à la fois dans la construction de son soi poétique et dans le positionnement de ce soi au sein de la société souterraine de Leningrad. Explorer la manière dont elle construit ce soi poétique révélera également les niveaux de son « mythe de Pétersbourg », le milieu mystique de son cycle de poèmes, et fera ainsi plus de clarté sur son rôle important dans l'histoire de la littérature russe.

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I, Jack McClelland, am the sole author and contributor to this M.A. Thesis.

Introduction

In 1990, the poet Elena Shvarts was interviewed by Valentina Polukhina as part of a book project by the late scholar on the perception of Joseph Brodsky by his peers in the literary community. Having won the Nobel prize in literature three years earlier, Brodsky was at the height of his global fame; a year later he would be named Poet Laureate of the United States. The conversation between Polukhina and Shvarts in *Brodsky Through the Eyes of His Contemporaries* is a prickly one, with Shvarts advocating for herself as a rising poet in the shadow of Brodsky's global celebrity status. Championing her own originality, Shvarts denies being influenced by poets of her own generation, highlighting the influence of figures from the Silver Age of Russian poetry and clarifying, "I came to know Brodsky's work only after I myself had fully matured as a poet" (Polukhina 254). This poetic maturity came early for Shvarts, and is displayed in full-force in her early poem-cycle «Черная Пасха», written in 1974, on the cusp of her 26th birthday. The six poem-chapters of the cycle offer sprawling, imaginative verses that ambitiously reconstruct her city's nearly three hundred years of mythical and literary history. Appearing in a form that Shvarts would return to throughout her career, the poem-cycle or *poema*, «Черная Пасха» offers a cacophony of literary and historical references, and establishes Shvarts as a unique poetic voice in the Leningrad underground.

In the years following the above conversation with Polukhina, Shvarts did experience her own rise to fame in post-Soviet Russia and abroad. As one leading scholar of the Leningrad underground, Josephine von Zitzewitz, argues, Shvarts experienced a graceful and unique transition from being a respected but minor poet of the 1970s, to "an agent in the literary process of the new Russia" ("From Underground to Mainstream" 226). While she continued compose

new poetry until her death in 2010, she remains most widely celebrated for her early poetry of the 1970s and 80s. «Черная Пасха», being the first major work from this era, offers clues to her poetic worldview, specifically with regards to her mythology of Leningrad/Saint Petersburg. Reading this poem cycle, which has been held up by her peers as her earliest major work, one wonders: how Shvarts remythologize her native city and what can it tell us about the state of underground literature in the climate of stagnation that defined the post-Thaw Soviet Union? Exploring the metaphysical planes of Leningrad's underground, «Черная Пасха» is, as von Zitzewitz calls it, "the key to Shvarts's Petersburg myth" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 125), and this thesis will expose the intertextual bonds she builds to link herself to her literary predecessors.

In the 1970s and 80s, poetry flourished in the Leningrad underground. Poets who, for a variety of reasons, could not be published through official channels, found community in the unofficial network of reading groups and within the pages of *samizdat* journals. While underground Soviet writing emerged as a practice in the later years of Stalin's rule, the final two decades of the Soviet Union saw samizdat in maturity, with journals such as *Часы*, *Северная Почта*, and *37* circulating new forms of poetry and prose alongside discourses on philosophy and spirituality. Viktor Krivulin, a prolific poet and editor of the latter two journals, once described the creative atmosphere of the era as having «вкус к вечному», a taste for the eternal («Петербургская спиритуальная лирика» 100). His poetry, as well as that of Shvarts, a prolific samizdat contributor herself, had a wide berth of influence ranging from rock music to Zen Buddhism, while also remaining deeply concerned with the city of Leningrad, its literary past, stagnating present, and unclear future. Shvarts, whose early «Черная Пасха» cycle first appeared in the first and sixth issues of Krivulin's journal *37*, takes these influences and transforms them

into an inventive and original "Petersburg text" (Toporov), nodding to her predecessors in Russia's literary mecca while also crafting an original myth of the city.

In the interview with Polukhina, Shvarts clarifies her intentions of originality, claiming, "My job is simply to avoid consciously repeating what someone else has already said" (253). She, like all poets, had her own literary influences, and while early responses to Shvarts highlight connections with the Silver Age and Russian modernism (Clint Walker), more recent scholarship has sought to identify greater universality in the space of Leningrad/Petersburg and the spirituality of this poetry. Josephine von Zitzewitz writes that Shvarts's poems from the era, specifically the cycles "Black Easter" («Черная Пасха») and "Portrait of the Blockade" («Портрет Блокады») "broaden the traditional association of the city with apocalypse and destruction to include a sense of desolation that is explicitly spiritual" ("From Underground to Mainstream" 237). While von Zitzewitz notes an "obsession with literary culture" (Ibid. 241) to ground the group in the kind of Russian postmodernism envisioned by Mikhail Epshtein, she also defines the Soviet underground poet as "the quintessential Russian poet, a Romantic outsider who is persecuted by the state for the 'truth' he or she has to tell" (Ibid. 240). Granting the underground poet this moral authority explains his or her justification in continuing to write while the Soviet state gatekept official literary culture. As Vladimir Alexeyev wrote in the samizdat *37*'s first edition, which was edited by Krivulin and featured «Черная Пасха», "in our honourable time they will more likely believe that you are a janitor, and the assertion that you are a poet can only spark laughter" (34).

While Shvarts, like Alexeyev and Krivulin, sacrificed "official" recognition for greater creative freedom, this freedom encouraged a search for spiritual meaning that blossomed in the journal *37*. For Shvarts, von Zitzewitz writes, "language is thus an instrument of worship rather

than itself the object of worship" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 112). But while spirituality was fundamental to their poetics, von Zitzewitz often glances over the more earthly implications of Shvarts's verse, those implications that bind her to the space of Leningrad/St. Petersburg. How did the city, and specifically the community of underground "romantic poets" influence her verse? Moreover, how does Shvarts deal with the perhaps overly-romanticized self-conception of underground poets as heroic creatives? While scholarship on Shvarts has tended to emphasize either her spiritual curiosity or her notoriously erratic lifestyle, few have taken adequate time to analyze her poetry for its unique portrait of life in late Soviet Leningrad. This thesis will do just that, turning specifically to her major poem cycle «Черная Пасха» and reading through its six chapters as poetic displays of a new, unique Petersburg text.

Shvarts's «Черная Пасха» adopts the Petersburg myth of her city as a dark, brooding northern capital, devoid of morality and life. In this sense the poem-cycle is similar to past Petersburg texts of both the 19th and 20th centuries. Where Shvarts finds originality, however, is in a reimagining of the city's deeply baroque foundation, and her crafting a verse which, as Catriona Kelly writes, "has an acrobatic vigour that is positively Baroque," continuing, "Figures fly through the air, plunge through water, and trample cities under their feet, rocketing backwards and forwards through time as well as space" (416). Scrutinizing the character of Shvarts's baroque, I will enlist the help of recent philosophy on the baroque in Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, as well as in the pioneering work by Italian semiotician Omar Calabrese in his cultural study *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times.* Alongside recent generic terminology from Slavic studies, I argue that Shvarts creates a (Neo-) Baroque poetry in «Черная Пасха», highlighting how this cycle participates in a wider movement of postmodernism alongside Deleuze's and Calabrese's studies.

Shvarts was championed by her peer Krivulin, who edited samizdat journals where her work first appeared. He printed «Черная Пасха» in both the first and sixth issues of the journal *37,* which he edited with his wife Tatiana Goricheva. The journal was maintained more-or-less as a press organ for their Religious-Philosophical Seminar hosted by Krivulin and Goricheva, named in part after their apartment number 37 where they hosted the Seminar reading group from 1974-80. In von Zitzewitz's extensive research on this seminar and its participants, she highlights Shvarts's absence from the group meetings, claiming that she was not an "active participant" in the seminar, but "maintained close personal friendships with numerous unofficial artists and writers, including Tat'iana Goricheva and Viktor Krivulin," (*Music for a Deaf Age* 111). As is recounted in a recent re-publication of her early samizdat works, Shvarts spent many of the seminar's most fruitful years between her native Leningrad and Moscow, where her then-husband Mikhail Sheinker lived (Shvarts 5). Nonetheless, «Черная Пасха» appeared as both a stand-alone cycle among other selected poems in an early section of the Leningrad journal's first issue, and again in the sixth issue (only six months later), as the penultimate work in her first comprehensive collection, included in full under the Latin name *Exercitus exorcitans*.

While Shvarts may have been spending time in Moscow during these years—enough time, that is, for her first samizdat collections to be printed there instead of in Leningrad—she remained steadfastly interested in the myth of her native Northern city. While the scholarly community has made strides in spotlighting her connections to the Russian Silver age, I will highlight the most original pieces of her Petersburg (or Leningrad) myth, those that are bound to both her contemporary surroundings and the more eternal traits of her native city. While Shvarts may be, as von Zitzewitz suggests, a quintessential Russian poet, her uniqueness lies in her era, and my thesis will demonstrate how «Черная Пасха» brings the Petersburg text and myth into

the postmodern era. This study not only uncovers an understudied side of Shvarts's work, but reveals her profound and thinly-veiled depiction of the creative self in late-Soviet society.

The six individual poem-chapters of «Черная Пасха» vary in length from ten to sixty lines, with each one having its own title to set the subject of focus. Beginning with «Канун», Shvarts imagines the eve of her "Black Easter", juxtaposing optimistic dreams of celebration with dark descriptions of a thawing Leningrad cityscape. This geography is refined in the second poem-chapter, «Где мы?», where Shvarts describes the horrors of her city's internal and external spaces, contrasting a scene of domestic violence with an unflattering portrait of Peter the Great's imperial project. From here, Shvarts jumps to the allegorical in her third poem-chapter «Разговор с жизнью во время тяжелого похмелья», which imagines a conversation between the poem-cycle's narrator and "life", during a bout of severe hangover. The final three poem-chapters, «Искушение», «Наутро», and «Обычная Ошибка», build on the allegorical and geographic planes of the first three to more clearly examine the role of the underground "romantic" poet in the city of Leningrad/St. Petersburg. While she never once calls the city "Leningrad", Shvarts makes it clear that the events in her poem-cycle takes place in her hometown, blending portraits of the urban landscape with references to her native city's deep literary history.

Working through the individual chapter-poems of the «Черная Пасха» cycle in order, I will articulate and illuminate the baroque and neo-baroque characteristics of Shvarts's verse, putting her poetry in conversation with the theoretical lenses mentioned above, in addition to scholarly perspectives from Slavic studies, anthropology, and sociology. I will additionally enlist the theory of Walter Benjamin in his discussion on the baroque nature of allegory, drawing a parallel between his study of German *Trauerspiel* and Shvarts's own (Neo-) baroque ambitions

in «Черная Пасха». Through this study of Shvarts's Petersburg/Leningrad myth, I will demonstrate how, for creatives like Shvarts, Petersburg remained Russia's proverbial window to Europe, even under the cloak of late Soviet stagnation. While important poetic developments were also occurring during these years in an adjacent Moscow underground, poets in Leningrad could naturally foster a deeper link to their country's literary history. Shvarts demonstrates this most willingly, in both her layered references to the writers and poets of the past, and in her reimagining of the derelict city through the prism of its timeless baroque. Her integration of baroque and neo-baroque fosters a unique intertextuality, Shvarts merging history, literature, and myth in the cycle's six individual chapter-poems. Analyzing her new mythology of Leningrad/Petersburg and the poet who inhabits this literary mecca, I will demonstrate why Shvarts's oeuvre and the «Черная Пасха» cycle merit more attention in our study of recent Russian literature.

Chapter One: On the Eve of Collapse

Originally written in 1974, Elena Shvarts's poem cycle "Black Easter", or «Черная Пасха», first appeared in print in the first and sixth editions of the *37* in 1976. This poem-cycle offers an occult rendering of the Easter holiday, one that explores the "glint and glitter" of her surrounding Leningrad, mythologizing the city in the six separate poem-chapters of verse. In the opening poem-chapter «Канун», Shvarts takes her reader on a disorienting ride through a city populated by golden-toothed whales, candles that weep like humans, and a foreboding demiurge. In addition to this eclectic collection of characters, physical eyes—greying, pitied, dimmed, and resolute—appear throughout this opening chapter to create a Leningrad characterised by a cacophony of visual perspectives, the city incorporating these points of view into its own unique mythos, also known as the "Petersburg myth" in the tradition of Russian literature. This complete incorporation includes the narrator herself when, at the chapter's end, she is "swallowed" quietly by a tram: «Трамвай ко мне, багровая, подлетел / и, как просвирку, тихо съел.» (Shvarts 74). In this final couplet, Shvarts sacrifices herself to the constant movement and evolution of Petersburg, embodied in the crimson tram, forsaking her agency and personal perspective to the mythological Petersburg. In this bodily sacrifice, Shvarts's narrator however does not perish, but becomes protected by a city that is constantly moving, forming with the other visual perspectives a collective vision, or visual polyphony all looking forward in anticipation.

Shvarts's opening chapter centers collective anticipation as an antidote for her city's despair, both literally, through this visual polyphony, and metaphorically, through the act of anticipation indicated in the chapter's title "The Eve". Her incorporation of visuality and eclectic referencing also ushers in a new era of the "Petersburg myth", one that challenges Leningrad's

complicated relationship to its past by emphasizing the act of looking ahead. Scholars before me have studied «Черная Пасха» as a necessarily Petersburgian text, with von Zitzewitz being the most recent and thorough scholar to examine how Shvarts renders her native city. Von Zitzewitz correctly demonstrates this poem-cycle's creation of a spiritual quest for Shvarts's narrator, highlighting the role of the city's literary history in constructing the cycle's setting. She argues that Shvarts forges "an association between the literary notion of Peter the Great's city as a playground for demonic forces and the 'unsavoury' wastelands that are her preferred settings, and then exploits this combination for her spiritual quest" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 123). It is true that Shvarts constructs her Petersburg through the prism of the city's literary history, most notably through works that centre the city's founder Peter the Great, the most relevant of these being Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*. However, Shvarts does more than simply exploit her city's history to create fodder for her own spiritual quest. Rather, she journeys through these past eras to emphasize the timelessness of the spiritual quest and the eternal act of looking.

In this opening poem-chapter of «Черная Пасха» Shvarts turns to the past for more than demonic forces and unsavory wastelands, instead tracing an outline of the eternal phenomena that haunt her contemporary Leningrad. She plays with perspective and sight to indicate both the blindness of late-Soviet society around her, and the possibility of redemption in the act of collective looking and anticipation, signified in the anticipatory title «Канун». Von Zitzewitz suggests that the poem "presents the 'spiritual Petersburg' as a world in which the transformative impulse that is inherent in Christian teaching and nature's cycles is negated" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 127). I will argue, however, against this binary reading, highlighting how Shvarts incorporates not just religious themes and symbols, but also her city's foundational baroque aesthetic in setting the scene for her "Black Easter". Beyond the notion of a historical baroque,

Shvarts's proximity to the era of postmodernism also connects her to the unique concept of the "Neo-baroque" which, combining with aspects of the traditional baroque, blend to form a unique mythology of her city, the "Petersburg myth". Exploring these questions alongside contextual insights from her contemporaries in the Leningrad underground, this opening chapter will lay the groundwork for a more thorough analysis of «Черная Пасха» as a major development in 20th century Russian poetry.

The narrator's quest is not only spiritual, but also metaphysical, and the nightmarish Leningrad she traverses in «Канун» is more than meets the eye. The first glimpses of Shvarts's unique "Petersburg myth" come in this opening poem-chapter, the verses of «Канун» being dominated by three important characteristics: the connection Shvarts builds between her native city of Leningrad and the historic Petersburg, the myth of Peter the Great, founder of Petersburg, and the relationship between Shvarts's poet-narrator and the city's founder. After an initial close reading driven by the above three motivating problems, I will offer some more background on Shvarts's relation to both the baroque and Neo-Baroque, and offer the term "(Neo-) baroque" as a helpful way to describe her style of poetry. My reading of «Черная Пасха» throughout the thesis will utilize the version recently published by Common Place press in 2018, which reflects a blending of the two versions from the first and sixth issues of the journal *37*. I will also occasionally consult translations by Michael Molnar in *'Paradise': Selected Poems*, by Elena Shvarts, published by Bloodaxe in 1993, clarifying those with my own translations at times.

Elena Shvarts: Baroque or Neo-baroque?

Shvarts's poetry is full of contrasts, and she begins «Канун» with one of these typically baroque juxtapositions set above and below her dark Petersburg/Leningrad cityscape:

Скопленье луж как стадо мух.
Над их мерцанием и блеском,
над расширяющимся плеском
орет вороний хор. (Shvarts 74)

The ravens' choir hovers above the city's puddles, above their glint and glitter, Shvarts marking her setting with this contrasted perspective of the earth-bound puddle and the high-flying crows. The cluster of puddles is likened to a swarm of flies, a perhaps unbecoming comparison, but is then marked by its shining effect in the second line. The repetition of the preposition «над» also emphasizes the movement of imagery from low to high, from the ground to the perspective above. The playful meddling of high and low reaches its climax in the last line, with the squawking crow being designated a choir, this line unique through the pairing of the verb, to bawl or holler, and noun, a choir, as well as through its uncommon adjectival form of crow. Taken together, these opening lines create numerous baroque contrasts of low and high, Shvarts assaulting her reader with these unexpected and strange pairings.

The poem-chapter continues this cycle of odd pairs and contrasts with a larger set of juxtaposing sections of verse. The first describes a primordial, almost folkloric depiction of easter with a gruel-filled cauldron: «котел нечищеный, безбрежный, / где нежный праздник варят для народа – / спасительный и розовый кулеш.» (Shvarts 74) This is then contrasted with a high-style description of meek kisses and celebration:

Завтра крашеные яйца,
солнца легкого уют.
Будем легко целоваться,
радоваться, что мы тут. (Shvarts 74)

In both the opening four lines and these second contrasting sets of verse, the perspective moves from low to high, taking a noticeable turn towards the heavenly, be it from a choir of crows or the shining sun of tomorrow.

From here though, the perspective plummets downward, nearly reaching the subterranean when Shvarts's narrator attempts to enter a church, which she curiously describes as the "golden-toothed mouth of a millionaire-whale".

А нынче, нынче все не то,
И в церкву не пройти,
На миг едва-едва вошла
В золотозубый рот кита-миллионера –
Она все та же древняя пещера,
Что, свет сокрыв, от тьмы спасла,
Но и сама стеною стала,
И чрез нее, как чрез забор,
Прохожий Бог кидает взор. (Shvarts 74)

While it seems the protagonist goes inside the church/whale for a brief moment «на миг едва-едва вошла», she ends up building a cavern of light in this dark space. We find in this cavern-church a glow that is faint, but self-sustaining. The wall—a surface that light is often projected onto—becomes the source in itself. This last image evokes the bright ikonostasis of Orthodox churches, where even a candle-lit chandelier and modest window will create the allusion of grand internal lighting. The empty cavern is re-awakened, and the self-sustaining light even causes a passing God to offer their glance. Continuing the contrast of high and low, Shvarts creates a cavernous religious sanctuary briefly visible to a distant God, God being both distant from Earth naturally, and especially distant from the Russian Orthodox church during the official atheism of the Soviet period.

The whale in this stanza, while likely a reference to the biblical story of Jonah and the whale, importantly embodies many of the traits of baroque architecture, an important component of the urban landscape in Petersburg and Leningrad. In one of the most thorough recent explorations of the baroque, Gilles's Deleuze's critical text *The Fold*, the semiotician offers a relatively succinct definition of baroque architecture, which features a characteristic separation

of interior from exterior space. Under the subheading "What is baroque?" he writes, "baroque architecture can be defined by this severing of the façade from the inside, of the interior from the exterior, and the autonomy of the interior from the independence of the exterior" (28). Much architecture has separate and distinct interior and exterior characteristics, but the baroque puts a unique emphasis on the boundary between these two spaces through the surface of the wall, which itself can be ornamented on either side. Shvarts recreates this when she imagines the light of the cavernous inside forming a wall to separate itself from the dark exterior: the wall is the central force which gives light to the cavern, distinguishing it from the dark exterior of her "Black Easter". The metaphor extends to the purpose of Shvarts's interior as a place of worship, a space which had to remain in secret and autonomy from the exterior Soviet world. The light of the inside forms its own wall to reinforce this separation, creating a barrier so strong that even God can only fleetingly cast a glance inside, as if through a fence «как чрез забор».

Shvarts was not the only poet from this era to engage with baroque aesthetics, as scholars have noticed the trend among others of her generation, including David Macfadyen in his monograph *Joseph Brodsky and the Baroque*. In his "Justification for the term 'baroque'", Macfadyen shines a light on Brodsky's inherent internationalism—albeit in Brodsky's case a very European one—and an "opposition to all things classical" (15). However, as von Zitzewitz has importantly pointed out, "unlike Brodsky or [Viktor] Krivulin, Shvarts is not content merely evoking these territories or identifying them as her home" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 123). Instead, she argues, Shvarts fills her Leningrad with a horror more akin to that of Andrey Bely's symbolist novel *Petersburg*, a horror that also anticipates a fascination with the uncanny characteristic of the later *Chernukha* genre. While Shvarts is fascinated with the dark, she does take opportunities to return to the light, evidenced in the high-low contrasts noted above. Rather

than distinguish her from *Chernukha*, it actually places her as a pioneer and unique voice in the early verse iteration of this consequential generic turn.

It is for this turn to the dark, one of her unique distinctions from Brodsky and Krivulin, that I introduce the prefix (neo-), kept hastily in parentheses, when describing Shvarts's baroque Leningrad/Petersburg myth. Italian semiotician Omar Calabrese emerged in the early 1990s coining this concept, born out of a disappointment in what he saw as the lost meaning behind the term "postmodern". Neo-baroque, he describes, is indebted to an idea of the baroque that is, "not only, or not exactly… a specific period in the history of culture, but as a general attitude and formal quality of those objects in which the attitude is expressed" (15). He continues, "in this sense, the baroque might be found in any epoch of our civilization," aligning with Deleuze in suggesting the term evokes its own sense of timelessness (15). The prefix neo- works less to suggest a clean repetition of a historical epoch, and more so to highlight the contemporaneity of the examples he brings forward in his book from the end of the 20th century. It is for this reason that I introduce it in my reading of Shvarts, and as I will demonstrate further, many components of Calabrese's concept bring new light to our reading of her work, as well as that of her peers in the Soviet Underground of the 1970s.

Another justification for attaching the prefix (neo-), is the fact that the architecture and culture of the baroque in Saint Petersburg was an imperfect one, transplanted from Western Europe and fused with native Russian elements. It is far from a replica of the baroque studied by Deleuze in *The Fold*—Rastrelli and other masters of the baroque did design many buildings of Russia's northern capital—but, as scholars and historians have noted, most of its principal cityscape is a mixture of baroque, neoclassical, and Russian orthodox architectural elements. Shvarts capitalizes on this imperfect blend, highlighting the structure of the baroque church

through the image of the whale's cavernous light-chamber to aid in the revitalization of this struggling architecture. In his study of the architectural history of the city, William Craft Brumfield identifies one of the most iconic of these architectural blends to be the Smolny cathedral complex: "the ensemble" he writes, "represents an ingenious fusion of Russian Orthodox and baroque elements" (8) also acknowledging the Winter Palace, the city's architectural centrepiece as, "not only one of the last major baroque buildings in Europe, but also—in light of subsequent events—one of the central monuments to the history of the modern world" (7). These foundational pieces of the Petersburg cityscape also highlight its connections to European art and culture, and Shvarts's decision to focus on the baroque certainly evokes the city's connection with old Europe, and potentially inspires a yearning for closer connection to her contemporary Western world.

As Brumfield notes, Petersburg was also importantly a consequential site for the direction of European history at the beginning of the 20th century. Referring here to the storming of the Winter Palace in the Bolshevik revolution, Brumfield brings to light another important component of Petersburg architecture: its survival of the transition from imperial to socialist Russia. During the early years of the Soviet Union, these monumental buildings remained precious to the new political elite, with the Smolny complex even going on to serve as the headquarters for Lenin's Bolshevik party. In the early chapters of *The House of Government*, Yuri Slezkine's expansive study on a housing site for the early Soviet government in Moscow, the acclaimed historian recalls the progression of the revolutionary spirit from one Peterburg baroque monument to the next through the metaphor of a flood: "This time the flood swept into Smolny, surged up to the third floor, whirled around the entrance to the Military-Revolutionary Committee office, and then flowed, in orderly streams, toward the Winter Palace, where old men

with empty eyes sat waiting" (137). While the unsuspecting imperial guards were the last to experience the flood of communist revolution, their fall was symbolic of the loss of one more baroque monument to a new era of politics and society.

While the spirit of revolution briefly provided a renewed purpose to Petersburg's lavish architectural monuments, this did not last long into the Soviet era. Events later in the century, including the moving of the capital to Moscow, and Leningrad's bombardment during the 900-day Siege in WW2, would lead to these buildings' falling into disrepair. Moreover, in its transition to becoming the Soviet city of Leningrad, much of Petersburg's baroque and neoclassical facades were covered with giant party-posters or left to crumble, a fact which Shvarts, as a citizen of late-Soviet Leningrad, was well-aware of. Thus, her gold-toothed whale symbolizes a decaying, once-opulent architecture, where the only remaining decadence can be found in the evidence of luxurious dental prosthesis. All that is left of Shvarts's whale is the façade, with its carved out interior ready to be repurposed for a new era. Even if Smolny is not the exact church Shvarts imagines in this episode, which is likely the case given her use of the Russian *церковь* (church) as opposed to *собор* (cathedral), many of the city's Orthodox churches feature this blending of baroque with neo-classical and Orthodox elements. The church in «Черная Пасха» reveals the bare bones of the city's baroque architecture, where light can sustain itself due to the foundational separation of interior from exterior. The church inspires autonomy, which allows Shvarts to create an inspired, not depressed, Petersburg text in the derelict Leningrad of the Soviet 70s.

While some scholars before me have pointed to Shvarts's more baroque aspects, none have ventured so far as to explore connections between the generic style of her poetry and the surrounding cityscape of her urban settings. Leading Slavicist Katerina Clark has argued that,

"Shvarts's better writing has an acrobatic vigour that is positively Baroque" (416), and Stephanie Sandler and Maija Könönen have also pointed out how Shvarts incorporates the grandiosity of the post-Rennaissance era into her verse. Alternatively, Mark Lipovetsky has borrowed Calabrese's term "Neo-Baroque" when describing late-Soviet samizdat prose, including works by Sasha Sokolov, Andrei Bitov, and Tatiana Tolstaya (38-39). Without acknowledging Shvarts, or any significant poets from the Leningrad underground, Lipovetsky identifies leading characteristics of Calabrese's neo-baroque, to argue that this is one of two definitive frame sfor understanding Russian postmodern poetry and prose. While the writers Lipovetsky cites lend well to the categories of analysis in Calebrese's book, Shvarts also keeps closer ties to the pure baroque of her surrounding city. For this reason, we can describe «Черная Пасха» as a work of (Neo-) Baroque, a poem-cycle which contains elements of classic and the new baroque aesthetics.

Some of the more relevant ideas from Calbrese's neo-baroque are listed in Lipovetsky's article "Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s", including repetition, excess, an emphasis on irregular fragments, labyrinth-like narratives, and the dominance of "formless forms" (39-40). As this thesis progresses, I will use both Calabrese's theory and Lipovetsky's arguments to display how these characteristics appear throughout «Черная Пасха», beginning with a brief re-examining of the most recent block of quoted verse. In these lines, beginning with « А нынче, нынче все не то…», we see all the characteristics noted in Lipovetsky's essay, except perhaps repetition, which we will arrive at in due time. Excess appears with the golden-toothed mouth of the millionaire whale, a seemingly redundant detailing of opulence that may also double as a nod to Mayakovsky's «Стиннес», a poem addressed to the German capitalist Hugo Stinnes, where he is decorated with the same «золотозубый рот». Irregular fragments can be found in the

poem's unconventional meter, where a rhyme pattern can be found, but one that evades set syllabic counts. The labyrinth-like narrative emerges when the protagonist's surroundings seem to shape-shift before the reader's eyes, with an empty church turning into a whale's mouth, then turning into a primordial cavern whose walls become a source of sustained light. This process of transformation also evokes the idea of "formless forms" where structures and settings exist dynamically, remaining in a constant state of flux throughout the poem-cycle. These formless forms continue to take shape and subsequently complicate themselves throughout the cycle, one of the most recurrent being the person responsible for the setting «Черная Пасха» loosely occupies: the founder of her city on the Neva, Peter the Great.

The Emperor's new Myth

Shvarts attempts to re-mythologize Petersburg throughout the poem-cycle, and the city's novel, (Neo-) Baroque appearance begins near the end of «Канун». After God has offered his fleeting glance into the whale-mouth cavernous church («И чрез нее, как чрез забор, / Прохожий Бог кидает взор.») Shvarts's first chapter takes a strange, dark turn before meeting the hand of a mysterious demiurge:

> Войдешь – и ты в родимом чреве:
> Еще ты не рожден, но ты уже согрет
> И киноварью света разодет.
> Свечи плачутся, как люди,
> Священника глава на блюде
> Толпы – отрубленной казалась,
> В глазах стояла сырость, жалость.
> Священник, щука золотая,
> Багровым промелькнул плечом,
> И сердца комната пустая
> Зажглась оранжевым лучом.
> И, провидя длань демиурга
> Со светящимся мощно кольцом,
> В жемчужную грязь Петербурга

И кротко ударю лицом. (Shvarts 74-75)

While these lines continue many of the neo-baroque characteristics I have just highlighted, they also help Shvarts arrive at a concrete setting: the city of "Petersburg". She arrives in her native city by way of the "low", first through descending back into the motherly native womb, and then reappearing to kiss the "pearly much" of Petersburg. At the end of these lines—not quite the end of the chapter, but a dramatic image to pause on—the protagonist embraces the city's earth, after being coaxed by the demiurge's hand. Shvarts incorporates the language of ancient Rus with the use of old church Slavonic «длань» alongside the gnostic «демиург», creating an image of an enticing false-God. Given the naming of her city as "Petersburg" in the next line, it seems clear that this demiurge is in fact the first appearance of Peter the Great, framed as both creator and false-God of Shvarts's mythological Petersburg.

Peter has, however, long been framed as a dark, evil spirit haunting his constructed city, and Shvarts herself nods to poets and writers who confronted Peter before her. This "Petersburg myth" was first consolidated in Pushkin's poem "The Bronze Horseman" and complicated by later poets and writers, perhaps most notably Andrey Bely in his symbolist novel *Petersburg*. Kevin M. F. Platt has demonstrated how Bely's myth of the city is based on the anticipation of an impending cataclysmic collapse, the ultimate destiny of Peter's planned city. Noting how Bely's novel is rooted in Pushkin's poem, which has its own apocalyptic nightmare culminating in a destructive flood, Platt finds the myth of Peter to be at the heart of the city's representation. Platt writes that Peter, "embod[ies] both the crushing weight of the autocracy and the revolutionary rejection of the past," continuing that the founder-tsar, "serves as an all-encompassing but overdetermined sign of the present" (138). Peter is more than just a harbinger of flood and destruction, but rather an embodiment of the revolutionary challenge at the heart of

Petersburg's preservation. While the city was founded in a revolutionary reimagining of the Russian empire, later reshaped in a revolutionary transition of politics and society, the Petersburg writer faces the distinct task of looking backwards in reflection, while inhabiting a city which demands forward attention and motion. Peter, as founder of the city, is memorialized as the creator of this ever-forward-facing city, and thus the hero and villain of its future authors.

While the myth of Peter has been consolidated through Petersburg's literary past, Shvarts had her own personal myth around the tyrannical ruler. In an early chapter of Shvarts's autobiography, *Видимая Сторона Жизни,* she recalls an episode from childhood when her mother—a prominent theatre director—gave her a frightening impression of tsar Peter the Great. The image left a lasting impression on the young Shvarts, and is recounted under the subheading "The Horror of Transfiguration":

> One day my mother started telling me about Peter the Great. She got very carried away, began to portray him, with fierce wide eyes, waving her hands. She jumped up, showing how tall he was. Sitting in the corner of the sofa, I listened with great interest to how he built a city and ships. The story was already coming to an end when she said that he had killed his son, Tsarevich Alexei. I was surprised: "How?" "Like this!" She said, and stretched out her hands to me ominously. "Strangled." She pulled and pulled relentlessly with her hands to my throat, and suddenly it was as if she had turned from my sweet pretty mother into a merciless monster. At that moment, the thought flashed through my head that everything before was a deception, and suddenly the truth was revealed, and now a terrible end will come, that everything good in the world is only pretending to be like this, only pretending. I screamed terribly, in a horror in which I had not seen before and would not see after. Laughing, she calmed me down, but for a long time I could not come to my senses, and I could not forget the horror of instant transformation, and I always suspected that the true face of the world was cruel, smiling and regal.[1]

[1] «Ужас преображения: Однажды мама стала рассказывать мне о Петре Великом. Она очень увлеклась, стала изображать его, круглить свирепо глаза, махать руками. Вскакивала, показывая, какой он был высоченный. Я, сидя в уголке дивана, с огромным интересом слушала про то, как он строил город и корабли. Рассказ уже подходил к концу, когда она сказала, что он убил своего сына — царевича Алексея. Я удивилась: "Как убил?" — "А вот так!" — сказала она и протянула ко мне зловеще руки: "Задушил". Она тянула и тянула неумолимо руки к моему горлу, и вдруг как будто бы превратилась из моей милой хорошенькой мамы в беспощадное чудовище. В это мгновение в голове моей пронеслась мысль, что все прежнее был обман, а вот теперь началось настоящее, и сейчас наступит ужасный конец, что все хорошее в мире только прикидывается таким, только притворяется. Я страшно завопила, в ужасе, в каком не была ни до этого, ни после. Она, смеясь, успокаивала меня, но я долго не могла прийти в себя, и не смогла забыть

Evidently, the myth of Peter as a false-prophet, or at least as a deceptive, amoral ruler was enshrined on Shvarts from a young age, though her mother's telling of the story involved some dramatic license. Peter, often valorized in Russian history, is shown in his true colours: "a merciless monster", harbinger for "a terrible end". This pivotal moment, where the truth is revealed to Shvarts, "that everything good in the world is only pretending to be like this, only pretending" helps us understand her construction of Peter as both a creator and a false-God. If this tyrant would go so far as to strangle his own son, it is no surprise that Shvarts reaches a pessimistic conclusion, "that the true face of the world [is] cruel, smiling and regal". Labeling him a "demiurge" in this first chapter of the poem, Shvarts also connects Peter to the creation of the material world, acknowledging his role in constructing her native city as the mysterious "demiurge". While his hand, the «длань демиурга», has the power to alter the physical realm, it does nothing for the spiritual which Shvarts is so inclined towards. His powerful ring in the poem, «со светящимся мощно кольцом», emphasizes his commanding power as royalty, and also his abuse of that power in the infanticidal killing of his son. Locating this demiurge in the pearly muck of Petersburg, «В жемчужную грязь Петербурга», Shvarts makes a clear nod to Peter, holding him responsible for the corrupt cityscape of her setting and highlighting its void of spiritual value.

By rendering Peter as this demiurge, extending his hand out of the city's pearly muck, Shvarts holds him responsible for creating a spiritually bankrupt city. Shvarts was not the first to frame Peter as this kind of false prophet, wielding power over the physical world with no acknowledgement of the spiritual realm. As von Zitzewitz and others have noted, Shvarts's main

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ужас мгновенной трансформации, и всегда подозревала, что подлинное лицо мира — жестокое, улыбающееся и царственное.» in Елена Шварц, *Видимая Сторона Жизни,* p. 2.

influence for the dark, foreboding description of the city can be found in Andrei Bely's symbolist novel *Petersburg*, itself a quasi-Nietzschean reinterpretation of Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*. In her major study on Shvarts, Krivulin, and their other peers in the Leningrad underground, von Zitzewitz argues that the poets of the 1970s attempted to recreate the symbolist movement anew, a claim that is supported by Krivulin's succinct statement that, "We were not 'postmodernists', but 'postsymbolists'".[2] Von Zitzewitz demonstrates this by noting parallels between the emergence of symbolism and the flourishing of the literary underground in 1970s Leningrad. She writes that "both phenomena constituted a resurgence of aestheticism and idealism at a time when the dominant literary current was staunchly realist," drawing a parallel between the Golden Age of 19th century Russian literature with the Soviet literary movements of socialist realism and village prose (Von Zitzewitz *Music for a Deaf Age* 32). This parallel is incredibly useful in understanding Krivulin's rejection of the "postmodern" label, turning instead to one that is more rooted in a specifically Petersburgian literary history.

Before the appearance of Peter as demiurge though, Shvarts's «Канун» already begins its descent into Peter's city. Following the exploration of the whale-mouth church, the protagonist returns to her native womb, suggesting that the "native womb" acts as a metaphor for the empty church in a whale-mouth described earlier. The temple becomes a warm, welcoming, and familiar space filled with a ruby-red cinnabar light, with candles burning and weeping, like people. Next appears a priest with what seems to be a severed head, but in actuality Shvarts simply projects the perspective from standing at the back of a church room, looking over crowds of people to the Priest delivering a sermon, only slightly above the collective's height. The priest,

[2] «Мы были не «постмодернисты», а «постсимволисты»…» Viktor Krivulin in «Петербургская спиритуальная лирика вчера и сегодня (К истории неофициальной поэзии Ленинграда 60 – 80-х годов)» in *История Ленинградской Неподцензурной Литературы: 1950 – 1980-е годы*. edited by Б. Иванов. 100.

with a pointed hat—making him look like the head of a golden pike—has tears in his eyes as well, revealing himself to be an inseparable part of this internal hearth, flashing a crimson (багровый) shoulder, the same colour as the cinnabar light. At this revelation, an orange light bursts into the empty room of the heart, just before the sensing of the Demiurge's hand, and bowing into the Petersburg muck.

The colours of these lines are the most vivid that have appeared so far, contrasting with the black and grey of the opening Petersburg description. The dark-red crimson will continue to appear throughout the poem-cycle, but it is interesting to note here that it emerges out of the human body, the native womb, and erupts into an orange light in the heart. In a recent article, Maija Könönen offers a close reading of Shvarts's poetic use of light and dark, which, she argues, "possesses the possibility to both liberate (light) and destroy (darkness)," going on to argue that fire serves as Shvarts's central symbol of transformation (421). The eruptive orange light appears like a flame in the empty room of one's heart, and from here, sensing the Demiurge's hand, Shvarts's protagonist bows down to embrace the earth. On the surface this suggests a rejection of the heavenly, redemptive light of God's blinding beam, and instead a turn towards the earthly, or more precisely bodily, crimson of the womb. Peter's appearance—as demiurge—immediately following the orange light consolidates this moment as the central transformation for Shvarts's narrator in this opening chapter. Instead of following the tearful, pitying priest, she bows her head to Petersburg's pearly muck. If not devoting allegiance to the city's false-prophet, she at least acknowledges his assumed authority.

The following lines where Shvarts's protagonist bows to the earth: «В жемчужную грязь Петербурга / И кротко ударю лицом» also suggest a connection to Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment,* when at the plot's climax Dostoevsky's hero bows to the

Petersburg earth to seek repentance for his sins. This novel serves as an undoubtable intertext in later chapters of Shvarts's poem-cycle, and makes an interesting initial appearance at the crux of this first chapter. Shvarts noticeably inverts Dostoevsky's plot by planting this transformative moment from the novel's close at her poem-cycle's beginning. This may simply be a nod to an important literary predecessor, but more likely it is used to emphasize the fall-from-grace of her narrator at the end of this chapter. While Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov embraces the earth to seek Christian repentance for his crimes, Shvarts's narrator does so in a turn away from the church to an earthlier salvation. The «жемчужная грязь» of Petersburg is soaked with the blood of those sacrificed in the city's construction, turning the cityscape crimson («багровый»). Shvarts makes this "crimson tide" apparent both in the city's populous, with the priest who "flashes a crimson shoulder" («багровым промелькнул плечом»), and in its infrastructure, with the chapter's closing image of a tram, "turning crimson" («багровея») swooping in to swallow the narrator. Her inversion of Dostoevsky's plot complicates the traditional narrative of Christian salvation, instead suggesting that Shvarts seeks an earthlier and more corporeal redemption in her "Black Easter".

The Grey Gaze of «Канун»

Aside from the colour of crimson, the landscape of «Канун» appears more or less in greyscale. Before the appearance of the crimson tram, Shvarts offers seven interesting lines that add to the fauna of her dark Petersburg myth:

> Лапки голубю омыть,
> Еще кому бы ноги вымыть?
> Селедки выплюнутая глава
> Пронзительно взглянула
> Хоть глаз ее давно потух,
> Но тротуар его присвоил

И зренье им свое удвоил, (Шварц 75)

Here appears the pigeon «голубь» or dove, whose claws the protagonist attempts to clean, before observing a spat-out herring whose dimmed eyes are being absorbed into the pavement. The dove is not the only winged creature to appear in this opening chapter, but offer a curious contrast to the "choir" of ravens Shvarts begins the poem with:

Скрепленье луж, как стадо мух,
Над их мерцанием и блеском,
Над расширяющимся плеском
Орет вороний хор. (Шварц 74)

The imagery of birds suggests a parallel to the biblical story of Noah, when after the flood he first sent out ravens, and after they proved uncooperative, sent a dove to see if the flood had subsided sufficiently. These birds' appearances mark this poem as occurring after the flood, both biblically and in reference to the flood of Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman". I will explore the role of Pushkin's flood with more depth as the poem progresses, but in this opening chapter it is important to note the power given to the sight and perspective of these winged animals. As opposed to the spat-out herring whose eyes have long gone dim, the city's birds remain vigilant, visible, and perceptive.

After the appearance of the choir of ravens, Shvarts descends into a dark, primordial image of Petersburg in April:

И черный кровоток старух
По вене каменной течет вдоль глав и притвор.
Апрель, удавленник, черно лицо твое.
Глаза серей носков несвежих,
Твоя полупрозрачна плешь,
Котел – нечищенный, безбрежный
Где нежный праздник варят для народа –
Спасительный и розовый кулеш. (Шварц 74)

Immediately following these lines is the light, indented musings of the Easter celebration, the only sign of brightness throughout the poem, before Shvarts descends back into the baroque church entrance discussed earlier. In the above set, Shvarts likens a winding line of women in mourning to blood flowing through the stone veins of a street. The women are being observed by "heads and the antechamber" («вдоль глав и притвор») a line she would change to "eyes in the antechamber" («вдоль глаз в притвор») perhaps in an attempt to clarify the role of visual perception of what is undoubtedly meant to be the painted heads of icons lining the walls of a church antechamber. In contrast to the eternal eyes of the antechamber, the overhanging eyes of April's sky have gone dim, grey as dirty socks. While the eyes from above have grown dim and dirty, those of the sea (the beheaded herring) have done the same, and been incorporated into the city's pavement («тротуар»), doubling its view «зренье им свое удвоил».

Sight is being observed and manipulated throughout this opening chapter, beginning with the multi-faceted view of the old women approaching the antechamber, and moving towards the beheaded herring being incorporated into the city's sight. In the middle of this chapter are seven lines of indented verse, which in their brightness, represent the only instance of metaphorically 'looking ahead' in the sense of the chapter's title of an anticipatory "Eve". In these lines Shvarts writes,

> Завтра крашеные яйца,
> Солнца легкого уют,
> Будем кротко целоваться,
> Радоваться, что мы тут.
> Он воскрес – и с ним мы все –
> Красной белкой закружились в колесе
> И пылинкой в слепящей полосе. (Шварц 74)

These optimistic musings are quickly replaced by a darker reality: the gold-toothed whale-mouth church, cinnabar womb, and the pearly mud of Petersburg appear shortly thereafter. However,

even within these seven lines an optimistic foresight is chipped away at until the protagonist is left feeling like a red squirrel spinning in a circle, a speck of dust floating helplessly in a blinding beam. In these lines even the metaphorical act of looking ahead is proven to be not so easy a task as one might figure. When confronted with the cyclical, routine nature of the Easter holiday—the red squirrel spinning in a circle—the protagonist is thrown into a contemplative paralysis—the speck of dust in a blinding beam.

In this chapter of supposed anticipation, Shvarts's protagonist progressively loses her ability to see, and the power of visual perception is absorbed by the oppressive city of Leningrad/Petersburg. The poem's protagonist finds brief comfort in the internal spaces of church and womb, but these too become desperate spaces for survival. The essential separation between internal and external central to the city's baroque architecture is accentuated and complicated, making this chapter necessarily (Neo-) baroque. By emphasizing visual perception as well as appearance and façade, «Канун» brings together symbols and imagery from Petersburg and beyond to create what her peer Krivulin would have likely championed as a clear example of "post-symbolism". Entering her "Black Easter" by night, Shvarts's protagonist is absorbed by the womb-cathedral of her city, adapting the Petersburg myth while also nodding to its precedent in other notable Petersburg texts. At the end of the chapter, in her being swallowed by the crimson tram, Shvarts reminds the reader that this is only the beginning of her adventurous escapade, with the next chapter promising to offer in more specific terms the geographic question at the heart of her Petersburg myth: where are we? («Где мы?»)

Chapter 2: Mapping Shvarts's Metarealist "Paradise"

If the first chapter of «Черная Пасха» hints at Shvarts's Leningrad/Petersburg as a (Neo-) Baroque city, her second chapter tries to answer the question of geography more precisely. This second chapter, «Где мы?», composed of two sections of thirty-one lines, guides a reader through two levels of Shvarts's Petersburg. The first is intimate and domestic, describing a berating husband and dysfunctional home life, and the second outward and expansive, exploring the geography of Petersburg through both "a web of literary references" as von Zitzewitz describes, as well as a refined, damning portrait of Peter the Great. While in the first section Shvarts's protagonist is berated, beaten, and bruised by a drunk husband in the confines of an intimate domestic space, in the second section she seemingly escapes this claustrophobic interior to paint a grand historical portrait of the Leningrad/Petersburg cityscape, expanding her description towards a diagnosis of Russia as a whole. While the literary references that von Zitzewitz notes towards Dostoevsky and Pushkin are relevant in grounding Shvarts's Petersburg myth in the city's literary tradition, this poem-chapter's use of geography expands beyond simple reference to her literary predecessors. Instead, it works to accomplish a retelling of Petersburg's history from the city's conception, with the most prominent character being the city's founding «царственный мужик», as Shvarts refers to him: Peter the Great.

Peter occupies a central role in the «Черная Пасха» *poema*, and in this chapter of the cycle Shvarts capitalizes on his mythology to usher in a new era of the "Petersburg text". She deems Peter a "royal peasant" to both highlight the contradictions in his historical and mythological character, and also to transform him from the evasive "demiurge" of «Канун» to a tangible human presence in «Где мы?». His presence is most easily visible in the chapter's

second half, where Shvarts makes mention of the infanticidal peasant with his wig falling off, fly undone, reeking of cabbage soup. His shadow, however, can also be found in the poem-chapter's first half, in the scene of violence and negotiation between Shvarts's protagonist and an unnamed "drunk husband". While this abuse hurled at her protagonist seems to reflect actual drunkenness and arguments that were typical of Shvarts's first marriage—her marriage to Evgeny Venzel that ended the same year she composed «Черная Пасха»—the poem's abusive figure also has characteristics of the city's founder that warrant attention. Focusing on the presence of Peter in this chapter of the cycle, I hope to illustrate further Shvarts's unique creation of a "Petersburg text" out of her Leningrad landscape, and the centering of this new text around a refined, but ugly Peter the Great.

Elements of the (Neo-) Baroque continue to appear throughout this chapter of the poem cycle, but in analyzing the geography of her poetic cityscape, it is also important to introduce the generic lens of metarealism. This term, coined by leading Russian literary scholar Michael Epstein in the early 1980s, describes a kind of realism that, "earnestly tries to capture an alternative reality" (170). While Epstein at first hesitated to include Shvarts in this camp, by the late 1980s he had listed her as a metarealist in his "Catalogue of New Poetries" (211), agreeing that her poetry represents, "the realism of metaphor, the entire scope of metamorphosis, which embraces reality in the whole range of its actual and possible transformations" (170). We have already seen this come alive in the first poem-chapter of «Черная Пасха», with its baroque shifts in perspective and allegorical architecture of the church-cum-whale cavern of worship. We can of course treat this term with some caution, as Shvarts never herself acknowledged its accuracy in describing her poetry. That being said, as an umbrella-term, it does bring her poetry into important conversation with that of her close peers Viktor Krivulin and Olga Sedakova,

highlighting both the value of networks and friendships in driving the poetry of this era. As this chapter will show, the community of "underground" poets in the 1970s and 80s Leningrad was heavily interactive, but also one that fostered poets who fashioned themselves as unique voices of dissent.

While scholars have noted Shvarts's eclectic personality and tendencies towards abrasiveness in her youth, just as many have pointed to lasting friendships that influenced her career. Perhaps the most consequential of these friendships was with Krivulin, as she dedicated poems to him, and was herself repeatedly was published in *37*, the journal Krivulin co-edited with his wife Tatiana Goricheva. Both poets sustained an interest in the spiritual realm while also highlighting Petersburg's essential place in Russia as the "Window to Europe", fitting in with Epstein's requirement that metarealists, "embrace the higher levels of reality, the universal images of the European cultural heritage" (211). Shvarts, however, is unique in focusing on the figure of Peter the Great, founder and specter of her native city on the Neva, figuring him with the tools of metarealism to craft a new "Petersburg text" out of the Leningrad underground. She emerges from her subterranean counterculture with a deep appreciation of her city's history, and a grandiosity wild enough to anticipate the city's unimaginable impending future, the return of the city to its original name, "Saint Petersburg". The lens of metarealism reveals the novelty of Shvarts's Petersburg myth, showing it as more than simply a looking backwards at her city's history, but rather an imaginative portrait of a city that transcends time. Shvarts's Petersburg is marked by its unique role in Russian literary history, both past and present, and this second chapter of «Черная Пасха» answers the question "Where are we?" by revealing the multitudes of this complex cityscape.

This poem chapter presents two levels of perspective: the domestic/personal and the public/communal. In the first half, Shvarts reflects on a violent instance with a manipulative lover, detailing the internal space of an abusive relationship, and in the second half moves into a distressful but thorough mythology of her city. The sociology of the Soviet underground is an essential piece of her poetic puzzle, and I will integrate insights from leading sociologists, anthropologists, and literary scholars in this chapter's unpacking of «Где мы?». One of the most relevant insights is the leading anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's concept of "internal emigration" as a kind of parallel in and out experience of late socialism experienced by a wide variety of passive Soviet citizens in the 1970s and 80s. Yurchak's anthropology explains the circumstances that allow for Shvarts's metarealism to flourish, this combination of theory and genre illuminating how one could transcend Soviet society to create a poem-cycle that is not so much anti-Soviet as it is a-Soviet: Shvarts treats her surrounding Leningrad with so much apathy she never once calls it by its Soviet-era name, instead creating a Petersburg text with only fleeting glimpses of her surrounding Soviet society. These fleeting glimpses however, carry their own significance, marking «Черная Пасха» as a whole and specifically the geography of the second chapter «Где мы?» relevant in their offering of a new poetic plane for understanding late-Soviet Leningrad.

Shvarts's Internal Metarealism

Shvarts begins this chapter with an intimate portrait of domestic violence, with her poet-narrator receiving blows and beatings from a drunken husband. Recalling how the first chapter ends, the narrator merging with the city's infrastructure as she is taken as communion by the crimson tram, it is unsurprising that she would enter a world of bruises and beatings, as she falls

victim to the violence Petersburg inflicts on its residents. This opening chapter presents a woman at the hands of her abusive husband in a most violent and manipulative state:

> Вот пьяный муж
> булыжником ввалился
> и, дик и дюж,
> заматерился.
> Он весь, как божия гроза:
> «Где ты была? С кем ты пила?
> Зачем блестят глаза твои
> И водкой пахнет?»
> И кулаком промежду глаз
> Как жахнет.
> И льется кровь, и льются слезы. (Шварц 75)

The husband enters, like God's thunder, taking shape simultaneously as a corporeal human being and as a dramatic force of weather, «как божия гроза». This is more than just an average Russian drunkard, but actually the embodiment of the tangibly abusive Peter the Great. While this is a noticeably different appearance than the «длань демиурга» of the first poem-chapter, it is still one that is forceful, oppressive, and cunning. Here is the same mythical Peter who, as Platt describes, "embodies both the crushing weight of autocracy and the revolutionary rejection of the past" with his overbearing presence as a patriarchal husband. Platt's diagnosis of Peter "as an all-encompassing but overdetermined sign of the present" (138) also benefits our reading, as it highlights Peter's ability to be transported to Shvarts's contemporary Leningrad. The description of the husband as "God's thunder" («божия гроза») emphasises both his sheer power and immortality, dropping-in as it appears to coerce and abuse the poem's protagonist.

A few lines later, the drunk husband replaces this abuse with manipulation, falling to his knees and seeking forgiveness from the narrator:

> Он здесь уже, он на коленях,
> И плачет, говорит: «Прости,
> Не знаю как... Ведь не хотел я...»
> И темные слова любви

Бормочет с грустного похмелья. (Шварц 76)

From here Shvarts offers a severe hangover as atonement, a hangover which will reappear in the next poem-chapter «Разговор с жизнью во время тяжелого похмелья». In this section though, it is important to remember that it is the husband's hangover she is forgiving, not her own; any smell of booze on her part is only likely a reference to a sip of wine in the ritual of taking communion. She finishes this section of the poem somewhere between forgiveness and awareness at her husband's cunning, and the corporeal image of blossoming bruises: «Перемешались наши слезы. / И я прощаю, не простив, / И синяки цветут, как розы.» (Шварц 76). In this blending of tears and half-hearted apologies, the narrator ends this episode with some semblance of agency, though resolving to remain in a dysfunctional relationship.

In the closing lines of this first half, Shvarts also importantly returns to the first-person perspective with the pronoun «я» taking a central role. Many of her poems feature this poetic "I", and while Shvarts never claimed that her poetry was autobiographical, the images of domestic violence ring true to accounts of Shvarts first marriage as having moments of violence (Sarah Clovis Bishop 115). Shvarts complicates this poetic self in the next poem-chapter, when the "I" enters into a conversation with life, but in this chapter she makes the poem's perspective that of her own to highlight her status as a citizen of both the eternal city of Petersburg and the very tangible underground of late-Soviet Leningrad. This era, in contrast to the earlier thaw years, saw a growth in the phenomenon of what scholars have termed "dropping out" of socialism, where creatives with higher education, such as Shvarts who graduated from the Leningrad theatre institute in 1971, sought odd jobs instead of following conventional career paths (Komaromi 7). Shvarts found a valuable peer in Krivulin, who later edited several samizdat journals where her work was published, including *37*. In a 1992 reflective essay on his

involvement with samizdat journals, Krivulin writes that *37* "aimed to create a language capable of describing the current state of culture and historical moment in Russia from the viewpoint of the individual/personality (*личность*)" continuing that it sought to "indicate the limits of a person's intellectual freedom in the conditions of that time" ("«37», «Северная Почта»" 74-75). By emphasizing Shvarts's poetry in the first and sixth issues of the journal, Krivulin entrusted Shvarts with a platform to explore the possibilities of intellectual freedom outside of official Soviet channels.

Shvarts was, of course, not the only underground poet in Leningrad, but was in fact a member of what is often called the "second culture" of the Soviet underground, and we might read her poetry as a product of this (counter)cultural milieu. We can best imagine this "second culture" through the concept of living "*vnye*" as Alexei Yurchak describes in his anthropological monograph *Everything Was Forever, Until it was no More*. In this study on the last Soviet generation, Yurchak describes living "*vnye*" as, "a condition of being simultaneously inside and outside of some context—such as, being within a context while remaining oblivious of it, imagining yourself elsewhere, or being inside your own mind" (127-8). One of the most extreme examples of living *vnye*, Yurchak describes, is what he calls "internal emigration" which suggests less a total removal from Soviet society into separate spaces of creative independence, but more so "the state of being inside and outside at the same time," where one inhabited an "oscillating position" of "inherent ambivalence" (132). As opposed to writers who emigrated to the west, the poets and writers in *37* could draw from the Soviet system's resources and cultural capital, while critiquing and reinterpreting it from a measured distance.

Living *vnye* was possible across the Soviet Union, but it became especially visible when a physical space could accommodate some measured deviance from the social rules of Soviet

socialism. One of these emerged in the form of Leningrad's café Saigon, which offered, Yurchak argues, a physical manifestation of living *vnye*. "The slang name Saigon symbolized the existence of a different dimension of discourse," he suggests: "*vnye* in a location" (Yurchak 142). The café opened in September 1964, seven months after Joseph Brodsky's public trial, and served at first as a site for literary exchange. One of Yurchak's respondent's, a woman named Inna, recalls that at Saigon, "we always had bags full of literature. So we were taking little risks… At most, we had a typed song by Galich or a poem by Brodsky. And of course we exchanged this stuff… This was not serious stuff. As for signing dissident letters or getting involved in other [dissident] activities, we never believed in that" (Yurchak 145). Political dissidents may have appeared at Saigon occasionally, but they were not regular visitors. Instead, the café catered to those interested in authors like "Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov, Marcel Proust, James Joyce" Yurchak writes, "which is why the café's milieus played an important role in educating and preparing the future post-Soviet founders of private publishing houses, as well as their editors, translators, and readers" (145).

In addition to the clientele's greater interest in poetry and music, another distinguishing feature of the café Saigon kept political dissidents away. Russian sociologist Elena Zdravomyslova reports that, "Intense heavy drinking served to differentiate Saigon people from the pro-dissident circle," one of the respondents to her research survey recalling "'My world view and interests were in a way continuous with theirs [dissidents'], but we differed in our attitude to alcohol. We drank, they did not" (164). Drinking was one of several lifestyle choices of these "Saigonees" that separated them from Soviet society, and while people like Inna may not have expressed political dissent, Zdravomyslova argues that the lifestyles of these patrons were "anti-Soviet" in that "they were constructed as a negation of normative Soviet practices"

(166). In a study of dissident biographies, sociologist Sofia Tchouikina similarly found that while some political dissidents, "feeling these 'nonconformists' to be kindred spirits and allies, tried, at the beginning of the 1980s, to persuade them to take part in protest actions," (133-4) these efforts were futile. The bohemian non-conformists of late socialism saw politics "as a dirty affair," Tchouikina summarizing: "they wished to neglect the state and be neglected by it" (134).

Café Saigon's patrons were surely a mixed bag of late-Soviet citizens, attempting to live *vnye* to different extents, but finding unity in a shared passion for counterculture and underground literature. While describing café Saigon as "at the center of the territory of counterculture," (147) seeming to take a neutrally sociological stance, Zdravomyslova doesn't deny literature's important role in this space: "The cultural and educational attractiveness of meetings in Café Saigon is well-attested by the cafe's former visitors. It 'created' the writer and the poet who was read by everybody in the milieu" (151). It is mostly for this reason that Krivulin and Shvarts appear frequently in a recently published anthology of Saigon-related texts and retrospectives, *Sumerki Saigona*. While more evidence is given to Krivulin and Shvarts's then-husband Venzel as frequent visitors of the Saigon, Shvarts appears in the anthology more often as a name-drop for those emphasizing their grasp on the literary culture of 70s Leningrad. The writing circulating around Saigon was, as Yurchak describes, united in being "temporally, spatially, and thematically *vnye* to the 'uninteresting' social and political issues of the Soviet discourse" (144).

Another space for "internal emigration" was the seminar that helped produced the bulk of work printed in *37*: the religious-philosophical seminar hosted by Krivulin and his wife Goricheva which ran from 1974-1980. Membership ebbed and flowed through these years, but it remained a hub for exploring questions of philosophy and spirituality, as its name suggests,

within the Leningrad second culture. Later in life, Shvarts denied attendance to the seminar, but her incorporation of religious themes into her poetry, as well as her proximity to Krivulin and Goricheva—who she named as her closest friends of this time—speaks volumes to this community's expansion beyond the walls of Krivulin and Goricheva's apartment. Shvarts's cycle «Черная Пасха» is indebted to theology as it seeks a spiritual landscape in the metarealist Petersburg, with references already acknowledged to Gnosticism and Orthodox Christianity. While Shvarts may not have attended seminar meetings, scholars have noted that her introduction to spiritual texts—and her later education in Russian orthodoxy—invariably came through samizdat, as theological texts were unlikely to be published officially in an atheistic state. The reading groups and samizdat publications built a dynamic relationship in the last Soviet decades, fostering what Krivulin described as the "taste for the eternal" («вкус к вечному») among the second culture.

Mapping a Metarealist Petersburg

This "taste for the eternal" becomes evident in the second half of «Где мы?», when the metarealism of Shvarts's Petersburg shows itself in full form. The poem-chapter expands suddenly from the scene of domestic violence to survey Petersburg's mythical cityscape, with a particular focus on the city's unique place within Russia:

> Мы ведь – где мы? В России,
> Где от боли чернеют кусты,
> Где глаза у святых лучезарно пусты,
> Где лупцуют по праздникам баб... (Шварц 76)

Shvarts's Russia is populated with agonizing black bushes, priests with radiantly empty eyes, and old women who, like the poem's protagonist, are thrashed on Sundays, the imperfective and low-style verb «лупцевать» suggesting an eternal condition of violence against women. This last

line also breaks the rhythmic pace established in the first three, with the final rhyming words «России», «кусты», «пусты», being followed by the fourth line's fleeting «баб». To agree with the established rhyme, Shvarts would have to end this line with «бабы», rendering the beaten women inanimate. Instead, the rough imagery offering punctuation to this opening instance of steady rhyme. The rhyme pattern of the poem-chapter continues with couplets of lines whose final words end on a shared vowel or consonant, a pattern that is interrupted occasionally by an unexpected, stand-alone or transitory line, jolting the reader/listener out of the established rhythm. Shvarts answers the question «Мы ведь – где мы?» posed at the beginning of the section in a blend of prosaic and poetic language, at once lyrical and fragmented.

Shvarts fragments not only the rhythm of her lyric, but also her imagination of the city she inhabits, a characteristic of this section that suggests (Neo-) Baroque as much as metarealism. She refers to it not once as Leningrad, but instead as Petersburg, paradise, *родина*, or its own country, «особая страна», continuing from the last lines:

> Я думала – не я одна –
> Что Петербург нам Родина – особая страна,
> Он – запад, вброшенный в восток,
> И окружен, и одинок, (Шварц 76)

The emphasis of the city here as Petersburg—not Leningrad—solidifies the poem-cycle as a Petersburg text, highlighting Petersburg's unique place in Russian history and denying the Soviet makeover of her surrounding Leningrad. Shvarts emphasises its circularity, isolation, and loneliness, while also highlighting its awkward placement on the Russian landscape as the west flung east. A few lines later Shvarts exclaims, «О, Парадиз! » in an evident harkening to Peter's aim for the city to be a new Russian "paradise", before decrying the city's founder in the next lines: «Ты избяного мозга порожденье, / Пропахший щами с дня рожденья» (Шварц 77). Peter appears both imperial and ordinary, a leader hiding his ill intentions, articulated clearly in

her description of him as a «царственный мужик». This chapter also harkens back to the description of Peter in the episode from Shvarts's autobiography when she realizes the evilness of the world, rooted in her mother's portrayal of the infanticidal tsar: "I screamed terribly, in a horror in which I had not seen before and would not see after. Laughing, she calmed me down, but for a long time I could not come to my senses, and I could not forget the horror of instant transformation, and I always suspected that the true face of the world was cruel, smiling and regal" (Шварц *Видимая Сторона Жизни* 2).

In this latter section of the poem-chapter, it is also noteworthy that Peter's image is blended with those of the city's great literary heroes, including the axe-wielding Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the cunning portrait artist Chartkov from Gogol's "The Portrait". Following the description of Petersburg as isolated, lonely («И окружен, и одинок») Shvarts continues:

> Чахоточный, все простужался он,
> И в нем процентщицу убил Наполеон.
> Но рухнула духовная стена –
> Россия хлынула, душна, темна, пьяна.
> Где ж Родина? И поняла я вдруг:
> Давно Россиею затоплен Петербург. (Шварц 76)

These lines of verse blend the literary myths of Petersburg, most importantly that of Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman", where a flood sweeps in to destroy the city, and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where a Napoleonic drop-out murders a pawnbroker to cover his rent. Shvarts explains the behaviour of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's novel as the result of a collapsed spiritual barrier, representing both an acute reading of the realist masterpiece and also a worrisome diagnosis of her native city. Using as well the archaic form of the Russian instrumental case with «Россиею», she highlights that this tainting of Petersburg goes down to the roots, that the city was cursed by the dark, drunk, evil Russia from its conception. This also undermines how the

city was built to be a more “civilized” and European capital, emphasizing that it has always been flooded by a characteristic “Russianness”.

Shvarts’s symbol for this archaic Russia is none other than the city’s founder, Peter, the one responsible for transplanting the seat of Imperial Russia to northern marshlands. In the next lines of the poem Shvarts molds him into the image of her literary anti-hero Raskolnikov, and, also, an unconvincing costumer:

> И сдернули заемный твой парик
> И все увидели, что
> Все тот же царственный мужик,
> И так же дергается лик,
> В руке топор,
> Расстегнута ширинка –
> Останови же в зеркале свой взор
> И ложной красоты смахни же паутинку,
> О, Парадиз! (Шварц 76-77)

His wig falling off and false beauty swept away like a cobweb, Peter appears as a bluff, unable to complete the “paradise” he so dreamed of in his new capital. Arriving on the scene with an axe, he resembles Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov on his way to murder the money-lender, but instead he is forced to face his ugly reflection in the mirror. Her metarealism fastens onto the image of Peter, here evoked with careful detail, transporting the reader to the earliest days of Petersburg’s imaginative existence, when it could still be dreamed of as a “paradise”.

This metarealist turn continues into the poem-chapter’s final lines, when the images of early Petersburg are once again bound to a literary reference, this time a nod to Gogol’s ekphrastic short story, “The Portrait”. From claiming «О, Парадиз!» Shvarts returns her focus to the unforgivable Peter, addressing him directly:

> Ты избяного мозга порожденье,
> Пропахший щами с дня рожденья,
> Где же картинка голландская, переводная?
> Ах, до тьмы стая мух засидела родная

И заспала тебя детоубийца.
Порфироносная вдова,
В тебе тамбовский ветер матерится
И окает, и цокает Нева. (Шварц 77)

Peter is blended with Gogol's Chartkov, as two figures who cheaply reproduce Dutch works, Chartkov merely fakes paintings whereas Peter attempted to replicate an entire city. He is cursed by a wind from the pre-Petrine city of Tambov that swears within him, and surrounded by the clattering Neva river. The first verb of the last line, «окает» also highlights the city's non-Russian origins by focusing on the odd-sounding dual-accent name of the river "Neva", itself of Finnish etymology. Moreover, this section highlights the particularly literary nature of Shvarts's metarealism, one that blends together the worlds of past centuries with her own. While Shvarts herself recedes into the shadows of this poem-chapter's second half, her incorporating of literary characters holds the abusive Peter accountable for the destructive city he pioneered.

Peter's centrality in this half of the poem reveals an important aspect of Shvarts's personalized metarealsim, but other scholars before me have expanded this discussion to offer their own insights. Albena Lutzkanova-Vassileva has also explored the role of literary reference in metarealist poetry, analyzing Shvarts's poetric oeuvre from the lens of metarealism and arguing that Shvarts's work "expands the scope of realism and strives to redeem reality's innate multidimensionality" (248). Shvart's poetry, in other words, offers a kind of expansive mimesis, first visible here in a multidimensional Petersburg, a separate space from Russia where Peter the Great exists alongside and becomes one with characters from Dostoevsky and Gogol. Russia's flooding of Petersburg allows the myths of the city's past to blend into one another, with the only constant being revealed in the poem-chapter's final line: «и окает, и цокает Нева». Paired with the opening half's focus on violence in the domestic space, this poem-chapter paints both Petersburg and Russia in an ugly shade. Shvarts's disillusionment in the "Paradise" of Petersburg

is not hopeless, but certainly heavily aware of the horror above and below the surface of her native city.

This poem-chapter is undoubtedly a critique of both Leningrad and Petersburg, but also importantly reaches the limits of what Shvarts as a poet would critique of her surrounding society. While not a vehemently political dissident, she evidently had an axe to grind with the uglier sides of the underground literary circles, which might explain her absence from Café Saigon as well as from the journal *37*'s regular seminar meetings. While *37* and *Часы*, where most of Shvarts's poetry appeared, were not openly political samizdat journals, they circulated at the same time as openly political dissident samizdats, such as the *Chronicle of Current Events.* However, as the testimonies from café Saigon hint at, the separate journals were not read by the same audiences. Ann Komaromi, a leading samizdat scholar, describes how since the end of Stalinism, Soviet society had a characteristic split between private and public domains. While poets and writers could find purpose in a private existence and expression of their art, "[political] dissidents aimed to forge a new type of public that would authentically reflect the concerns and aspirations of a variety of constituents" (5). The underground, from this perspective, cannot lead to tangible political or social change by remaining discreet and independent. "Splitting the private from the public in order to protect it," Komaromi writes, "was not the goal" (5).

However, in appealing to the literary figures of this era, Komaromi searches for a unique political position. By appealing to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the avant-garde and "interest in disinterest", she argues that underground artists, writers, and poets necessarily "worked towards a future where they could be recognized and consecrated" (3). These writers, "aimed for future transformation of their social collective based on a new imagination of active, critical subjects and relations among them" (3). In other words, if their immediate behaviours seemed apolitical,

their underlying ambitions involved the imagination of an alternative social and political reality. “They artistically embraced their present environment (however hostile or degraded it may seem to be), rather than trying to escape from it. They did so for the sake of a different future” (10). Thus the journal *37* and Shvarts’s poetry aimed towards a future where provocative voices could be heard, if not respected.

Krivulin, in the 1992 essay, argues that *37* didn’t aim to show all the possibilities of the second culture, but rather “to feel the limit of permissible utterance («ощутить границу допустимого высказывания»)” (“«37», «Северная Почта»” 75). With this in mind we can turn back to Shvarts’s question of this poem-chapter «Где мы?» and unpack some of the deeper ramifications of her verse. The notable absence of the city’s then-present name “Leningrad” denies the Soviet state any authority over the setting of the poem, favoring instead the Petersburg of past centuries: the Petersburg of imperial Russia, the west thrown onto the east. Shvarts harkens to the old adage of Petersburg serving as Russia’s window to Europe, creating a contrast between the wild, ravaging Russia that floods the Western project Petersburg. Out of this comes a city that cannot escape its fate as the meeting of East and West in Russia. This fate, however, is not tragic; it ebbs and flows like the Neva, in constant fluidity. In this sense the poem can be read as a manifesto for a metarealist Petersburg, and it is in fact no coincidence that in his reflections on *37*, Krivulin saw the journal as a revived cultural bridge between Russia and the West. In reviving this aspect of the city’s identity, Shvarts’s poetry, and Krivulin and Goricheva’s journal, were stinging critiques of Soviet society. By refusing to answer the question «Где мы?» with «В Ленинграде», Shvarts demonstrates the political potential of a seemingly apolitical question, and in verse creates an expansive imagination of all her city has and will be.

Chapter 3: The (Neo-) Baroque and Allegory

As the last chapter demonstrated, the geography of «Черная Пасха» is both evasive and expansive. Reading Shvarts as a metarealist poet, we find that the poem-cycle's setting creates a Petersburg that is eternal and in a way unreachable. Through a folding together of Petersburg's past and present, the cityscape of her poetry grows larger than the Leningrad she actually inhabited. Relying on reference, details, and history, Shvarts crafts her Petersburg myth to be an essentially allegorical portrait of the city, with her narrator's encounters reflecting those of both the underground writer and the everyday pedestrian throughout the centuries of Petersburg's history. In the third poem-chapter of the cycle, «Разговор с жизнью во время тяжелого похмелья», Shvarts offers another allegory, the contemplative 'conversation with life', as a further example of her tendency towards this form of lyrical storytelling. This conversation-chapter leads Shvarts's narrator towards life-affirming insights, with the personification of life forming an allegorical space for the narrator to converse with herself. Shvarts compliments this allegorical poem-chapter with themes continued from the first three sections, including the colour crimson and allusions to past Petersburg texts. In this way she continues the unique project of the «Черная Пасха» cycle, building up a Petersburg myth that is tied to her city's past as much as its present.

Shvarts's proximity to the baroque also becomes more blatantly clear in this overtly allegorical poem-chapter. An essential component of baroque aesthetics, allegory ties Shvarts closer to the phenomenon of (Neo-) Baroque, and this 'conversation with life' demonstrates clearly her dual inclusion of typical baroque elements complemented with characteristics from Calabrese's concept of the neo-baroque. The timing of this allegorical discourse at a severe

hangover complicates the allegory twofold: first by impairing the judgement of the philosopher-poet (not unlike the character Venya in Venedikt Erofeev's *Москва – Петушки*) and second by situating the conversation after the assumed episode of severe drunkenness, the source of our poem-narrator's hangover. These elements combine to form the most clearly (neo-) baroque chapter of the poem cycle, one that occupies a liminal space between life and death, allowing Shvarts to spotlight the taboo of female drunkenness from a transcendent and retracted perspective.

The allegory in this poem-chapter serves an essential function for Shvarts's (neo-) baroque. Scholars before me have highlighted the importance of allegory for the baroque period, perhaps the most notable being German philosopher Walter Benjamin, who illuminated the baroque-allegorical connection in his 1925 study on the origins of German tragic drama. In *The Fold*, Deleuze also turns to Benjamin's work, calling it foundational to our understanding of the baroque. Deleuze writes that allegory "uncovers nature and history according to time," as opposed to the symbol which merely, "combines the eternal and the momentary, nearly at the center of the world" (125). Allegory comes to Deleuze by way of Benjamin, serving "not [as] a failed symbol, or an abstract personification" but as something entirely different which, "produces a history from nature and transforms history into nature in a world that no longer has its center" (125). Benjamin's study reveals both the natural roots and transformative ends of allegory in the baroque as seen in 17th century German drama, but is also translatable to poetry and works of modernism that similarly operate through allegory. Deleuze's diagnosis of a "world that no longer has its center" also grounds allegory in a necessarily modern, or even postmodern, light, evoking perhaps the most famous poetic evocation of English modernism: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold" (W.B. Yeats).

Benjamin himself hesitates to credit Yeats with understanding allegory properly. He writes, “Even great artists and exceptional theoreticians, such as Yeats, still assume that allegory is a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning,” (Benjamin 162). Benjamin perhaps judges Yeats unfairly, however, referencing an early, immature essay of the Irish poet on William Blake’s illustrations to the Divine Comedy. While Benjamin creates an expansive, almost explosive definition of allegory, more concise understandings of the term also shed light on how modern and postmodern poets can harken timelessness in a world without a center. Shvarts’s religious quest in «Черная Пасха», as one example, imagines the Petersburg myth anew, in a godless society and derelict cityscape. This third chapter moreover follows the allegorical tradition of a ‘conversation with life’, moving beyond a merely symbolic poet-philosopher’s inner dialogue and towards a rewriting of the city’s larger history. By framing this chapter of self-actualization as a ‘conversation with life’, Shvarts uses allegory to nuance her narrator, interchanging moments of irony with those of sincerity. She charges her Petersburg myth with a natural origin that equates literature with history in the poet-narrator’s quest, and uses allegory to further emphasize her city’s literary history, creating a Petersburg myth stronger than any which has come before.

Shvarts’s allegorical ‘Conversation with life’ offers a new level of baroque myth to her Petersburgian quest, but also ironizes the allegory through the qualification «во время тяжелого похмелья», making this chapter also an important example of the more postmodern subtlety of the neo-baroque. A close reading of the poem-chapter’s first half will reveal the continuation of some of the themes already discussed, including the prevalence of the crimson «багровый» colour and the blurring of literary and historical imagery, specifically surrounding the figure of Peter the Great. After identifying these common threads, a closer definition of the term allegory

will highlight how Shvarts complicates allegory in this poem-chapter, evident within the philosophical and satirical verse of the poem-chapter's latter half. Finally, I will offer some concluding insights as I progress onto the final three 'chapters' of «Черная Пасха», signaling how the final three poem-chapters offer their own developments on the (neo-) baroque and allegorical elements discussed so far.

Reading Shvarts's «Разговор с жизнью…», one is struck first by the continuation of tendencies seen already throughout the poem-cycle's earlier chapters, including the symbol of fire to mark transformation and the tinging of her cityscape with the colour crimson. These tendencies reveal themselves in the poem-chapter's first two lines: «Багрянит око / огнём восток», these four words covering four essential themes of the poem thus far. «Око», the old church Slavonic (and neuter) word for eye, lends a sense of the primordial to the opening image: an eye is turning purple/crimson towards the fire of the east. The latter half of this image seems to suggest the sun rising in the east, doubly significant for the use of the word "fire" which, as Könönen has demonstrated, often symbolizes important moments of transformation for Shvarts (421). We can anticipate then a moment of transformation in this 'Conversation with life' to follow shortly. The former half of this image, «Багрянит око» offers a threefold interpretation. The eye changing colour could be a result of bruising caused by the violence in the previous chapter, or reddening associated with a hangover, or even to evoke the image of a closed eye perceiving the first rays of daylight, turning crimson with the "fire of the East". Shvarts artfully re-introduces the colour crimson alongside a fiery transformation, visual perception, and the Eastern gaze, deftly incorporating four key themes in the chapter's first four words.

Shortly after these opening lines, Shvarts begins her conversation with life in earnest, begging it to "leave her be", to end the misery that has already consumed a wasted half day:

Ах, жизнь, оставь,
Тебе я руку ли не жала,
Показывала – нет кинжала, (Шварц 77)

In the second line Shvarts uses the past tense of the verb «Жать», meaning to shake, indicating an attempt to see eye-to-eye with life and to shake its proverbial hand in good faith. In the next line she shows (literally, by using the verb «показывать») the absence of a secret dagger, incorporating a Turkic form here «нет *кинжала*» to rhyme with the first «жала». The repetitive «жал» syllable in these two lines also hints to a Russian ear the conversational «жалко», an expression of pity which fits into portrait of hangover Shvarts has begun to paint. The following lines continue the plea for pity, Shvarts entering into dialogue with life, making it an object she addresses with alternating use of the informal second-person and third-person forms:

А ты не унялась...
И рвет меня
Уже полсуток,
О, подари хоть промежуток –
Ведь не коня. (Шварц 77)

Accusing "life" of not offering her respite, but only vomit and wasted time, she begs it to give her just a break, a brief interval. The last line of the sentence may be puzzling: "Give me a break / but not *a horse*", Shvarts using another archaic word form in «конь» as opposed to the more current «лошадь». It can be explained as a continuation of the use of archaic language in this allegorical, and thus primordial, conversation, and also as a casual reference to the horse of Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*, which is repeatedly referred to as «конь» rather than «лошадь».

Shvarts begins the allegorical 'conversation with life' using archaic language and inventive rhyming, and through these concise verses evokes both universal pity and the Petersburg myth. Her creative use of allegory in re-writing the generic 'conversation with life' helps her stand out among her peers in creating distinctly baroque, if not neo-baroque poetics. To

understand allegory properly, we can begin with a definition given by Northrop Frye, offered in the second essay of his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye writes suggests that "within the boundaries of literature we find a kind of sliding scale of [of allegory], ranging from the most explicitly allegorical, consistent with being literature at all, at one extreme, to the most elusive, anti-explicit and anti-allegorical at the other… Then we have in the exact center, works in which the structure of imagery, however suggestive, has an implicit relation only to events and ideas" (91). Allegory, in other words, works on a spectrum, at the extreme end making explicit reference to "examples and precepts" (90), which Frye also refers to as Naïve allegory, "a disguised form of discursive writing, [which] belongs chiefly to educational literature on an elementary level: schoolroom moralities, devotional exempla, local pageants and the like" (90). Naïve allegory is "so anxious to make its own allegorical points that it has no real literary or hypothetical center" (91). This kind of allegory operates similarly to reference, as a literary device, pointing to an obvious external meaning that a reader could easily grasp and apply to their own life.

Shvarts's allegory does not operate on this plane, and her complexity suggests in fact the opposite of a naïve allegory, even if its title «Разговор с жизнью…» might suggest simplicity. On the opposite end of Frye's spectrum lies ironic or anti-allegory, where "poetic imagery begins to recede from example and precept and become increasingly ironic and paradoxical" (91). Frye explicitly turns to the baroque period for revealing this type of allegory before moving on to modern literature, including "Hawthorne's scarlet letter, Melville's white whale, James's golden bowl, or Virginia Woolf's lighthouse" (92). These "symbols" of modern literature importantly digress from the aims of formal allegory, acting instead, "in a paradoxical and ironic relation to both narrative and meaning" and allegory's "continuous relationship between art and nature" (92). Frye finds this extreme end in poetry, and we can indeed track many ironies and paradoxes

within Shvarts's *Black Easter*. This is done in the poema's title, where she creates paradox of a typically light and bright holiday, as well as in the chapter-titles, such as the current chapter where she infects the high-level inner dialogue with the after effects of drunken revelry. Additional scholarship, however, will complicate Frye's definition, with Benjamin's exploration of German *Trauerspiel* revealing a deeper connection between allegory and the baroque.

Benjamin in one sense agrees with Frye in that irony and paradox have a connection to allegory: "Indeed a genuine history of the romantic style could do no better than show, with reference to his works, that even the fragment, and even irony are variants of the allegorical" (188). Benjamin's study offers many astute insights like the one above, perhaps sacrificing consistency for a more abstract, fluid exploration of allegory. While he is not so explicit in his definition as Frye—Benjamin takes well over 200 pages in this German equivalent of a doctoral thesis to work through how allegory formed and functioned in baroque German tragedies—he does offer insights that only a scholar of the specific German baroque period could uncover. In addition to referencing a number of specific dramas, he also turns to contemporary scholarship in Germany, and offers a definition of allegory by way of his colleague Hermann Cohen. Benjamin writes, quoting Cohen,

> 'The basic characteristic of allegory, however, is ambiguity, multiplicity of meaning; allegory, and the baroque, glory in richness of meaning. But the richness of this ambiguity is the richness of extravagance; nature, however, according to the old rules of metaphysics, and indeed also of mechanics, is bound by the law of economy. Ambiguity is therefore always the opposite of clarity and unity of meaning.' (177)

While Frye observes allegory in its most pure, naïve form as obvious and teeming with clarity, Benjamin focuses specifically on Baroque allegory and builds a definition that celebrates ambiguity and "multiplicity of meaning". These are characteristics we find in Shvarts's poetry, and some of those that have invited scholars to call her a baroque poet. Ambiguity is seen in this

chapter's title, with the hangover having an unclear connection to the earlier plot of the poem-cycle (nowhere in chapters one or two does Shvarts's poet-protagonist consume alcohol, but perhaps the act of writing or reciting poetry creates a kind of metaphorically drunken state).

For Benjamin, allegory's ambiguity also leads to its connection with nature and history, which would become the more important realization for Deleuze in his study of baroque philosophy in *The Fold*. Benjamin writes that nature exists to express its own meaning, adopting an allegorical relationship to historical realization: "From the point of view of the baroque, nature serves the purpose of expressing its meaning, it is the emblematic representation of its sense, and as an allegorical representation it remains irremediably different from its historical realization" (170). The development of allegory accompanies a transition from history to nature, which was noted by Deleuze when he remarked that allegory "transforms history into nature" (125), Benjamin reflecting at one point, "even the story of the life of Christ supported the movement from history to nature which is the basis of allegory" (182). Here, the Bible, where some stories reflect what Frye would term "naïve allegory", serves as the beginning of a teleological historical path, culminating for Benjamin in the baroque dramas he has researched. It is important to acknowledge as well that Benjamin does not stop at the baroque drama, but looks back at it, acknowledging its obscurity and hoping to shed light on how its use of allegory can reflect currents in his contemporary literary surroundings.

Shvarts was, like Benjamin, interested in dramatic forms of past centuries, and had in fact written her dissertation at the Leningrad Theatre Institute on the baroque-era Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi and his use of masks in reviving the Commedia dell'arte genre. In her concluding remarks of the dissertation, Shvarts lists allegory as one of the most important pieces of Gozzi's dramatic puzzle, and thus it is no surprise that we find this literary device employed in her

longer, more playful *poemas* like «Черная Пасха». This reliance on allegory also lends her verse its baroque characteristics, with this chapter becoming perhaps the most baroque in its distinct separation of "self" from "life". Timothy Flanagan, a leading scholar on the philosophical connections between Deleuze and Benjamin, describes the baroque (in the context of these two thinkers) as "the moment of a melancholic transcendental genesis" (53), where nature is preserved not as a source of enlightenment, but as a natural state, a kind of eternal transience that in its own way inspires mourning. We see this evolve in the second half of «Разговор с жизнью…» with Shvarts separating her own "self" from "life", and this external "life", that is uncertainly alive or dead, steals away with Svharts's voice: «жива ль она? мертва? она безгласна, / и голос мой прилип к ее когтям.» (Шварц 78) Life's externality helps it transcend to the realm of nature, serving once as a "naïve" allegory for the punishments of a severe hangover—the lifelessness of exhaustion and dehydration—and also as an image of a transcendental being existing beyond the human realms of "life" and "death", something we will re-encounter later in the poem-cycle.

After stealing away with the narrator's voice, the transcendent "life" of this poem-chapter's second half does not abandon the "self", but rather takes her along for a Bulgakovian joyride following the last lines:

> И, как орел, она несет меня
> Знакомыми зелеными морями,
> Уронит и поймает, вновь дразня,
> И ластится румяными когтями. (Шварц. 78)

What at first seemed a threatening "life" reveals itself to be a gentle creature, teasing and caressing the "self" as it takes her over familiar green seas and tosses her up and down with ruddy claws. Shvarts's narrator (as herself) is thus reunited with her "life" in a playful, transcendence, as are indicated in the chapter's final lines:

> Как сердце не дрожит,
> Но с жизнью можно сжиться:
> То чаем напоит,
> То даст опохмелиться. (Шварц 78)

Life, in closing, becomes bearable: it may tease and frighten you, but there is always the opportunity to warm up with tea, and revive oneself with a hair of the dog. This ending also allows Shvarts's narrator to reach an understanding of truth, which Flanagan defines in his reading of Deleuze as "the condition in which individuals realise themselves to be the subjective determination of a perspective" (53). While this poem-chapter allows Shvarts to sit outside herself and mockingly perceive the ugliness of hangover, it also allows her to reintegrate the two separate beings into a playful, positive relationship in the closing lines, also highlighting the joys found in life's most simple and banal moments.

Shvarts certainly achieves the moment of "melancholic transcendental genesis" (Flanagan 53) to accomplish the baroque task of the poem, but also embodies this in a more postmodern way, visible in the ironic return to alcohol with the verb «опохмелиться». Many themes of Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque* reveal themselves as well throughout Shvarts's verse, grounding this poem-chapter, and the *poema* more largely, as a text that is both baroque and neo-baroque. Calabrese, who explains the "Neo-Baroque" through chapters of paired phenomenon, including "Rhythm and Repetition", "Limit and Excess", and "Detail and Fragment", emphasizes the unique contemporaneity of his term:

> Naturally, the reference to baroque works by analogy, and in many cases I shall try to make the analogy clear. But this does not imply in any sense a hypothetical "recuperation" of the period… the idea of cycles must be regarded as unacceptably idealistic and metahistorical. "We never step into the same river twice," in other words. (Calabrese 15)

Shvarts's Petersburg myth works in a similar way, calling back to past iterations of her city without attempting to replicate them per se. The reader recognizes the presence of Shvarts's

predecessors in the references to past Petersburg poets and authors, while Shvarts herself never replicates the exact intention of Gogol, Bely, Dostoevsky, or Pushkin. Instead, she respects the unique depictions of Petersburg each of these writers is celebrated for, and alludes to them fleetingly in order to make a patchwork of her city's literary past. What may appear an act of the backwards glance is in fact a revolutionary re-imagining of the present, with, as discussed in the last chapter, the creative expansion of metarealism aiding in this imaginary Petersburg. The city is transcended in this chapter so that Shvarts may step aside from the cityscape and emphasize her own presence in the construction of a baroque and Neo-Baroque reality.

The second half of «Разговор с жизнью…» emphasizes the Neo-Baroque through ironic turns like the closing «опохмелиться» as well as through its eccentric and fragmented verse. From Calabrese's book, two chapters offer especially poignant insights to this third chapter-poem of «Черная Пасха», where the semiotician addresses limits, excess, details, and fragments. Some themes from the earlier poem-chapters continue, such as voicelessness and a contrast between high and low—in this instance between the mortal being and all that transcends above her. Compared to the earlier two, this poem-chapter comes closest to the typical and structured rhyme schemes we expect out of Russian poetry. However, her verse and lyric remain as complex as we have seen thus far. Looking, for example, at the middle section of verse, which holds the reference to the archaic «Конь» of Pushkin's Bronze Horseman:

> О, подари хоть промежуток –
> Ведь не коня.
> Ну на – терзай, тяни желудок к горлу,
> Все нутро – гляди, в нем тоже нет оружья,
> Я, неопасная, я твоя,
> Хоть твоего мне ничего не нужно. (Шварц 77)

While repeating the ending vowel «я», the second and fourth lines fail to rhyme due to stress patterns. However, the «оружья» forms a proper rhyme with the closing «нужно», itself

preceded by «не» signifying more negation. Shvarts stages a battle between her poetic "self" and "life", describing her "self" as becoming sick to prove innocence in front of "life", before making a declarative stance of independence with the final line. There is a final doubling of negation in this last quoted couplet, where Shvarts writes, "I am *not* dangerous, I am yours, / Though there is *nothing* of yours which I need" (italics added). The repetition of the «не» sound emphasizes the self's combativeness, pushing itself away from life while also recognizing its inherent connection through the possessive statement «я твоя». Expanding the limits of "life" and "self"—two beings which generally remain connected—with such nuance and contradiction, Shvarts creates a world without a centre.

Interestingly, Calabrese begins his study of limits and excess with a discussion of eccentricity, a specific look at the word's modern etymology, which involves a moving away or digression from a "centre". "Eccentricity, in this context," Calabrese writes, "exerts pressure on the margins of order without undermining it," (56) much like the outwardly apolitical literary underground of Shvarts and her closest peers. Eccentricity, in other words, goes beyond a supposed limit as an expansion from the centre, possibly leading to the creation of a new centre (Calabrese 58). Excess, Calabrese writes, on the other hand, is more destabilizing, "precisely because it goes beyond limits or boundaries" (Calabrese 58). Excess, as opposed to eccentricity, is characterized by the absence of a centre, with the phenomena of erotic excess, degeneration, and horror all serving this end (Calabrese 59-60). While in his cultural study Calabrese turns to horror films and television, the most important for him being those of Dario Argento, we can also see this typically post-modern excess in the horror of the emergent Chernukha genre, of which Shvarts is an essential pioneer. Degeneration, or the presentation of what is typically

"indecent", or taboo, also plays an important part in Shvarts's poetics, one that is emphasized repeatedly through its contrast with measurement against the high or sacred.

While Shvarts may seem at first glance an "eccentric" poet, one that is pushing the boundary without questioning the centre, a deeper reading reveals the Petersburg of «Черная Пасха» lacks the grounded centre demanded of eccentricity. Her use of allegory, as I have demonstrated, highlights a Petersburg myth built on the absence of a centre, one that, as Benjamin would argue, ties her verse to nature and history, and, as Deleuze would write, "transforms history into nature in a world that no longer has its center" (125). We see this in the third poem-chapter through the apparent lifelessness of life, made evident in its voicelessness:

> Но, тихая, куском тяжелым мяса,
> Она прижмется вся к моим зрачкам:
> Жива ль она? Мертва? Она безгласна,
> И голос мой прилип к ее когтям. (Шварц 77-78)

This life, which egged her on in the opening lines to reveal the suspected hidden dagger, the life that torments Shvarts with the pains of a hangover, must steal that essential tool of the poet: her voice. Excess, with its characteristic absence of centre, can be seen at other points of the *poema* as well, in the extensively allegorical architecture of the first poem-chapter, and the trans-temporal portrait of Peter the Great in the second. Throughout «Черная Пасха» Shvarts uses a spectrum of allegory and excess to create a metaphysical and metarealist Petersburg that is innately tied to nature and history.

Calabrese has one additional lens that will pull together any loose strands of my reading, that being his discussion of the detail and fragment. His discussion of "detail" also begins with an etymological inquiry, noting its French origins in the noun détail and verb détailler, meaning literally to cut apart. The detail then serves as a necessarily representative part of a past "whole", and just as eccentricity indicates the existence of a relative centre, the detail indicates the

permanence of a whole it is representative of (Calabrese 70). Just as with eccentricity, we can notice details in Shvarts's poema, such as the detached, fleeting reference to the Bronze Horseman with the use of the archaic «конь» as opposed to everyday «лошадь». Shvarts may even encourage us to see her referencing as effective detail, especially in her literary and poetic references, thinking back to the numerous allusions to 19th century letters in the earlier chapter-poem «Где мы?». These fleeting allusions function to bring the work which she has quoted, of which the majority are widely-read Russian classics, to the mind of the reader, treating her Raskolnikov not as an independent subject, but as a necessary product of Dostoevsky's oeuvre. In this way, she successfully collages together nearly two hundred years of literary history in «Черная Пасха», putting not just independent characters, but authors and movements of Petersburg's past under one poetic roof.

While this reading suggests a transparent, collective approach to Russian literary history, we should remain skeptical of such a clear explanation from the work of such a meticulous poet. In a 1990 interview, Shvarts acknowledged her use of quoting and referencing with some passivity, saying "but those quotations are ironic. I don't quote with any intention other than irony. It's always irony. There are some pure coincidences, but it's not my job to find them. My job is simply to avoid consciously repeating what someone else has already said" almost treating literary allusion like a bad habit (Shvarts quoted in Polukhina 253). The references to Pushkin, which Shvarts acknowledges are plentiful in her verse, are used to ironize the father of Russian literature, not represent him. In this vein, we can read the «конь» of «Разговор с жизнью…» as less the establishment of a Pushkinian foundation for Shvarts to build on, but rather a turning over, even a mocking, of Pushkin's archaicism, which she uses to distinguish her lyric's myth from the Petersburg myth of the 19th century. The same reading can apply to her allusions to

Dostoevsky and Gogol, which, in their fleeting and ironic nature, don't have the space to convince a reader of their value as independent Petersburg texts or myths. Instead, Shvarts ironizes these figures to paint a mocking portrait of Peter the Great, and to make space for herself as a distinguished poet and unique lyrical voice of her native Leningrad.

The fragment, as Calabrese defines it, involves the absence of a whole to latch onto, proven in an equally ambitious etymological inquiry. "Unlike the detail," he concludes, "the fragment, despite having formed part of a previous whole, does not need to take the presence of that whole into account in order to be defined. On the contrary: the whole is *in absentia*" (Calabrese 73). The fragment distinguishes itself from the detail through this independence, developing its own independent meaning in this newfound state of isolation, in a world that is, like that of excess, without a centre. This distinction also becomes significant in his application of these terms onto the disciplines of scholarship, Calabrese arguing that studying a 'detail' as part of and representative of its structure is applicable in many human and pure sciences, whereas "fragmentary" studies better represent the worlds of historiography and literary studies. The study of fragments of history, or micro-events as he calls them, benefit us twofold: "they make it possible to check the fact being examined; and they express more clearly than any macro-event the 'spirit' of an epoch, which is assumed to be more or less the same in every section and level of a given society at a given time" (Calabrese 77). Through its isolation, the fragment preserves both accountability and the spirit of an era, and this is what has led it to, as Calabrese continues, reacquire, "what is probably its most authentic and original role: in poetry" (87). In other words, the fragmentation of history, and we may even go as far to include here literary history, allows us a more reliable understanding of an era than a detailed analysis can.

While Calabrese claims that all four of the above-discussed phenomena (limit, excess, detail, and fragment) contribute to our neo-baroque world, this summary has made clear that the latter half of each pair may perhaps prove more potent for our study of Shvarts's neo-baroque poem-cycle. This becomes especially evident when we put these two emphasized phenomena, excess and fragment, into dialogue with the earlier discussion of allegory, essential to our reading of this third poem-chapter. An allegory that ironizes and toys with its external story, as is exhibited in Shvarts's «Разговор с жизнью…» is of course what Benjamin and Frye predicted as signs of post-modernism and its natural predecessor, modernism. Calabrese emphasizes the postmodern direction of fragments and eccentricity in his insistence that the neo-baroque involves a movement towards "the decline or fall of totality" (90), echoing Benjamin's finding of baroque allegory as producing "a history from nature and transform[ation of] history into nature in a world that no longer has its center" (Deleuze 125). Shvarts gives the allegorical 'conversation with life' a multitude of baroque and neo-baroque implications, tainting the traditional philosophical discourse with drunkenness, and inverting the perspective of this taboo phenomenon—not just drunkenness, but female drunkenness—by situating the conversation during a hangover. She uses a spectrum of allegory to create a metaphysical and metarealist Petersburg that is innately tied to nature and history, her excess and fragmentation of (literary) history creating a neo-baroque Petersburg that is tied to the city's original baroque ambitions, while Shvarts's verse revives those ambitions in the bleak surroundings of her late-Soviet cityscape.

Chapter 4: The Last Temptation

Up to this point, I have defined Shvarts as a necessarily Petersburgian poet, but it must now be acknowledged that she also had strong ties to the city of Moscow. This is not atypical when looking at previous writers of "Petersburg texts", including Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Bely, who were all originally Muscovites. As Pavel Uspensky has noted in a recent foreword to the collection of Shvarts's poetry I've chosen to cite for this thesis, Shvarts published her first four collections of samizdat verse in Moscow, where she spent significant time from the 1970s-80s (Шварц 5). The first of these collections was titled "Exercitus exorcitans", and was the collection that appeared in the sixth issue of *37*, «Черная Пасха» serving as the final poem-cycle for these 50+ pages of verse. «Черная Пасха» was, as is indicated at the poem's end, composed in 1974, two years before the 1976 release of "Exercitus exorcitans" in *37*, issue six, but still some shadows of Moscow seem to lurk behind her Petersburg/Leningrad backdrop. When we start to search for these characteristically Moscow moments, however, it becomes clear that they are carefully placed to emphasize her interest and dedication to crafting a myth of her native city and her own unique "Petersburg text".

To the Stones of her Native City

Shvarts's fourth poem-chapter «Искушение» (revised to «искушенье» in *37* no. 6) sees the poet dive further into the depths of her native city, to a devil lurking below her native city stones:

> Воронкой лестница кружится,
> Как омут – кто-то, мил и тих,
> Зовет со дна – скорей топиться
> В камнях родимых городских.

Ведь дьяволу сверзится мило,
И тянет незримо рука
Туда, где пролет ниспадает уныло
Одеждой моей навека. (Шварц 78)

Returning to a more regular rhyme scheme, Shvarts incorporates an archaic, foreign, and church-associated form of the word for Devil (дьявол), alongside the return of an unseen hand, perhaps the demiurge's hand from the first chapter-poem. The devilish imagery in this chapter harkens to an important component of the historic 'Petersburg myth': the city's nature as evil, devilish. The devil in this chapter, who appears later as «сатан» also may harken readers' imagination to the devils of 20th century Moscow prose, in, for example, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* or Erofeev's *Moscow – Petushki*. These nods to Moscow, notable as they are, remain just nods, and as this chapter will demonstrate, Shvarts's "Temptation" solidifies her poem-cycle as a Petersburg text in its evocation of the underground, and exploration of the underground in both archaic and contemporary terms.

While Shvarts did not aspire to become a "Moscow poet" herself, her proximity to Muscovites may have accentuated those parts of her verses that are particularly Petersburgian or Leningradian. Consulting a pair of relevant articles on the Moscow text, I will demonstrate in this chapter how Shvarts's poetry, in the face of this Moscow influence, remained steadfastly aligned with the tradition of the Petersburg text. It is important to acknowledge here how this phenomenon, the Petersburg text, which allows Shvarts to create a "myth" of her native city, differentiates from the "Petersburg school" mentioned in her interview, the latter suggesting a formal style of poetry emerging with those poets of the early Silver Age. Diving into the depths of Petersburg's underground, «Искушение» opens Shvarts's Petersburg myth to her contemporary surroundings, connecting the eternal (Neo-) baroque of earlier chapter-poems with Shvarts's contemporary social surroundings. Further, this "temptation" reveals Shvarts's

coexistent attraction to and disillusion with the Leningrad underground, an anxious struggle which holds the key to her unique Petersburg myth.

Quoted above, the opening verses of this fourth poem-chapter offer both a reflective and anticipatory view of the poem-cycle at large. Halfway through the 200+ line cycle, Shvarts borrows imagery from past poem-chapters, blending those with ones that will grow to prominence in the final three sections. «Искушение» begins with an image of downward motion, a spiraling staircase descending like a funnel, an apt metaphor for the temptations of sin and desire. «Воронкой», the first word of the poem-cycle, while meaning "like or as a funnel" also evokes the choir of crows «вороний хор» introduced in the first poem chapter. While those crows hovered above the city's glint and glitter, the «воронка» of this fourth poem-chapter operates in the opposite direction, guiding Shvarts's poet-narrator down below her native city's stonework. The verb «кружится» is also significant in this opening line, as adjacent forms of spinning have appeared earlier in the first and second chapters, first with the image of the red squirrel spinning in a circle «красной белкой закружились в колесе» and second with the image of Petersburg as a city surrounded and alone: «и окружен, и одинок». This verb will however gain momentum as the cycle enters its final chapters, reappearing in its form «кружится» in the final two chapter-poems. What began as an image of the world's cyclical nature—the meaning of the red squirrel in «Канун»—will turn into something more sinister in the final half of «Черная Пасха».

The downward spiral staircase leads to the previously mentioned Devil, whose lying beneath Shvarts's "native city stones" is a clear indication of her Petersburg myth. In his comparison of the Petersburg and Moscow texts, Slavicist Ian K. Lilly has pointed to several important contrasts that will help ground Shvarts's cycle, as seen in these opening lines, as

especially Petersburgian. While Petersburg texts are driven by “idealists and dreamers” who are “routinely driven to their deaths,” Petersburg is repeatedly portrayed as, “an inert mass of granite and cast iron, with a climate that is bitterly cold in winter, dangerously damp in autumn, and overwhelmingly oppressive in summer” (Lilly 429). While no diagnosis is given to the regular state of Spring, Shvarts qualification of Easter as a “Black” holiday is telling in the long-lasting nature of the city’s dark winter. Lilly later on describes the important construction materials of buildings in each city as relevant to their literary representation, with Moscow built more or less with vital and adaptable wood, whereas Petersburg is “literally the city of stone”, its buildings made up of a cold, albeit permanent raw material foundation (435). The devil who lurks below the city’s stones in these opening verses acts as a harbinger for the death that may await the dreamy poet-narrator. Shvarts’s poet-protagonist exercises, however, an acute awareness of this temptation, as one who has already seen the hand of a false-prophet and is not likely to fall for the allure of the city’s underbelly.

Her foresight becomes aware in the following lines, where the low-lying devil begins to imitate the drunken husband from «Где мы?»:

> Он хочет, он хочет вселиться
> И крови горячей испить,
> И вместе лететь и разбиться,
> По камню в истоме разлиться,
> И хрустнуть, и миг, да не быть.
> Но цепь перерождений –
> Как каторжные цепи,
> И новый облик душу,
> Скокетничав, подцепит. (Шварц. 78)

The violence of these lines brings us back to that opening half of the second poem-chapter, but here there is something more, an awareness at the eternal dangers of sacrificing one’s life to the profane. The crash towards nonexistence «и хрустнуть, и миг, да не быть» anticipates a

depression in the next life, where the chain of rebirth «цепь перерождений» works like those of a convict «каторжные цепи», returning one to earth under a new guise. These lines reveal a dual disillusionment with life and a disbelief in the possibility of "nonexistence"; through this conflict Shvarts protects her narrator from a destructive descent into the hands of temptation. She then ponders what it is that continues to call her towards the depths, imagining herself as a sharp nail, helpless to the force of a magnet:

> Ах, гвоздь ведь не знает
> Отчего его манит магнит,
> И я не знаю, кто со дна
> Зовет, манит. (Шварц 78)

Wondering what it is that pulls her downward, Shvarts reveals her temptation to be an inescapable call from the dark subterrain.

"A shadow cast by the light"

Throughout her poetic oeuvre, Shvarts never shied away from darker topics and themes, a perhaps unexpected trait for someone who also sought deep purpose through religion. In the interview mentioned earlier, Shvarts's interviewer goes on to ask her about this peaceful coexistence of light and dark in her work. After admitting her commitment to exploring the darkness, and allowing herself to plunge "as far as it's possible to go… As far as I can go" Shvarts explains the source of this curiosity with poetic grace:

> — [Interviewer]: *Where does such a need come from?*
> — [Shvarts]: It's because the realm of darkness is, in all probability, merely a shadow cast by the light; is the same light in a certain sense. And then man is born for knowledge, though the apostle Job says that man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I myself feel as if I were sent here by someone to tell of what I could understand, of what is here. And as darkness also exists here how can you avoid it? That would be tantamount to spiritual cowardice. (Polukhina 256)

Shvarts's answer here has multiple layers of significance for our reading of *Black Easter*. The first part of her answer emphasizes an observation made by Deleuze in *The Fold*, on a uniquely baroque relationship between light and shadows. "The Baroque is inseparable from a new regime of light and color" he claims, going on to define in essence what Shvarts finds in her world-view: an innate interdependency between those aspects of the world that produce light and those that are shadowed from it (31). Through an exploration of new painting techniques Deleuze found through Leibniz that an emphasis on new shades of darkness could not be appreciated if it were not for contrasting "slits" of light to illuminate these newly discovered nuances (32). In much the same way, Shvarts acts as her own slit of light in relation to her unapologetically dark poetic world, illuminating the newfound contours of her seedy, grim underworld.

In the second half of the above quote, Shvarts even emphasises this belief she holds in herself as a guide to the dark underbelly of society. This role as representative of and guide to the darker tones of Petersburg also harkens to an important trend of both the Petersburg text and Russian literature at large, that of the "Underground man". As Vladimir Ivantsov has shown, the "Underground man" emerged in the works of Dostoevsky and grew steadily in relevance to figures of counterculture in the 20th century. In Dostoevsky, we can see this figure, as Ivantsov calls him, "the founder of a distinct tradition of representing the underground and 'underground consciousness' in Russian literary and (counter)cultural discourse" (Ivantsov "The Concepts of the Underground" 12). While paying greater attention to Shvarts's peer Krivulin, Ivantsov draws an important connection between the imaginary revolutionary of Dostoevsky's poetics to the personal myths surrounding underground poets in the 1970s and 80s, going even further to explore Dostoevsky's relevance for late- and post-Soviet rock music and adjacent countercultures. For Shvarts, it remains clear that she saw it her duty to explore the underground

in both life and verse, to illuminate its contours with the poet's voice. This exploration, however, didn't come without its own dangers.

Wondering what draws her downwards, Shvarts imagines the possibility of someone like her, calling her from below: «Может, кто-то незримый, родной, / и так же как я одинок…» (78). Her isolation in this moment is palpable, Shvarts's poet-narrator imagining that a mysterious voice in the dark could be someone just like her. But then this dark being reveals itself in its true form, and the poem takes a notable turn:

> Торговцам злобный сатана
> Чуть-чуть меня не уволок
> Конфетой в лестницы кулек,
> Легко б лететь спьяна.
> Но как представлю эту смесь –
> Из джинсов, крови и костей,
> Глаз выбитый, в сторонке крестик…
> Ах, нет, я думаю, уволь.
> А мы – зачем мы воскресаем из боли в боль?
> (Шварц 79)

The devil appears here as Satan, an evil trader, who almost gets away with Shvarts's poet-narrator. Shvarts then takes an almost unbelievably daker turn, describing how easy it might be for her subject to jump (fly) drunk to her death, leading to a mixture of "jeans, blood, and bones" the thought of which, fortunately, turns the subject away from the idea. For Shvarts, as Ivantsov notes in his findings, suicidal ideation was a frequent danger, but her antidote for this was the pursuit of her poetic project. He quotes Krivulin's recollection of Shvarts a few days after a stint of aggressive behaviour, including the smashing of a bottle of vodka over a peer's head, Shvarts "at first wanted to hang herself but then wrote a poem" (Krivulin quoted in Ivantsov "The Concepts of the Underground" 155). This cycle of outlandish behaviour followed by remorse was typical of the literary underground, Ivantsov argues, explaining the sense of despair and

inevitable circularity in the final line of the above verse, where Shvarts's subject wonders why she is resurrected from one pain to another.

As the above verse seems to demonstrate, life in the literary underground was far from a walk in the park, and led to a sense of the poet's inevitable disposability. This poem-chapter shows Shvarts tossing and turning with this idea, struggling to find a space in the underground that can hold all her ambition. In a recent article published in the Russian Reivew, Ivantsov expands on this problem of ambition in the literary underground, enlisting Krivulin again for insight to the inner workings of his circle:

> According to Krivulin, the nature of communication between members of the Second culture "made almost every poet think that he or she was the uniquely chosen: this was a collective 'delusion of grandeur' spawned by the literary underground and experienced on one's own deeply personal level—in the underground of one's soul (*v podpol'e dushi*)." (Ivantsov "Of Mice, Rats, and Underground Men" 22)

While Shvarts was not immune to this "delusion of grandeur", she remains one of the few poets from this era in Leningrad to emerge as a unique talent in the undoubtable shadow of the Leningrad-native Joseph Brodsky, and thus we may treat her as some exception to the crowd of uncelebrated "underground" Krivulin alludes to here. Disillusioned with the underground as she seems in this chapter-poem, we might even begin to wonder if Shvarts truly suffered under this same "delusion of grandeur", or if she saw it as an isolating force detrimental to the spiritual self. Her verses suggest a certain 'disillusionment with the delusion', and a yearning for a sense of community nonexistent among the corrupt personalities surrounding her.

Krivulin actively worried for the generation of poets in Brodsky's wake, seeing this "delusion of grandeur" as both an inevitability and a detrimental force to Russian poetry. In a 1990 interview he mourns the negative impact Brodsky made on the last generation of Soviet underground poets. "There's, first," he argues, "the way that he makes the concept of personal

fate into an absolute" continuing, "And so you have a first wave of young poets, aged between 15 and 17, who refuse to go to university, who think of themselves as great poets, who go off and get themselves jobs stoking boilers and who, very often, come to a bad end" (Krivulin quoted in Polukhina 223). Alexei Yurchak is a bit more forgiving towards the boiler room poets and rockers, "*kochegary-rockery*" as he calls them, arguing that these jobs "became attractive for some individuals because of the performative shift of authoritative discourse," citing Brodsky as a case in point (153). The legal obligation to be employed within the Soviet state, Yurchak describes, led to young poets, scholars, and rock musicians frequently turning to the vocation of "boiler room technician" as a stable job that, although paying little, offered copious amounts of free time and space for intellectual and creative pursuits. Inadvertently, the state's obligatory employment fostered these spaces of free, if isolated, thought. "The state again enabled it," Yurchak argues, "without quite being able to control or account for it" (153).

The "delusion of grandeur" Krivulin speaks of is then equally a product of the late-Soviet state policy and the seemingly-best practices adopted by those creatives in the literary underground. Nonetheless, as Krivulin claims in his interview, this didn't necessarily always lead to good poetry. And in the final lines of Shvarts's «Искушение», she appears to echo Krivulin's concerns about the boiler room poet. After pondering that difficult question «А мы – зачем мы воскресаем из боли в боль?» Shvarts returns to the crimson of earlier chapters before examining what actually lies under the stairs introduced in the poem-chapter's opening line:

> И кровь ручонкою двупалой
> Светящейся и темно-алой
> Тянется в помещенье род лестницей
> Где лопаты и метлы
> Там-то ее пальчики прижали,
> Там они увяли и засохли. (Шварц 79)

Shvarts here blends the image of the Devil with that of the boiler-room poet, reaching down towards the room below the stairs where maintenance equipment can be found. It is in this room that her hands get jammed, where her fingers fade and dry up, indicating a loss of poetic ambition in the stuffy basement room. Losing her will to write, Shvarts's poet-narrator finally encounters the most destructive of all the temptations explored in this chapter: creative stagnation in a stable but unstimulating professional environment.

«Искушение» more than anything reveals a complicated relationship between Shvarts and the literary underground of her era. While Shvarts claims herself to be drawn towards darkness, like a nail to a magnet, her poet-narrator here also takes pride in exercising discipline and caution with the temptations calling to her from below. While the devilish imagery in this chapter further consolidates her cycle as a distinct Petersburg text, the insights this chapter-poem bring regarding Shvarts's relationship to darkness help to illuminate an important aspect of her (neo-) Baroque. By offering up her poetic self and poet-narrator as vessels of light, Shvarts makes the unique contours of her notably dark surroundings ever more noticeable. It is through this perspective that she saves herself from suicidal ideation, not just in the poem-chapter but in real life, as Krivulin's words attest to. While certainly subject to moments of despair, Shvarts's bravery in facing the darker sides of her world is rewarded in turn by both moments of serenity and joy, as we will see in the final chapter analysis, and in the sheer output as one of the underground's most prolific poets.

Chapter 5: Cycling Back and Forth

As the last chapter demonstrated, Shvarts's turn towards darkness is for her, the fulfilment of a responsibility assumed in her personal contract with the divine. To not explore the subterrain in depth would, as she puts it, "be tantamount to spiritual cowardice" (Polukhina 256). While in her chapter on 'temptation' we find coexistent yearning towards and disillusionment with the underbelly of society, she undoubtedly embraces the voyeuristic role of the "underground man" this perspective demands. In the final two poem-chapters, Shvarts expands this tension between her roles as viewer and participant in the underground, exposing the inevitability of cycles through two unique sections of verse. «Наутро» and «Обычная Ошибка» both treat, in distinct ways, the problems of cycles and reoccurrence, Shvarts crafting verse that harkens back to earlier sections of the poem while exploring in new depth her long battle with inevitability. In this final turn towards the inevitable, Shvarts also invokes a layer of the (neo-) Baroque as of yet hardly discussed, but ever important to our analysis: the possibility of the baroque to appear and reappear throughout history. In creating a cyclical portrait of history, desire, and "usual mistakes", Shvarts proves the uniqueness of her Petersburg myth in its essential inclusion of both baroque and neo-baroque characteristics.

The final two poem-chapters also offer some level of closure to our reading of «Черная Пасха» as an allusion to Shvarts's personal spiritual quest. While this question has not been addressed in depth thus far, in order to offer focused attention on her connection to the "Petersburg myth" and literary underground, it becomes a necessary pursuit for this final chapter of my thesis. Spirituality serves as the vehicle for Shvarts to roam the plains of her (neo-) Baroque Petersburg, and also allows her poet-narrator to find redemption in the cycle's cryptic

final lines of verse. This chapter thus offers chronological close reading of these final chapter-poems alongside renewed exploration of the importance of spirituality for Shvarts's poetic project. Looping back to images from earlier in the poem-cycle, I hope to offer glimpses of a potentially deeper reading, one that has in part been done already by leading scholar of the Leningrad underground Josephine von Zitzewitz, leading as well into larger questions to be explored in the conclusion section. Balancing this discussion of spirituality with problems of her (neo-) Baroque, this chapter aims to anticipate conclusions that tie the two phenomena together in a more holistic characterizing of Shvarts's poetic underground.

Spiritual suspension in «Наутро»

«Наутро» begins with a serene image, evocative of the fleeting musing of a peaceful and celebratory Easter offered in the first poem-chapter.

> Я плыву в заливе перезвона,
> То хрипит он, то – высок до стона.
> Кружится колокольный звон,
> Как будто машет юбкой в рюшах,
> И круглый, как баранка он,
> Его жевать так рады уши. (Шварц 79)

While not reveling in celebration, Shvarts has found some level of peace in these lines, floating in a sea of harmony, her ears chewing the ringing of the easter bells with pleasure. Reminiscent of the "speck of dust" floating in a blinding beam from «Канун», her pleasure here is more nuanced than what could be anticipated in that opening chapter. While in that early scene of tranquility Shvarts's poet-narrator imagines a day of celebration that slowly turns into a contemplative moment of suspension, here she awakes exactly in that state of suspended bliss, with the earlier tone of excitement exchanged for one of simpler tranquility. Settling into the inevitable "morning after", Shvarts repetitively offers the images of circles, first in the verb

«кружится» and then with the adjective «круглый». These words appear two lines apart, but are importantly describing the same ringing sound of the bell «колокольный звон», emphasizing the circling, encompassing nature of the aural effect.

In the next set of lines Shvarts returns to another image from the earliest parts of the poem, this time offering a gentler description of Leningrad's northern climate:

> Христосуется ветер и, косматый,
> Облупливает скорлупу стиха,
> И колокольня девочкой носатой
> За облаками ищет жениха. (Шварц 79)

The sky, previously grey as dirty socks, now appears gentle, kissing («христосуется») our poet-narrator, peeling away the outer shells of her poetry. Following this image, the brief fifth chapter ends with a creative image of a church-tower being likened to a woman with a long nose, her head resting on the horizon and looking upwards in search for both Christ and a groom, the double meaning of the final word «жених». In this act of personification, Shvarts's female subject embraces her landscape and confronts the sky, indicating a symbiotic convergence with and opposition to her natural landscape. In a novel reversal of the Petersburg text, which systematically posits the downtrodden hero as a suffering subject to the unforgiving climate of Leningrad (Lilly 428), Shvarts's hero, or at least an image of her, merges with the landscape to embrace the gentle kiss of Spring's oncoming.

Under the title «Наутро», this last image also evokes a peaceful awakening, the hangover of previous chapters replaced with a calm serenity. An easy morning, bathed in the comforting bells of the church, marks a distinct change from the earlier images of drunken abuse and blossoming bruises. It appears that, whether she knows it or not, Shvarts's poet-narrator has gone through a stark transformation and is no longer the victim to abuses and has found, through an embracing of the church, a spiritual rebirth. Shvarts suggests this most concretely in the final

image, which, while working as metaphor, merges the image of a long-nosed young girl with that of the church tower. This image seems to evoke someone bound to the earth, their head rooted in the topsoil, looking upwards in search of spiritual experience (given their doubling as a church tower). Additionally, von Zitzewitz has annotated Shvarts's rise to fame, noting the important influence of Anna Akhmatova, if not on Shvarts's poetic voice, than on her construction of a poetic and celebrity "self" ("From Underground to Mainstream" 250). It is no surprise then, that being so influenced by Akhmatova, who was so often defined by her profile image, Shvarts would imagine her own poetic self from this perspective, expanded and transposed onto the landscape of her native Leningrad, looking upwards in search of God.

A last important trait of this short fifth chapter-poem is the poetic/spiritual transformation that occurs in the second half, when the shaggy wind peels away a poetic shell, and the long-nosed girl becomes one with the church tower. While I have neglected thus far to directly address Shvarts's narrator, these final four lines offer up the imagery to explain this figure in vivid detail. The subject of this chapter emerges out of the turmoil of the previous four chapters to the serene morning, ready to embrace the promising kiss of Spring winds. This embracing of the natural elements allows her to finally peel away the shell of poetry she has hid behind so far in the cycle, revealing at her core a young woman searching simultaneously for Christ (or love, depending on the meaning of «жених» we take). While she appears more often enclosed in this "shell of poetry" («скорлупа стиха»), Shvarts's narrator peels it away to reveal her yearning to embrace the church as a source of meaning. As von Zitzewitz writes, Shvarts uses language as, "an instrument of worship rather than [as] itself the object of worship" (*Music for a Deaf Age* 112), but in this instance it seems that the poet-narrator puts spirituality and poetry in opposition to one another. That would be the case if it weren't for the fact that Shvarts never herself

abandons poetry, evidenced in that we continue to experience her narrator through Shvarts's poetic voice throughout the cycle. Reimagining her religious infrastructure in the shape of a woman's face, looking upwards in search of Christ, Shvarts evokes the possibility that a poet like herself can be bound to the earth, with roots extending to the underground, and still maintain a search for love and spiritual fulfilment.

"A nation runs on coffee"

In the final poem-chapter of «Черная Пасха», circles and cycles continue to feature prominently, the opening lines of «Обычная ошибка» offering a mysterious patchwork of fragmented imagery:

> Сожженными архивами
> Кружится воронье,
> На площадь черно-сивую
> Нет-нет да плюнет солнце.
> И кофеем кружит народ
> На городских кругах,
> И новобранцем день стоит,
> Глядит в сухих слезах. (Шварц 79-80)

In addition to the return of the crows, introduced early in the cycle, these opening eight lines feature the word "cycle" or "circle" as adjective, verb, and noun. First the crows are seen circling around the burnt archives, hovering above the black square turned ash-grey by the burnt pages, with the sun only momentarily penetrating the cloud of coverage. Suddenly Shvarts pivots to an image of coffee fueling a nation «народ», or more accurately translated as, "with coffee the people [nation] spin / in their urban circles," before turning to a final somber image of the grey day standing like a conscript, looking out through dried tears.[3] Shvarts seemingly returns to the

[3] Translated by Michael Molnar as, "Folk spin like coffee grounds / in the circles of the city. / Like a recruit, day stands / staring through dried tears." in Elena Shvarts *'Paradise': Selected Poems*, Bloodaxe, p. 37.

tone of despair we've grown somewhat accustomed to reading through this cycle, contrasting a critique of over-caffeinated urbanites with a stoic day, standing tall amid turmoil. Coffee has long been associated with the city of Petersburg as characteristic of its European, fast-moving nature, and so it is unsurprising that Shvarts cues into this stereotype given the care with which she attends to her city's history. Coffee also, conveniently for members of the underground, has the added bonus of sobering one up, or curing the aches of hangover, like those described in the third poem-chapter.

Shvarts also uses the imagery of coffee and circles to ground this chapter in her contemporary surroundings, highlighting the coffee culture that grew to unique importance for the underground literati of Leningrad. Viktor Krivulin often referred to the "Great Coffee Revolution" that struck Leningrad in the mid 1960s, noting the first appearances of coffee "apparatuses" in the city around this time. In a 1996 interview with Elena Zdravomyslova, he emphasizes the coffee culture of café Saigon, the notorious meeting spot for the underground discussed in chapter two. "At Saigon," Krivulin recalls, "there were seven or eight coffee machines (кофейные аппарата), with an eternal queue behind them".[4] While he notes the true origin point of Leningrad's revived coffee culture as an Aeroflot kiosk where the first "apparatus" appeared, Krivulin emphasizes a slow permeation of these machines into the intellectual hubs that blossomed in various cafes across the city. The opening of Saigon was, however, in his words, "an event (событие)," for the literary community, with people like Shvarts's first husband coming there to drink coffee, "from morning to evening, like going to work".[5] Perhaps this was a more respectable place, in Shvarts's view, to spend one's day,

[4] «В «Сайгоне» было семь или восемь кофейных аппаратов, там вечно стояли очереди.» in *Сумерки Сайгона*, p. 16

[5] «В «Сайгоне» приходили люди и стояли, попивая кофе, минут сорок, час… Некоторые, например Евгений Вензель, приходили туда как на работу — с утра и до вечера.» in *Сумерки Сайгона*, p. 16

compared with a boiler room or broom closet; or it was the natural landing place for a drunkard in need of sobering up.

Whatever the sentimental value of these last lines were—we might even imagine Venzel as the stoic conscript in the final couplet, gazing onward through freshly dried tears—they also carry important weight in Shvarts's Petersburg/Leningrad myth. The appearance of the coffee-fueled urban circle in this last poem-chapter draws an important connection to early Petersburg texts of the 19th century, when the city was known for its coffee, in contrast to Moscow where tea was the more common hot beverage. As Lilly notes in his study on historic myths of Moscow and Petersburg texts, early ethnography emphasizes this dichotomy between the old and new Russian capitals through their differing tendencies towards tea in the former and coffee in the latter. One ethnographer he cites, Ivan Kokorev, points out "that tea has more of an effect on the heart than on the head", with an early commentator, Faddei Bulgarin, summarizing succinctly, "Moscow is the heart of Russia, Petersburg is the head" (Lilly 437-8). While Shvarts does nod to tea's value in the final lines of her "Conversation with life",

> Как сердце не дрожит,
> Но с жизнью можно сжиться:
> То чаем напоит,
> То даст опохмелиться. (Шварц 78)

she highlights coffee's significance by identifying it as the source of the 'circling' going on in this final chapter-poem. In doing so, she build a bridge to her city's historical tendency towards coffee, highlighting the deep connection between the literary underground of the Soviet 70s as a natural continuation of the literary-intellectual circles of the 19th century.

<u>An Encounter with Life and Death</u>

In the final section of «Черная Пасха», Shvarts departs from her ponderings on coffee culture and instead turns back to the earlier allegory of the third poem-chapter, «Разговор с жизнью во время тяжелого похмелья». Following the image of the stoic conscript looking on through dry tears, the allegorical "life" suddenly reappears to the poem's narrator, but alongside death, who appears as life's doppelganger:

> Бывают дни, такие дни,
> Когда и смерть и жизнь
> Близнятами к тебе придут,
> Смотри не ошибись.
> Выглядят они простó –
> На них иссиние пальто
> Торжковского пошива,
> И обе дамочки, они
> Торгового пошиба. (Шварц 80)

While the day of their arrival may be arbitrary, it will most certainly be consequential if one confuses the two. Marked by a similar plain dress, Shvarts warns her reader not to confuse them, and describes them with a baroque mixture of high and low, placing the super-feminine «дамочки» alongside the archaic third-person plural pronoun for women «оне». They are both wearing blue dresses, described as particularly merchant-like.[6] And while Shvarts warns us not to mistake the two, the poem-chapter's title has already hinted at what we can expect to happen next.

The poem continues, unsurprisingly, with Shvarts mistakenly embracing one of the twins, thinking it to be the now familiar life:

> Губки крашены сердечком,
> И на ручках по колечку,
> И я скажу одной из них –
> У ней в глазах весна:
> "Конечно, ты – еще бы – жизнь,
> Ты, щедрая, бедна". (Шварц 80)

[6] Michael Molnar translates the latter five lines as "They're plainly dressed / in bluish coats, provincial style, and both ladies have a manner that is mercantile." *Шварц,* p. 37.

Describing life as poor and generous seems surprising, given the unrelenting conflict Shvarts seemed to pose between the poem's "self" and "life" in the earlier chapters. While this twin seems to project beauty and virtue, as well as the promise of spring, it is unsurprisingly a cunning "death" that coaxes Shvarts with false assurance:

> Но вдруг я вижу, что у ней
> Кольцо-то на кости.
> И на коленях я к другой:
> "Родимая, прости!"
> Но в сердце ужас уж поет,
> жужжит сталь острия.
> Бумагу Слово не прожжет.
> Но поджелтит края.
> 24 апреля 1974 г. (Шварц 80)

As the poem-cycle concludes, Shvarts's narrator realizes her fatal error and falls victim to death. Recognizing the exposed bone of death's finger, the narrator tries to turn back to life, but can already hear the approaching hum of a steel blade. Thus, she apparently meets her end in this unceremonious fashion, falling for the "usual mistake" of the poem-chapter's title.

The final two lines of this excerpt, however, suggest a potential redemptive aspect of the poet-narrator's death. Intentionally capitalized, the "Word" here must symbolize the Word of God, or in the godless landscape of Petersburg/Leningrad, the false prophet Peter. His authority will not burn through paper; in other words, the evil root of the city cannot hamper writers and poets from continuing their craft. However, this "Word" will sear the edges of the page, leaving its mark on the unique works to emerge from Peter's city. They will always be tainted by a horror or darkness, as this is the eternal condition of those artists determined to continue the tradition of the "Petersburg text". In a 1990 interview, Shvarts expressed skepticism at the notion of a "Petersburg school" of poetry, calling it "a fictive concept, one that has been dreamed up" (Polukhina 254). This final chapter reveals, however, that while she may not have believed in a

completely universal experience of Petersburg poetry and prose, she does see its most consequential writers bound to the city and prone to this “usual mistake”. While Petersburg may not have a unified “school” of poetry, its greatest writers and poets share a common condition, remaining throughout the ages subject to the city’s destructive nature. For Shvarts, this fortunately provided a life-affirming outlet in her vocation as a poet. While steeped in darkness, «Черная Пасха» presents the “Petersburg text” as a myth worth continuing, and in this sprawling, intertextual cycle, Shvarts presents a city worth exploring and admiring for all it has and will be.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the final lines of the last poem-chapter, it seems surprising that Shvarts's narrator succumbs to death, mistaking it for life even after having a full-fledged 'Conversation with life' earlier in the cycle. Turning back to that earlier section though, we can wonder if the narrator really does converse with life, or if the figure who steals away with Shvarts's voice is in fact death in disguise:

> Жива ль она? мертва? она безгласна,
> И голос мой прилип к ее когтям.
> И, как орел, она несет меня
> Знакомыми зелеными морями (Шварц 78)

Is it life or death carrying the narrator away over these green, familiar seas? If we take Shvarts's word that it is indeed life in this scene, then we might understand the "usual mistake" that her narrator falls for in the final lines. If life is just as willing as death to tease and steal something so vital as the subject's voice, then it could easily be mistaken for a cunning personification of death. Showing Spring in its eyes, «У ней в глазах весна» (Шварц 80) death stands out among all the eyes and faces encountered throughout «Черная Пасха», most of which have been black or greying. In this instance however, the eyes' lightness is a trick, and death reveals herself through the exposed bone of her ring finger. In these closing theatrics, death cunningly sweeps away the life of our narrator, leaving a lasting, consequential aural impression of a humming steel blade.

Before noticing the exposed bone of death's ring finger, Shvarts's narrator comments that it must be life, for her generosity and poverty: «Конечно, ты – еще бы – жизнь / Ты, щедрая, бедная» (Шварц 80). These, as is revealed, are not the virtues of life, but rather those of death, Shvarts's narrator realizing this as she attempts to kneel before life for forgiveness: «И на

коленях я к другой: / “Родимая, прости!” » (Шварц 80). The fatal error then, the “usual mistake” of the penultimate poem-chapter’s title, is to think of life as generous and poor. As we were told in the earlier poem-chapter, life had nothing that Shvarts’s narrator was in need of, «Хоть твоего мне ничего не нужно» (Шварц 77), but also was willing to take flight with the narrator’s voice. While poverty and generosity strike one as noble virtues, they reveal themselves in this last poem-chapter to be another one of death’s cunning deceptions, coaxing Shvarts’s narrator to her death, and rendering the Easter black.

If death in this instance is poor and generous, life, by rule of negation, would be rich and greedy. This dichotomous presentation of life and death, seems to be a pessimistic note to end the poem-cycle on, one that paints the world with stark black-and white rigidity. Shvarts may, in fact, be guiding her reader to a final and stable philosophy, one that does not view life and death as personified beings to run towards or away from, but rather as balancing forces of her meta-reality. To borrow Epstein’s thinking one last time, Shvarts presents in the poem cycle a world where the forces of life and death balance each other out through their opposing virtues, and the lesson of the allegory lies not in running towards one or the other, for they are so easily mistakable. Rather, Shvarts’s metarealist Petersburg embraces a lack of agency, and in doing so creates a baroque allegory for a world that has no centre. While Shvarts may see wealth and greed in the world around her, poetry gives her the means to place her native city on a metaphysical plane where the virtues of life prove redundant. This is at once a damning critique or late-Soviet society, most notable in her refusal to write the name “Leningrad” at all in the poem-cycle, and a novel reimagining of the “Petersburg text”, one that welcomes all the city’s past mythical heroes and villains to exist on the same metaphysical plane.

Shvarts exercises an original aim in «Черная Пасха», reimagining the typically bright Easter holiday through this lens of her city's dark history. In the earlier referenced 1990 interview, she emphasises this goal of unique creativity, even if she arrives at this by way of her literary predecessors. "My job," she clarifies, "is simply to avoid consciously repeating what someone else has already said" (Polukhina 253). While my thesis has noted important allusions in Shvarts's cycle to past Petersburg authors and poets, the reading of «Черная Пасха» has more so emphasized her willing avoidance of repetition. Instead, Shvarts crafts a unique intertextuality with the city's literary and historical myths, building up her own unique myth and Petersburg text. While I have often referred to her as an "underground" poet, this cycle also reveals her imperfect relationship with peers in the supposed "underground", and her yearning to push the boundaries of "uncensored" poetry. As Ann Komaromi writes, "Leningrad unofficial culture [did] not simply oppose official Socialist Realist aims—it expressed its own positive aims" (156). Shvarts stands out as one of the most original contributors of the Leningrad poets to a "positive aim," crafting a unique poetic voice that led to her long and influential career, of which «Черная Пасха» was an early and formative milestone.

Within the six poem-chapters of «Черная Пасха», Shvarts creates a unique blend of baroque and neo-baroque elements, drawing a connection between the social climate of late-Soviet society and the aspirational intent of her city's founding figure. Deleuze's study of the baroque has helped me clarify its role in Shvarts's cycle, most notably through elements Deleuze identified such as "the high and the low" and "the fold", the primary methods by which Shvarts weaves together her intertextual narrative (Deleuze 34-35). Her creative use of allegory, for which both Deleuze and Benjamin aid our comprehension, also supports the more baroque aims of her poetic project. Additionally, Calabrese's study of the Neo-Baroque has helped to clarify

Shvarts's more postmodern devices, including details, fragments, limits, and excess. Finding elements from both studies throughout the «Черная Пасха» cycle, I have argued for calling this a work of the (Neo-) Baroque, also acknowledging the important generic component of "metarealism" identified by Mikhail Epstein. These theoretical components have helped shed light on how Shvarts reinvents the "Petersburg text" under the stagnating atmosphere of late socialism, pioneering a playful and original prosody at the same time. Digging deep to the roots of her city's past, Shvarts locates the source of Leningrad's horror in the historical figure of Peter, using images and fragments of past Petersburg texts to demonstrate his lasting impact on the city he founded.

While the scholarly community continues to critically study later-Soviet samizdat works, close reading of underground poetry is principally necessary to drive further scholarship. «Черная Пасха» represents a mature but early work of Shvarts's oeuvre, and we are fortunately left with several decades of her poetry to read with a similarly critical lens. Additionally, her peers published within the pages of *37* and other samizdat journals offer adjacent opportunities for close reading and analysis, which fortunately many in the scholarly community have begun. The journal *37* offers its own possibilities for analysis as a home to new creative pursuits. In many ways, this journal embodies the central successes and failures of the Leningrad underground, as in its short life it stood for ground-breaking developments in poetry, prose, philosophy, and criticism. Even its name, which Krivulin once acknowledges as a reference not just to his apartment number, but also to the year of 1937, which marked the height of Stalinist terror, and to the inversion of the mathematical concept E, speaks to intellectual curiosity and a commitment to critical thought (Krivulin "«37», «Северная Почта»" 75). Later issues of the journal also expanded beyond the realms of Leningrad's underground to include both Moscow

conceptualist poetry,and translated foreign literature, including early translations of Jorge Luis Borges's prose. Future scholarship can continue to scrutinize and build knowledge that draws connections between the impactful work found within the journal's brief run of 21 issues.

While *37* had a short life, many of its poets and editors did not, and another research direction asks us to study what exactly happened to the "underground" writer in the decades after the fall of communism. Why did some, like Shvarts, rise to a state of semi-stardom, while others faded into obscurity? Scholars have begun to study the evolution of the "underground man" in post-Soviet society, including Ivantsov in his critical analysis of punk music in Russia in the 1990s, and von Zitzewitz in her exploration of Shvarts's steady rise to fame in the post-Soviet era. What happened to the communities of literature in Russia, however, remains a curious and active research question within the scholarly community. Research on samizdat has fortunately become more and more accessible through digitizing efforts, such as those which benefited this thesis, the University of Toronto's Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat. The continuation of projects like these, as well as efforts towards research and translation of samizdat, will expand the accessibility of samizdat research, and ultimately lead to more nuanced and expansive scholarship on this recent chapter of Russian and Slavic literary history.

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