Estonian, Russian and Samizdat Identity: Arno Tsart and Elena Shvarts[1]

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Abstract. The article explores a case of literary mystification by Elena Shvarts that occurred in samizdat during the eighties, featuring a fictitious Estonian poet. Aware of the relevance that translation played in the literary samizdat of Leningrad during the eighties, the investigation focuses on the similarities between the poetess' hoax and the concept of pseudo-translation, analysing the reasons for and outcomes of her endeavour in terms of identity research. Engaging with Shvarts' verses, Sergei Stratanovsky's account of the episode and the position that Estonia played in the samizdat imagined world, the article explores the role of Shvarts/Tsart's mystification in relation to the poetess and her readership.

Keywords: samizdat, unofficial poetry, Elena Shvarts, pseudo-translation, literary mystification, translation microhistory

Leningrad, 1982. The unofficial poetess Elena Shvarts introduces to a semi-official literary group the verses of the Estonian poet Arno Tsart, who apparently writes in Russian. Arno Tsart is a real success…until it is discovered that he is not real at all.

This article engages with a literary hoax that happened in the unofficial cultural environment of late Soviet Leningrad. Sergei Stratanovsky, poet and founder of the unofficial literary journal *Obvodnyi Kanal* (1981–1986), recalls the episode as follows:

> Klub-81 was formed in Leningrad in the 80s. It was an organisation created thanks to a compromise between the authorities and independent writers. Anyone could join it, but the board considered the candidates' texts and made a decision on their admission to the club. So, Elena Andreevna Shvarts submitted some poems for consideration allegedly written by her acquaintance, a Tartusian student, an Estonian writing in Russian, Arno Tsart. (By the way, no one noticed that there is no "C" [Ts] sound in Estonian). The poems aroused universal admiration – no one suspected a mystification. Then Tsart himself

appeared – Lena Shvarts asked a friend of hers (Russian, not Estonian) to play this role. However, the mystification lasted no more than two weeks: I don't remember who told me about the hoax, but I told Viktor Krivulin about it. Krivulin decided to face Shvarts as follows: he called her on the phone and said that Arno Tsart had visited him too, and also brought new poems, even better than the previous ones. A stung Lena screamed into the phone "I wrote that!". After that, Krivulin, Mironov and I decided to use the mask of Tsart to write several texts on his behalf, which Lena Shvarts was very unhappy about. (Interview with the author, 2022, emphasis added.)

Twelve poems under the name of Tsart were published in *Obvodnyi Kanal* No 3 (1982): one poem was written by Shvarts, one by Stratanovsky, one by Mironov and nine by Krivulin, who wrote and published another four 'tsartian' poems in *Obvodnyi Kanal* No 4. We do not know exactly which texts were submitted as Tsart's but *Obvodnyi Kanal* published the long poem called "Story about the Fox" in 8 parts and a later collection of poems (1996) containing several poems on the same subjects that could have formed the initial corpus of the mystification.

The aim of the article is to understand the scope of Shvarts' 'mystification', as well as the motives and outcomes, and the role of the 'mask' of Arno Tsart, adopted by Stratanovsky, Krivulin and Mironov. I aim also to expand the terminology used here, i.e. mystification and hoax, to concentrate on the intercultural dynamic: involving an Estonian fictitious poet writing in Russian and an unofficial Russian poetess, this situation shares some elements with cases of pseudo-translation. Therefore, the article explores the role that mystifications and pseudo-translation can play in (re)defining and (re)negotiating identity, emphasising the context of in-between-ness that characterised the Leningrad cultural underground, with the aim of possibly finding a better definition for Elena Shvarts' endeavour. The research questions that guide the investigations are the following: 1) What are the peculiarities of this literary mystification?; 2) What does this mystification tell us about the poetess Elena Shvarts?; 3) What does it tell us about her readership and her context? The article will partially rely on the terms capital[2] and *habitus*[3] as applied by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

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[2] According to Pierre Bourdieu there are three types of capital: economic, cultural and symbolic. Economic capital obviously refers to money and monetary exchange; cultural capital comprehends a person's education, influences – from family and friends – and tastes; symbolic capital is a value established on fame or admiration although it does not necessarily have an economic dynamic (1986: 246).

[3] According to Bourdieu *habitus* is a complex dynamic that is contemporaneously producer and product of cultural practices and is formed by what he calls a "set of dispositions" gradually acquired (Bourdieu 1990: 12–13).

The structure of the investigation is the following: firstly the article introduces the context of late samizdat and the characters involved; secondly it engages with the concept of literary mystification and pseudo translation, exploring their functions; thirdly, the focus moves to Shvarts as a literary figure in connection with the texts she wrote as Arno Tsart; fourthly the article considers Tsart's collection published in *Obvodnyi Kanal*, pointing out some relevant aspects; fifthly, the article concludes with some remarks about the meaning and aftermath of this case of mystification, in terms of identity formation, by addressing the research questions.

1. Unofficial literary life in late Soviet Leningrad

The clandestine circulation of texts that characterised the unofficial culture of Soviet Russia (and other countries such as Estonia, Lithuania, the former Czechoslovakia and Poland), i.e. samizdat, was based on a network of exchange of forbidden or uncensored literature, political and sociological essays, philosophical works and other genres. The literary samizdat especially developed in Leningrad, becoming in the seventies a platform for a wave of uncensored poetry that occurred in the frame of the so called "Orthodox revival" since unofficial poets of the time abundantly referred to Christian, and especially biblical, themes and imageries (Von Zitzewitz 2017). Hand in hand with the poetry revival, from the end of the seventies samizdat communities showed more and more interest in foreign literature, giving life to a significant increase in the translated literature circulating in samizdat, especially poetry (Lazzarin 2011: 209–218), and even to an unofficial journal devoted to translation, i.e. *Predlog* (1984–1989).

In the eighties contact between the samizdat world and the official publishing systems was more and more recurrent. After several failed attempts at collaboration with the official press in the seventies, unofficial poets managed to come to a compromise generating a new semi-official experience called Klub-81 in 1981.

Viktor Krivulin (1944–2001), Sergei Stratanovsky (1944) and Elena Shvarts (1948–2010) were all relevant Leningrad samizdat poets devoted to philosophical and religious themes. Their poems were published in the samizdat literary journals *Severnaia Pochta*, *37*, *Chasy* and *Obvodnyi Kanal*. Officially Krivulin worked as watchmen although he was very active in samizdat: he held a philosophical-religious seminar in his apartment with his wife Tatiana Goricheva and founded *37*, which was especially focused on philosophical issues. Stratanovsky, who attended Krivulin's seminars and was his close friend, founded *Obvodnyi Kanal* and published both poetry and translations in samizdat.

Elena Shvarts was an iconic figure of the Leningrad samizdat whose "religious quest in her writings is even more pronounced than in the case of her peers" (Von Zitzewitz 2017: 131). Her verses, the very first to be published, appeared in 1972 in the journal of Tartu University and are impregnated with an ecumenic mysticism that mixed different spiritual traditions. Shvarts was of Jewish origin, and like other great poets such as Mandelshtam, Pasternak, Brodsky (ibid.), was fascinated by Christianity. Her poetry is developed around biblical and Christian imagery, in a fragmented way, and is free from the official orthodoxy (ibid.: 123), as much as her poetic figure was detached from the official literary space. For Shvarts the poet is first of all an interpreter of life, and "poems are equivalent to biblical texts because they both explain and interpret life" (ibid.: 120). Certainly, the writing experience of Krivulin, Stratanovsky and Shvarts was also an attempt to make sense of their difficult everyday lives in the late Soviet period, transfiguring the quotidian through biblical imagery and re-interpreting their challenging existence at the borders of officialdom.

The philosophical and religious components of Leningrad underground culture (such as the above-mentioned philosophical-religious seminar held by Krivulin and Goricheva) was not only related to Orthodoxy or Christianity, but instead also involved Buddhism, Hinduism and other spiritual traditions. This fascination with abstract thinking, distant cultures and inaccessible worlds was not only a samizdat prerogative, although it was certainly especially developed by the underground intelligentsia. As Yurchak explains, it was a widespread attitude for the "last Soviet generation" (2006: 151). However, the prerogative of the poets mentioned above, especially of Shvarts, was that

> [t]he exploration of the spiritual dimension went hand in hand with the longing for a language that acknowledged the transcendence of reality, as well as a rejection of both the materialism of Soviet ideology and the prescriptive official aesthetics. (Von Zitzewitz 2017: 119)

Therefore, poetry writing was also a linguistic endeavour that was intrinsically bounded with the poets' identity in relation to their environment.

2. Literary mystifications and pseudo-translations

Keeping in mind the landscape of the underground culture of Leningrad, and the prominence of poetry and poetry translations, let us now approach the subject theoretically, to understand the nature of a literary mystification, comparing it with the concept of pseudo-translation.

A literary mystification has been defined as "the practice of writing under the shelter of distinguished names" (Farrer 1907: 1) and it has been adopted in history in various contexts and for various purposes, from income to recognition. It is fruitful to analyse literary mystifications from a literary point of view, because they usually reveal essential information about the author:

> Writers differ from non-writers only by leaving retrievable traces of the various people they are capable of becoming, because imaginative writing offers unique opportunities for naming and exploring alters. (Ruthven 2001: 110)

The idea of exploring an alternative self can be the artistic motor of a literary hoax or of a pseudo-translation, and as we will discover this was a prominent trait of Shvarts' poetics.

According to Gideon Toury, pseudo-translations are "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source text in other languages ever having existed" (Toury 1995: 40). Why should an author pretend to be a translator? The most obvious advantage of a pseudo-translation is the opportunity to hide behind a fictitious author: this way the pseudo-translator is delivered from responsibility for the content of the text. Therefore, this strategy is used to avoid serious repercussions in cases of cultural control and censorship, but also to bring formal or content innovations in the target literary language with the excuse of a fictitious source text. Therefore, with a pseudo-translation

> the responsibility over a work is consciously deferred to an imaginary, textually constructed author while the actual author takes on the role of translator. (Vanacker 2019: 85)

The 'de-responsibilisation' that characterises pseudo-translations was not uncommon in the official sphere, though it took the form of the de-authorising process that characterised the Soviet period (Monticelli 2016; Baer 2016). The de-authorisation that occurred during the Soviet Union was realised through the total control of authorial agency by the authorities. Authors were deprived of their authority over the text and forced to apply a literary structure imposed by the authorities. Such a disempowerment was reinforced by the fact that most unaligned or disgraced writers became translators, working at the service of another authorial figure. As Brian Baer explains:

> Writers whose original work did not align with the narrowing dictates of approved literature were given translation work to do. This occurred typically with authors who had developed their literary style and thematic pre-

occupations in the prerevolutionary Silver Age or in the tumultuous aesthetic environment of the early postrevolutionary period. (Baer 2016: 115)

Renouncing one's authorship in samizdat, the un-official platform par excellence, was not common; samizdat usually fostered authors who could not (and/or did not want to) publish officially. Even if in that environment pseudonyms were very common, the samizdat communities were usually well aware of who was behind pennames and the use of other literary personae was more a tool to protect oneself from authorities. Instead, Shvarts introduces a new character into the play, so to say, even presenting him in the flesh. In what follows I am going to present Shvarts' textual mystification, how it relates to her poetics, and analyse the elements that contributed to her mystification, including the presence of Arno Tsart himself.

3. Shvarts/Tsart verses and their 'scenography'

The "Story about the Fox", divided into 8 parts, is a narration in verse that originated from Shvarts' interest in various religious traditions; in this case the poetess drew from ancient Chinese mythology, imagining an encounter between a mythical Fox and the tartuensis student Arno. In Chinese folklore the Fox is a divinity with the power to turn into a witty, smart and seductive maiden to approach human beings. The intercultural play here is double: not only is the poem set in Estonia, but the Chinese component is predominant, making the poem exotic. As mentioned, in the late Soviet period a particular interest in eastern and distant cultures emerged (as reported by Yurchak 2006: 151 and exemplified by the official translation of Rabindranath **Tagore**[4] by Anna Akhmatova, the samizdat translation of Jiddu Krishnamurti[5] published in the philosophical journal *37* No. 6, 1976, and a samizdat translation from Chinese by the poet-translator Arkadii Dragomoshchenko in *Chasy* No. 46, 1983), and Shvarts' poetry embodies this fascination. Her novel in verse "Trudy i dni Lavinii, monakhin iz ordena Obrezania Serdtsa" (The Works and Days of Lavinia, Nun of the Order of the Circumcised Heart, 1987) the main character of which is a nun with an individual and controversial relationship with God, started with various quotations that help frame the work. These quotations aptly display the spiritual and religious syncretism that characterises Shvarts' poetry, as they belong to St Paul, Boris Pasternak, Olga Sedakova, Rainer M.

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[4] Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a Bengali polymath, poet, writer and thinker.
[5] Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was a stateless philosopher, orator and spiritual teacher of Indian ethnicity.

Rilke, Aleksander Mironov and Chuang-Tzu, Chinese mystic and philosopher of the fourth century BC. Moreover, in more than one poem Shvarts quotes other authors without translating them, creating in the reader an estranging effect. For instance, in "Puteshestvie" (Voyage, 1984) she includes a line by Goethe in German, writes two verses in Polish and quotes Byron, and in "Vita-Laif"[6] (1978) she plays with the English and Italian word for life, creating puns in both Russian and English. The intercultural dimension makes Shvarts' verse especially interesting as in her poems various characters from different traditions can co-exist, among them the Estonian poet Arno and the Fox. Valerii Shubinskii, samizdat poet and translator, points out that the legendary figure depicted by Shvarts is in fact

> [a] ruinous werewolf Fox, a charming demoness from the work of Pu Sun-Ling, a Chinese entertainer from the 17th century. (Shubinskii 2001)

Thus, Shubinskii points out a precise source on which Elena Shvarts may have drawn for her Chinese character. This element introduces another pattern in Shvarts's poetics, i.e. rewriting or reinterpreting myths and stories. Apart from the Chinese legend of the Fox, in 1982 Shvarts wrote *Orfeus*, reinterpreting the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. According to Shvarts Eurydice followed Orpheus on the way out of Ades, but her physical aspect would have been monstrous until her first breath of fresh air. Orpheus walks in fear: he does not see his wife but he hears her voice distorted, accompanied by grunts and wheezes that make him tremble. His anguish makes him turn around: he sees a "snake, wide as a tree trunk…" which "[h]urried behind with pleading eyes…" and he is overwhelmed by the horror. Eurydice understands that Orpheus did not recognise her and she decides to stay back:

> —No, your heart did not recognize me,
> No, you do not love me—
> The snake hissed with a smile.
> No, no! I don't need that—she waned
> Like smoke in the gloom of hell.
>
> (Translation by Ian Probstein 2015)

In this poem, Shvarts focuses on Eurydice's firm decision to renounce an imperfect love. Both this poem and Tsart's exemplify Shvarts' exploration of

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6   I transliterated the title directly from the Russian, although it is a compound of the Italian and English words for life.

"the complexities of female identity" (Winsor Wood 2013), exploring culturally distant examples of women, i.e. a Chinese fox-maiden and the Greek nymph, unfortunate spouse of Orpheus. These explorations of female identity, which will find their peak in the *Days and Works of Lavinia*, happened through "the other, fictive self" (ibid.), and will continue to wholly influence Shvarts's poetics until her death. From 1974 to 2006 the poetess wrote 27 poems using the literary persona of Kinfiia. This collection of poems is introduced as a collection of 'translations' of Propertius's lover Cynthia (Barker). Again, Shvarts' intent is not to make her readership believe her, rather the use of an Other and a distant world made her more creative:

> It's fun to transport your life from seventies Russia to Ancient Rome, as it were – everything becomes funnier and prettier. I used Ancient Rome as something like a powder room or a kitchen – for gossip and settling scores; poems 'from yourself' don't give you that possibility. (Quoted in ibid., translation by Georgina Barker)

Fictitious Others bring with them new environments to explore and new dynamics to discover. Therefore, the question that can be posed is: why did she choose an Estonian contemporary male poet to interact with a Chinese mythological woman?

Keeping in mind this question, let us move to the analysis of Shvart's scenography. Literary mystifiers and pseudo-translators usually adopt certain strategies to reinforce the nature of their text, among which are the invention of a literary persona, the explanatory paratext, the 'found manuscript', topos and so on. These tricks create what Beatrijs Vanacker defines as the "scenography" of pseudo-translation, i.e. "a narrative embedding [...] that formally moulds the work and legitimises the act of writing" (2019: 96) and creates a convincing context for literary production or translation. Interestingly enough, the use of the word scenography here seems quite fitting as Elena Shvarts was also a translator of plays for several Leningrad theatres, having studied theatre at the Leningrad Institute of Theatre. Shvarts' scenography is based on certain textual elements as well as the extra-textual, physical presence of Tsart himself.

Shvarts' attempts at mystification on the textual level are mainly the introduction of some references to Tsart himself and to his environment:
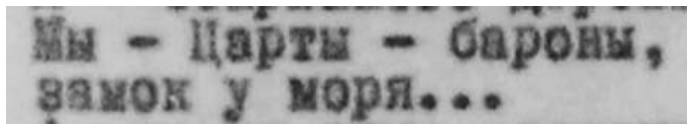
Fig. 1. ("We, Tsarts, are barons,/[we have] a castle on the sea"), and to Vene street (a street in Tallinn Old Town), also with a reference to the catholic church situated there.
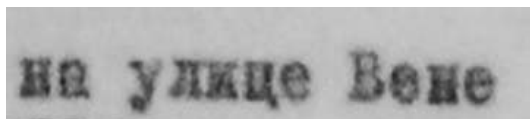

Fig. 2. ("In Vene street")

Mentioning Tsart's name and giving a reference to the city of Tallinn helps the reader connect with the fictitious author's environment and provides a background to the author. In these references Shvarts emphasises two aspects that are closely linked to the European identity of Estonian history and culture, i.e. the Baltic-German nobility[7] and the Catholic church, both far from the indigenous Estonian ethos but symbols of their connections to other European peoples.

Shvarts goes further, completing her scenography with her 'Estonian' acquaintance. In doing so she probably hoped to be convincing enough to continue writing as Arno Tsart, probably wanting to work on other poems belonging to the same cycle. By introducing Arno Tsart, Elena Shvarts emphasises her role as a figure in between, one could say a mediator. As her first published poems appeared in the Tartu University newspaper, Shvarts' cultural capital was linked to Estonia and therefore her alleged connection with a poet from Tartu could have been believed.

Other aspects of Shvarts's scenography can be explored by reading the *Mundus Imaginalis: Kniga otvetvlenii* (Mundus Imaginalis: Book of Branches, 1996) poetry collection, where there is a section devoted to Tsart's poems. Here all the poems written by Shvarts in the initial mystification were collected,

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7   Baltic Germans started to settle in the area of Estonia and Latvia in the 12th century, due to the Northern Crusade announced to christianise the pagan peoples who inhabited these lands. They formed the privileged class in Estonia and Latvia for several centuries until Estonian and Latvian independence in 1918–1919. Bartlett (1993)

whereas only the long poem in eight parts was published back then in *Obvodnyi Kanal*, with also a later poem dated 1984.[8] All the poems belong to the narrative frame regarding the Fox, and the later poem is a continuation. The first scenography element here is dedication to the poet Aleksei Semenov, who often travelled between Tallinn and Leningrad and who translated and published several Estonian poems in *Severnaia Pochta* (1978) and *Obvodnyi Kanal* (1981). In this way Elena Shvarts was also partially recreating Arno's network, and justifying his connection with her and with Leningrad.

Leningrad, as a city and as a cultural environment, is crucial for this mystification: Shvarts tried to introduce the fictitious poet to Klub-81, based in Leningrad which was also the centre of literary samizdat. Indeed, the most relevant and cohesive aspect that can be found between Elena and Arno is the 'St Petersburg-ness' of the humour in the poetic narration:

> In fact, the most wonderful thing is not that a Chinese magician lives in St Petersburg, but that he lives under the guise of a watchman, Semyonich-Krivoy, and on holiday he goes to feed the dragons Shi-jia ... dumpling after dumpling. This is the humour of Hoffman, Gogol, the young Dostoevsky, pure and scary, but so unlike the foolishness of popular postmodernism. This is Petersburg humour. (Shubinskii 2001)[9]

Through this St Petersburg/Leningrad lens Shvarts explores other worlds, such as Greece, Rome, Estonia and China. Shvarts' poetry, as well as her friends', is thus embedded in the St Petersburg literary legacy.

4. Arno Tsart's poems in *Obvodnyi Kanal*

Moving on to the collection, I would like to consider four patterns that can provide a general idea about the collection. The first element to consider is the preface, written by Kirill Butyrin, co-founder of the journal. He immediately declares that Arno Tsart was a mystification, and that the author behind the poems was Elena Shvarts. The preface also describes how Shvarts' idea proved to be fruitful for other poets too, starting a wave of poetry called tsartism which "expands the borders of the contemporary poetic conscience, adding to it dynamism and elasticity". The most relevant remark contained in the preface relates

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8   In the last and most recent poem under the name of Tsart, Shvarts ironically mentions Krivulin, spelling his name à la Chinese: "Kri-vu-liin".
9   Here Shubinskii refers to the last poem of the Arno Tsarts cycle, written in 1984 and set in St Petersburg.

ROSSI

to the strong relationship between Shvarts and Tsart: this relationship is defined as a "metamorphosis" of the poetess into a new literary persona.

The second element is the over-identification between author and lyrical I. This trick is used to restate the authorial figure and reinforce his/her authority over the text, shadowing instead the translator or the mediator. In the figure below I have collected all the references to the author's name and surname that can be found in the poems.
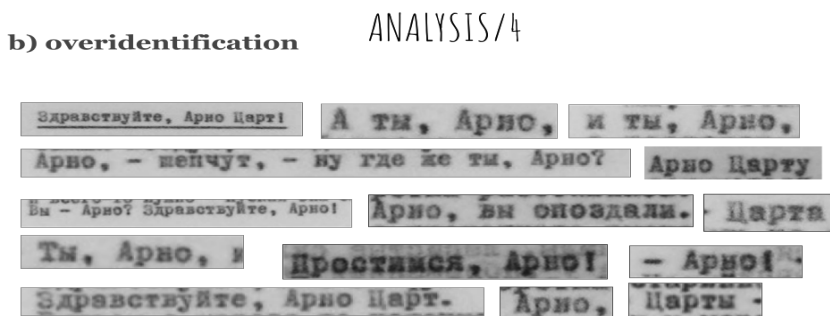
b) overidentification   ANALYSIS/4

Fig 3.

The figure shows all 16 occurrences of the fictitious author's name and/or surname in the 12 poems. The repetition of the name throughout the texts is also telling of the relational/dialogical nature of the poems, apart from Mironov's, and of the narrative frame provided by Shvarts' poem which served as a pilot for others.

The third aspect is the abundant presence of references to the culture and geography of the fictitious poet.

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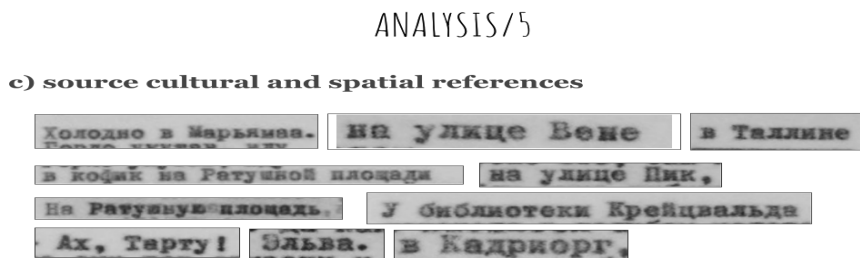c) source cultural and spatial references

Fig 4.

In Fig 3. several names of Estonian cities and places can be found, such as the cities of Tallinn, Tartu, Elva, the rural municipality of Märjamaa and various locations in Tallinn, such as Vene street (which in Estonian literally means Russian street), the coffee shop in Raekoja square, Pikk street, the library dedicated to the poet Kreutzwald, and Kadriorg park. As in Shvarts's text, these urban indicators help create the setting of the poetic narration and the identity of the fictitious author.

The fourth pattern concerns the way the poems interact with Shvarts' "Story about the Fox", which comes last. The structure of the publication is the following: the first two poems are by Krivulin, then there is one by Stratanovsky, one by Mironov and other six are again by Krivulin, whereas the last one is Shvarts'. Krivulin is certainly the most prolific, as exemplified by the above-mentioned poems published in the following issue of *Obvodnyi Kanal*, once again under Tsart's name. His poems also have the function of providing patterns and connections between the various styles and themes presented in the collection. For example, in his "The Last Poem", which immediately precedes Shvarts' "Story about the Fox", we read:

На осиротелые лисьи норы
набредаю. Сегодня видел лису –
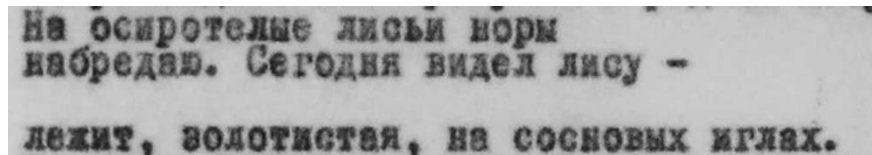
лежит, золотистая, на сосновых иглах.

Fig 5. I come across orphaned fox holes. / Today I saw a fox – lying down, golden, on pine needles.

In other poems under the name of Tsart, Krivulin suggests a contraposition between Arno's Estonian-ness and his fascination with the East:

– Мы, эстонцы, народ спокойный,
и ты, Арно, почти в Европе родился,
а разговариваешь, будто вырос
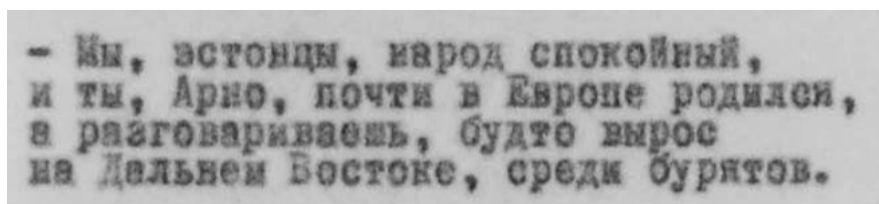на Дальнем Востоке, среди бурятов.

Fig 6.

We Estonians are a quiet people / and you, Arno, you were born almost in Europe / but you speak as if you grew up / in the far East, among Buryats.[10] Stratanovsky's poem "Progulka s filosofom" (A Walk with the Philosopher) relates to Shvarts' poem, mentioning Tsart and his Chinese friend, who discuss under the Tallinn sky:

Острые башни тушью
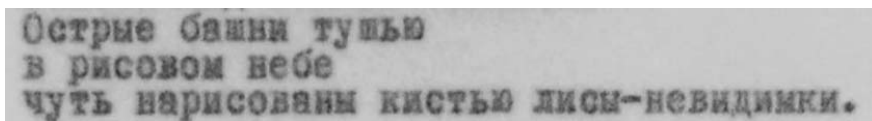в рисовом небе
чуть нарисованы кистью лисы-невидимки.

Fig 7. Pointed ink towers / in a rice sky / as if they were drawn by the brush of an invisible fox.

The texts that precede Shvarts' "Story about the Fox" seem to prepare the reader for what is to come, with small references to foxes, Chinese characters, and philosophical discussions about Yin and Yang set in Tallinn. It can therefore be said that the collection of poems was probably orchestrated by Krivulin, who wrote the majority of the poems, although it was certainly based on the narrative frame provided by Shvarts' initial mystification. Moreover, the poems are geographically set in Estonia, with plenty of Estonian geographical references, although they are more impregnated with Chinese and Russian cultural hints. Tallinn and Tartu are essentially a background, the scenery for this mystification, whereas the poetics is full of Eastern references, especially religious and philosophical, and at the same time is embedded in the samizdat experience of Leningrad and its literary pre-revolutionary legacy.

5. Unfolding identities

Keeping in mind the peculiarities of this mystification and the role it played within Shvarts' poetic universe, the research questions can be approached.

First of all, what are the peculiarities of this literary mystification? There are two relevant aspects that make this hoax quite unique. The first is the intercultural play between the Far East and Europe, Estonian, Russian and Chinese languages and cultures. The second is the dynamic that followed the discovery

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[10] The Buryats are an indigenous group living in the republic of Buryatia, in Eastern Siberia, a federal state that is part of the Russian federation. They are mainly Buddhist and Shamanists.

of the mystification: the poems proposed by Shvarts were not rejected or merely assimilated into her poetics, they prove to have a creative strength that prompted other poets to experiment with that narrative and poetic frame.

Secondly, what does it tell us about the poetess Elena Shvarts? Although the exploration of the Self through the Other was deeply embedded in Shvarts's poetics, adopting a male Other was an exception for her. Observing Shvarts's lyrical personae though, it is clear that these women are always in relation to a male figure: Lavinia with God, Eurydice with Orpheus, Cynthia with Propertius. Therefore, with Arno Tsart she probably explored two different and conflicting Selves within her own poetics. In addition, there could have been a gender issue: writing with a male identity could have allowed space for her *yang* nature to emerge. As Arkadii Dragomoshchenko recalled, she referred to herself as an androgyne (Winsor Wood 2013). Therefore, Arno Tsart reveals the diversified nature of Elena Shvarts' character and the feeling of in-between-ness she shared with other samizdat poets.

Thirdly, what does it tell us about her readership and her context? This question is very relevant due to the polycultural nature of this mystification. Pseudo-translations have the function of revealing or confirming certain aspects of the target culture identity, face to face with a foreign-ness.

> Pseudotranslations tell us, inevitably, much more about the patterns of the receiving culture than about the patterns (faked, imitated or pastiched) of the putative source culture. (O'Sullivan 2012: 124)

The fact that Tsart became a "mask", as Stratanovsky described it, for other samizdat poets means that the Estonian lyrical I could enhance their poetics, or at least inspire them. Stratanovsky, Mironov and especially Krivulin were probably fascinated by Estonian culture, so close and yet so different, accessible and yet so detached from Leningrad.

In conclusion, both for Shvarts and the other poets involved in this mystification, Arno Tsart was more than a literary fraud or game. Tsart and his mythical Chinese companion were a subject that enclosed the Eastern philosophy and religious practices in which they were interested, as well as the Western soul of Estonia, which Stratanovsky defines as "our accessible Europe" (interview with the author, 2022).

Being that the polycultural dimension is so crucial for this literary hoax, I suggest that Arno Tsart's case retains some aspects of pseudo-translating practice. The comparison between this case and pseudo-translations per se has been fruitful to emphasise the polycultural dynamic of Shvarts'/Tsart's hoax. Surely, we cannot define Shvarts' texts as pseudo-translations, since she did

not pretend to be the translator, but the term "mystification" is quite broad to define this case. Interestingly, Shvarts acted the other way around compared to most mystifications: she claimed that her poems belonged to someone else without choosing a renowned figure or trying to represent instead an unknown, non-existent, contemporary Estonian poet. Therefore, I believe that Shvarts' mystifying practice can be placed between a literary hoax and a pseudo-translation. Due to the theatrical nature of this case, I think that the term *transcultural* or *polycultural performance* could be a good option to define this mystification without diminishing the role that interculturality plays in these cases. This transcultural performance, where the author masks the self with another identity, is not a de-authorising practice, but is instead an empowering exercise that enable the author to express his or her own poetic and cultural context from other perspectives. This transcultural performance included a polycultural (Estonian/Chinese) translation into the Soviet Russian sphere of samizdat and three characters: Elena Shvarts, Arno Tsart and the Fox. The former is the only authentic character, whereas Arno Tsart was played by an actor and the Fox existed only in texts. Elena Shvarts' performance fits the *habitus* of the poetess well, where her theatrical personality (as some friends described her, as quoted in Winsor Wood 2013) and her search for a transcultural poetics, through which she could explore her polymorphous poetic identity, certainly played a crucial role. As said above, in this performance Estonian geography was mainly used as a background, understood from the Leningrad perspective, whereas the Chinese myth provided the exotic-ness of and the alienation from elsewhere within the underground of Leningrad.

6. Conclusions

Shvarts'/Tsart's case encompasses the categorisation of literary mystification and pseudo-translation, including many aspects of both. The polycultural performance that stem from Shvarts' poems is strongly bound to the samizdat fascination with the East and the West at the same time, as well as to Shvarts' multiple and various lyrical I (Kinfiia, the Fox, Lavinia and Arno). Shvarts's mystification did enhance her creative possibilities, but it also served as a prompt for her cultural and social environment, as proved by the collection published in *Obvodnyi Kanal*. The condition of in-between-ness that the frame created by Shvarts offered was indeed fruitful for some samizdat poets, who were performing their agency between official and unofficial, natural and supernatural domains, and between reality and myth.

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