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Incarceration and Death:
The Poetry of Vasyl' Stus

by

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Notes on Translation

All the translations of Stus' poems and excerpts from letters, as well as some Ukrainian-language sources quoted in this work are done by me, unless otherwise stated. In approaching Stus' poems, my guiding premise was to reflect as precisely as possible the original text in Ukrainian. All the translations are as literal as possible without any regard to poetic merit. Inasmuch as I deal with themes, motifs and images in Stus' works, this approach is necessary for both analysis and comparison.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the poetic works of Vasyl' Stus (1938-1985), a Ukrainian dissident writer whose uncompromising stand resulted in his untimely death in the Soviet Gulag. Given that in Ukraine Stus has often been regarded primarily as a national hero, the thesis presents him above all as a poet. This work explores the influence incarceration had on the poet's themes, motifs, and images; it traces some of the literary influences, and identifies the role of existentialism and Buddhism in both his life and writing. The dissertation places Stus in a context of prison writing in general, showing how his themes of life and death, love, space and time resonate with writers and philosophers of different periods and cultures.

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Introduction

> It is arguable that it is impossible to understand Occidental thought without recognizing the central significance of prison and banishment in its theoretical and literary composition.[1]

The poetry of Vasyl' Stus (1938-1985) has not yet been subjected to systematic and comprehensive analysis. This thesis does not pretend to perform such a task. It is instead an investigation into his prison (and exile) writings that seeks to explore -- on a comparative basis -- the effect that confinement had on the themes of his poetry. The guiding premise of this thesis is my conviction that the experience of imprisonment has, throughout history, evoked broadly similar intellectual and poetic responses among numerous writers.[2] In my opinion, among the factors that have a most profound impact on the human psyche, incarceration occupies a place next only to love and death. Much of the influential literature of Judeo-Christian civilization was composed under conditions of incarceration and exile.[3] The list of incarcerated writers is long and impressive. Even though their "crimes" were different -- from what was considered to be political treason to sexual perversion and to dissident activities -- their works firmly established their names in literature and

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[1] Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1990) 3.

[2] The impact of confinement was explored by Victor Brombert in *The Romantic Prison* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.).

[3] Davies 3.

brought fame to their authors. Among the latter are Boethius, Benvenuto Cellini, François Villon, André Chénier, the Marquis de Sade, Taras Shevchenko, Wilfrid Blunt, Fedor Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine, Victor Serge, Jean Genet, Ezra Pound, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Wole Soyinka, to name but a few. The list also includes Vasyl' Stus, a Ukrainian poet whose confinement resulted in his death and inspired his best poetry.

Vasyl' Stus was born on January 8, 1938, in the village of Rakhnivka, south of Kiev. However, he spent his childhood and youth in the Donbas Region, an extremely Russified area of Ukraine, where his parents moved in 1940. After graduating from a pedagogical institute, Stus worked as a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature. In 1963, he moved to Kiev, where he became a graduate student in literary theory at the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR.

The atmosphere of the 1960s, with its political thaw, revival of the arts and informal literary gatherings, had a profound effect on the intellectual life of the Ukrainian capital. A group of Ukrainian writers, subsequently called *shestydesiatnyky* ("the generation of the 'sixties"), "rediscovered the function of poetry and successfully defended the poet's right to the lyrical apprehension of reality and linguistic experimentation."[4] The "sixtiers," mostly poets, included Vasyl' Symonenko, Ivan Drach, Vitalii Korotych, Lina Kostenko, Mykola Vinhranovs'ky. Their works betrayed different styles, and hence the writers did not form a single school. However,

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[4] George S. N. Luckyj, "Ukrainian Literature," *Discordant Voices* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1975) 130.

they were united by a new appreciation of poetry. They consciously stayed away from the language clichés of socialist realism, seeking "new images and intricacies."[5] According to M. Kotsiubyns'ka, the "sixtiers" were united by the awareness of the necessity to learn, to free themselves from the tenets of ideological dogmas and traditional phraseology. They strove to become part of the world cultural process, being acutely aware of the unrealized cultural potential of their own nation.[6] They wrote about love, nature, human existence, explored Ukrainian history and mythology, and reevaluated the world around them.

The creators of the literature of the 1960s and 1970s might be divided between those who remained on the "outside" (e.g., V. Symonenko, V. Holoborod'ko, I. Drach, L. Kostenko) and those who found themselves incarcerated for political reasons (e.g., I. Kalynets', M. Osadchyi, etc.). The boundaries between the two groups are often fluid because many writers who avoided arrest were treated by society as outcasts, their ability to publish severely restricted. V. Symonenko, for example, became a cult figure among young Ukrainians soon after his death in 1963. His poetry is marked by strong lyricism, an uncompromising tone and satire which expose the vestiges of Stalinism. Written in a fairly traditional style and expressing deep love of Ukraine, Symonenko's works betray the influence of Shevchenko's writing.[7] Lina Kostenko was never

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[5] George S. N. Luckyj, *Ukrainian Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 70.

[6] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Ivan Svitlychnyi, shistdesiatnyk" in Ivan Svitlychnyi, *U mene til'ky slovo* (Kharkiv: Folio, 1994) 7-8.

[7] Luckyj *Ukrainian Literature in the Twentieth Century* 71.

arrested but she was forbidden to publish for many years. Her poems have an aphoristic quality and are at the same time honest and sincere -- a quality which Ukrainian readers found immensely refreshing and appealing. Drach, like Kostenko, was a prolific poet but suffered less from publication bans than others. After being censured, he compromised with the Soviet regime. His poetry, besides thematic innovations, reveals preoccupation with the language and readiness to experiment with new forms of expression.

The writers of the second group (the "arrested") also offer a wide spectrum of creative approaches. Thus Ihor Kalynets' works, before and after incarceration, never engaged in political discourse. His poems explored the Ukraine of his time through its traditional cultural and mythological systems, experimenting with the form and structure of the verse, employing stream of consciousness, highly charged metaphors and elliptical expressions. Mykhailo Osadchy, on the other hand, recorded his experience of confinement in *The Cataract,* a powerful prose work exposing the practices of Soviet authorities and the KGB. The works of both Kalynets' and Osadchy were marginalized and inaccessible to the majority of Ukrainian readers until very recently.

A person responsible for generating many of the ideas of the "sixtiers" was Ivan Svitlychnyi, a poet and literary critic. His home became an unofficial centre of creative Ukrainian youth, attracting, among others, the critic Ivan Dziuba, poets Vasyl' Symonenko, Ivan Drach, Ihor Kalynets' and Vasyl' Holoborod'ko, artists Alla Hors'ka and Opanas Zalyvakha. Vasyl' Stus was also a frequent visitor of

Svitlychnyi's house. Later, in the camps, Stus recalled the inspiration and moral support that he received from Svitlychnyi, identifying his house as a place where "it was good to contemplate and [where] it was so comfortable."[8]

It is such unofficial gatherings of the Ukrainian intelligentsia that sowed the seeds of the country's dissident movement. According to Luckyj, the first dissenters were among the "sixtiers." It is they who provided the leadership for this movement.[9] The newly acquired freedom of expression, circumscribed as it was, attained political overtones, leading to protests against Russification and totalitarianism, and giving rise to a movement for human rights and civil liberties.[10]

In 1965, Stus protested against the repressions of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. His public outcry, which took place in the "Ukraina" movie theater in Kiev, resulted in expulsion from the graduate program. According to Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka -- a leading authority on Stus and a close friend of the poet -- this event proved to be a milestone in his life. Stus' "normal" life came

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8 Kotsiubyns'ka, "Ivan Svitlychnyi, shistdesiatnyk" 8-9.

9 George S. N. Luckyj, "Ukrainian Literature" in George S. N. Luckyj, ed. *Discordant Voices* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1975) 134.

10 This movement was almost completely destroyed by the arrests of 1972. The literature about this period is quite extensive. The following are just a few of the useful sources of information: Michael Browne, ed. *Ferment in the Ukraine* (Woodhaven, N. Y.: Crisis Press by arrangement with Praeger, Inc., 1973); Ivan Koshelivets', ed. *Panorama nainovishoi literatury v URSR. Poeziia, proza, krytyka* (New York: proloh, 1963); Bohdan Krawchenko, ed. *Ukraine After Shelest.* (Edmonton: CIUS, 1983); Leonid Plyushch, *History's Carnival: A Dissident's Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

to an end:[11] he was unable to find employment and the authorities systematically refused to publish his works.

In 1972, Stus -- along with other Ukrainian intellectuals -- was arrested and charged with anti-Soviet propaganda. The sentence included five years in penal colonies and three years of exile. Those years were marked by an unshaken determination to continue on his chosen course and show a deep commitment to his homeland which Stus perceived as betrayed and abandoned. "Behind me stood Ukraine, my oppressed people, whose honour I had to defend, to the death," wrote Stus in his diary.[12] While in exile, he wrote a letter to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, in which he renounced his Soviet citizenship, arguing that: "To be a Soviet citizen means to be a slave. I am not fit for such a role. The more I am tortured and abused, the greater is my resistance to my slavery, and to this system of abuse of man and of his elementary rights."[13]

Stus returned to Kiev in 1979. Despite being closely watched by the KGB, he joined the Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Group which was monitoring Soviet compliance with the provisions of the Helsinki Accords. Even though he was fully aware of the consequences, his conscience did not allow him to stand aside while others continued the activities he believed in:

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[11] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Strasti po Vitchyzni," *Vasyl Stus. Poezii* (Kiev: Radianskyj pysmennyk, 1990) 202.

[12] *The Idler,* No.VII, Vol. II, May 1986. "The Life and Death of a Poet" (Prison Diaries & Poems by Vasyl Stus) 18.

[13] *The Idler* 18.

> I ...learned that the people close to the Helsinki Group were being brutally persecuted... Realizing that the Group had been forsaken, I decided to join in. I could not do otherwise. If my life had been taken away, I did not need the crumbs. I set about rescuing my poems, and contributing to the information work of the Helsinki Group.
>
> I understood that in a matter of days the prison gate would close behind me for a long time. But what could I do? Ukrainians are not allowed to go abroad, and I was not very keen to go. Who would remain, here in Ukraine, to be the voice of indignation and protest? This was my fate, and fate cannot be chosen. We accept it, such as it is. If we do not accept it, it chooses us, by force.[14]

Eight months after his release, Stus was arrested again. The second sentence committed him to ten years of imprisonement and five years of exile. In his diary, Stus describes the conditions of incarceration at the concentration camp in the Perm region:

> The police regimen has been perfected. All appeals remain unanswered, and many are punished. Three times within six months I was denied visitors; a month later I was forbidden access to the prison shop; and three weeks I spent in solitary. Nowhere else was one punished for a hunger strike by the withdrawal of visiting privileges: here hunger strikes were an infraction of the rules.[15]

Stus also portrayed the prisoners' relations with the administration:

> A law of complete lawlessness regulates our so-called relations... Searches are conducted in the most arbitrary fashion: they seize anything they like, without

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[14] *The Idler* 19-20.

[15] *The Idler* 20.

> any notice or official record. We have lost every right to be ourselves, not to mention the right to have books, notebooks, and writings... Pressure such as this is possible only before death. I do not know when death will come for the others, but I personally feel it approaching...[16]

Stus died on the eve of perestroika, when the political climate in the country was beginning to change under Gorbachev's policies. The Ukrainian poet's life ended on September 4, 1985, in a punishment cell at a camp for political prisoners in the Urals. He was 47 years old. In November 1989 his remains were brought to Kiev for reburial.

Stus' death was the outcome of an uncompromising individual's struggle with the powerful Soviet repressive machine. He was too honest, daring, and unfit to survive the life in the camps. In his reminiscences, the former political prisoner Mikhail Heifetz wrote that "in the zone" one could survive and preserve minimum health by mastering a special art of maneuvering, which was employed even by such a proud and unyielding man of letters, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn."[17] However, Stus not only ignored this strategy, but also treated prison authorities as if he were "a prosecutor at a future Nuremberg trial," regarding them as criminals whose actions he was planning to report to the future court of justice.[18] To his friends he appeared as a Don Quixote, both in appearance and in deed:

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[16] *The Idler* 20.

[17] Mikhail Heifetz, *Ukrainskie siluety.* (Suchasnist: 1983) 18.

[18] Heifetz 21.

> After getting to know Stus better, I understood that he was proud and dignified as a Chinese emperor. He would not shy away from discussing poetry (not his own though), philosophy, intricacies of prose writing or fearless struggle (not his own) with security forces. However, his own illnesses and sufferings were never discussed.[19]

In his approach to life, Stus considered it important "to make one's own choice, and not follow circumstances."[20] This existential stand made him believe in the virtue of learning the high art of life. "Life is not pleasure. It is not satisfaction either. It has its own vital...sense. This sense determines the measure of life," he wrote in a letter to his wife and son.[21]

Stus began publishing poetry in 1963-65. However, his first collection of 40 poems, *The Circuit (Kruhovert')*, was rejected by the publisher. M. Kotsiubyns'ka noted that *The Circuit* reveals a budding poet whose works are influenced by P. Tychyna, S. Esenin, M. Kotsiubyns'ky.[22] It also betrays a very young person, whose concerns center around the beauty of life, nature, love, and devotion to homeland. Stus' second collection, written in the late sixties, *Winter Trees (Zymovi dereva)*, was also denied publication despite

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[19] Heifetz 13.

[20] Vasyl' Stus, A letter to wife and son, dated 5.7.81. *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 183.

[21] A letter to wife and son, dated 1.6.81., Stus 182.

[22] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Poet," in Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh*, Vol 1 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 10.

favorable reviews.[23] As it happened, the collection appeared in the West in 1970 and thus its first readers were individuals living far away from Ukraine.[24]

Stus' own short introduction to *Zymovi dereva*, entitled *Dvoie sliv chytachevi* (A Couple of Words to the Reader), gives a glimpse into the author's mindset and personality. It identifies his favourite writers and reflects his ideas on the nature of creativity. The collection, which consists of 115 poems, is uneven. It betrays a budding poet in search of personal style and willing to experiment with the fabric of the word.[25] He explores a variety of themes -- nature, love, philosophy, Ukraine, folk motifs, etc. The collection's intertextuality and literary allusions link Stus to Mykola Bazhan, Taras Shevchenko, Mykola Vinhranovsky, Hryhorij Skovoroda, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, all of whom he mentions in the introduction. His poetry does not as yet carry the weightiness typical of his later works, nor is it devoid of the didacticism characteristic of some of the *shestydesiatnyky* (e.g. Vasyl' Symonenko). However, the collection *Zymovi dereva* contains the seeds that later were to germinate into more hermetic and philosophical poems. Of

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[23] Dmytro Stus, "Zamist' komentariv," Vasyl Stus, *Veselyi tsvyntar* (Warsaw: Vydavnyche ahentstvo objednannia ukraintsiv u Polschi, 1990) 5. Many bigraphical sketches of Stus' life (e.g., Kotsiubynska's *Strasti po Vitchyzni*) state that the poet's first collection of poetry was *Zymovi dereva*.. However, *Veselyj Tsvyntar*, with a commentary written by the poet's son, who works closely with his father's archival materials, provides new light on the number of collections of poetry and their order.

[24] Vasyl' Stus, *Zymovi dereva* (Brussels: Literatura i mystetstvo, 1970)

[25] While, for example, "Kostomarov u Saratovi" (Kostomarov in Saratov) is noticeably influenced by Taras Shevchenko, particularly due to its romantic and patriotic pathos, "Medytatsia" (Meditation) demonstrates Stus' attempts to find his own themes and forms of expression, discussing eternity, fragmentation of emotions and hopes of youth.

particular interest in this respect is the poem "Kostomarov u Saratovi" (Kostomarov in Saratov), devoted to a prominent Ukrainian historian, writer and folklorist. Jailed by the tsarist government for participation in the Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (a clandestine Ukrainian organization that called for restructuring of society and equal civil rights, including national),[26] Kostomarov was subsequently exiled to Saratov. In his poem, Stus not only pays homage to this historical figure, but also links absence of freedom with death and identifies this kind of existence with actual incarceration.

Stus also engaged in literary criticism from 1958. In particular, in 1964, he wrote an essay, "Nai budem shchyri" (Let Us be Honest),[27] that reflects his views on some contemporary Ukrainian poets (e.g. B. Oliinyk, P. Movchan), identifies important achievements of Ukrainian poetry in general (in particular, the accomplishments of Ivan Franko, Lesia Ukrainka, Taras Shevchenko), and attempts to establish Stus' personal criteria regarding poetic creations. Stus expresses concerns over a generally low intellectual level of the current Ukrainian poetry which, according to him, does not satisfy the demands of the contemporary reader.[28] Critical of the poets who prefer to imitate Shevchenko rather than explore new realms of poetry, he writes:

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[26] Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press) 1990 236.

[27] Stus *Vikna* 15-33.

[28] Stus *Vikna* 16.

> The Ukrainian muse is dressed in Shevchenko's sheepskin -- and not only does it sweat in it, but stews. It is particularly difficult to rhyme in Ukrainian: there are not that many rhymes, not everyone dares employ assonances, etc. I like Yu. Shcherbak's blank verses, mainly for their modern fabric, and not for the contents. When an interesting poet appears in the future, he will be precisely this: free from rhymes and old canons, without the smell of sheepskin.[29]

Stus criticizes the so-called "branch" poetry, i.e. landscape, philosophical, lyrical, publicistic, etc., maintaining that classical poetry does not know such narrow specialization. He firmly believes that a poet's intellectual level should be reflected in the theme, composition, style, and choice of details of his poems.[30] Regarding the journalistic style as a major limitation of current Ukrainian poetry, Stus reproaches those young writers who create a poetic work for the sake of one final didactic phrase.[31] In his own search for the means of expression that reveal the intellectual and spiritual level of poetry, Stus seeks to identify the forms that can reflect "the finest mood shifts" (the feature he attributes to Walt Whitman's free verse).[32]

The 1960s also witness the appearance of essays in literary theory that consider the questions of form and content, theme and composition against the background of modern Ukrainian poetry ("Na

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[29] Stus *Vikna* 233.

[30] Stus *Vikna* 22.

[31] Stus *Vikna* 24, 19.

[32] Letter to wife and son of June 12, 1983, in Stus *Vikna* 233.

poetychnomu turniri" / "At the Poetic Tournament"),[33] and problems of creativity ("Do problemy tvorchoi indyvidual'nosti pys'mennyka" / "Toward the Problems of the Creative Individuality of a Writer").[34] The poet's interest in world literature is reflected in essays devoted to Rainer Maria Rilke, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and Frederico Garcia Lorca. In 1970-1971, Stus wrote a long essay on the preeminent poet of the 1920s, Pavlo Tychyna, whose later efforts were wasted on paeans to the Communist regime. Stus' two critical articles on the poetry of Volodymyr Svidzins'kyi[35] and Viktor Kordun,[36] completed in 1971, reflect the author's appreciation of subjectivity as a major creative factor. In particular, while identifying Svidzins'kyi's poetry as a means of escaping reality in order to preserve personal identity, Stus simultaneously reveals his own approach to subjectivity -- the necessity of maintaining one's spiritual entity and to explore one's inner Self which, according to Stus, manifests part of the macrocosm. Recognizing Svidzins'kyi's poetry as a medium of self-preservation, Stus unknowingly identified the nature of his own poetry during the subsequent periods of incarceration and exile. In an essay devoted to Kordun, Stus emphasizes the poet's intellectual efforts, psychological approach and creative thinking, coupled with

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[33] Stus *Tvory* Vol. 4 165-173.

[34] Stus *Tvory* Vol. 4 209-229.

[35] Stus *Tvory* Vol. 4 346-361.

[36] Stus *Tvory* Vol. 4 361-368.

the existential perception of the Self -- features evocative of the critic's own poetry.[37]

In 1970 Stus prepared a third collection, *The Merry Cemetery (Veselyi tsvyntar).* Having no hope of publishing it, he wrote it solely for a select circle of friends.[38] According to M. Kotsiubyns'ka, it was "an interesting poetic document of protest against intellectual stagnation, the parade of the absurd, imitation of real life, a kind of poetic report from the cemetery of living souls."[39] In this collection of 62 poems, Stus continued his search for new forms of expression, which included experiments with free verse that dominates *The Merry Cemetery.*

The collection functions on two levels. The first depicts the ugliness of Soviet reality, viewed primarily through the eyes of a lyrical hero who, nonetheless, is part of this realm. The second level expresses his philosophical ruminations: he tries to apprehend this reality and to grasp the source of "the cemetery of souls" by trying to discover what makes people around him spiritually dead. He searches for solutions, while constantly questioning whether he himself is dead or alive. In this collection one encounters the symbols, themes and motifs that will later dominate Stus' prison poetry (e.g., the mirror, the candle, God, life and death, life as a dream, the idea of crossing boundaries). This level also contains the

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37 For more information on Stus' essays in literary criticism see Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh,* Vol. 4 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994).

38 D. Stus 5.

39 Kotsiubyns'ka "Strasti po Vitchyzni" 205.

writer's hermetic, philosophical poetry which, again, will be quite representative of his poetry of confinement.

The Merry Cemetery includes three poems that constitute a separate group. They stand apart from other poems in the collection because of their mood and the manner in which they are written. Each of the poems deals with an individual held in high esteem by the author, respectively: Alla Hors'ka, an artist and a close friend of Stus, who was murdered allegedly by the KGB; the scholar and poet Mykola Zerov, who died in exile in 1937; and Valentyn Moroz, a dissident historian of the sixties, who was imprisoned for his ideas. The poems clearly reveal Stus' sympathies and orientation; each of his "heroes" is counterposed with characters that populate the "cemetery of souls."

The reaction of the Soviet establishment to the poet can be seen in the official comments that accompanied the verdict after Stus' first arrest. *Winter Trees* was characterized as a "poetics of decadence": "The most biased and inventive dreamer could not have come up with a more disgusting abomination and more terrible hatred toward our daily life. It is obvious that Stus' book is harmful because of its ideological orientation, its whole essence. An ordinary, unbiased reader can read it only with a feeling of loathing and contempt toward the so-called poet who discredits his people and his land in such a manner." *The Merry Cemetery* received this judgment:

> According to Stus, Soviet people are heartless machines, people without brains, dummies who mechanically participate in a senseless show in keeping with a pre-programmed scenario... From the poetic point

> of view, Stus' work is the ravings of a madman, a kind of malicious mutter, while from the social and political point of view, it is conscious slander, the tarnishing and defaming of our reality...[40]

Stus' nine months of incarceration in 1972 -- before and during his trial -- proved to be particularly productive for the poet. In this period, he wrote 302 poems and translated 129 poems by Goethe. These works constitute the collection *Chas tvorchosti (The Time of Creativity): Dichtenszeit,* which was published for the first time in 1995, ten years after Stus' death. It was prepared for publication by his friend, the literary critic Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, and his son Dmytro.[41] In the introduction to the collection, Dmytro Stus writes that *The Time of Creativity* reflects his father's search for a new form "which would serve to attract attention of the reader and at the same time develop the main theme of all his creative work -- human destiny in a transition period."[42] Written as a poetic diary of incarceration, the collection conveys the sentiments of a man facing an important choice. Reminiscences, contemplations, impressions, and reveries form "the framework of the subject-matter" of the collection and

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[40] Excerpts from the commentary to the verdict recorded in the archives of the Department of Manuscripts and Textology of the Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, fund 170, #2103.

[41] Vasyl' Stus, *Chas tvorchosti: Dichtenszeit* Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh, Vol. 2 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1995). A new, academic edition of Stus' works is being prepared at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences under the guidance of Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka and active assistance of Dmytro Stus. The edition will have four volumes which will come out in six books. Volume 1 (Books 1 and 2), Volume 2, and Volume 4 were available to me.

[42] Dmytro Stus, "Chas poeziji" in Stus, *Chas tvorchosti: Dichtenszeit* 6.

reveal the poet's inner world.[43] *The Time of Creativity* crowned an intense period of his literary and intellectual pursuits. According to D. Stus, the years between 1962 and 1972 were marked for Stus by

> a considerable influence by Goethe's, Rilke's and Pasternak's poetry; the philosophical ideas of Ortega y Gasset, Camus, Sartre, Jung, Plato, Skovoroda; the mythological systems of Greece, Rome and Ukrainian Rus'; as well as by the research of the poetic works by Tychyna and Svidzins'ky.[44]

The materials confiscated from Stus during his arrest are yet another manifestation of his broad intellectual pursuits that embrace both Ukrainian and world literary and philosophical thought. Among the materials, seized by the KGB, were the poet's own poems, critical essays, prose works and translations, as well as works by contemporary Ukrainian writers V. Kordun, M. Kholodny, I. Kalynets', H. Chubai, V. Symonenko, M. Vinhranovs'ky, L. Kostenko, I. Drach, L. Taniuk; by Ukrainian writers from abroad -- V. Vovk and E. Andiievs'ka; by Russian writers -- A. Solzhenitsyn, M. Gorki, Ie. Ievtushenko, and B. Pasternak; philosophical writings by N. Berdiaiev, K. Marx, C. Jung and Ortega y Gasset.

Stus' intellectual curiosity keeps apace during his five years in the Mordovian camp (1972-1977). His letters home discuss the Frankfurt philosophical and sociological school, Camus, Goethe, Pushkin, Eastern philosophy.[45] Stus' friend, Heifetz, recollects

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[43] D. Stus 7.

[44] D. Stus 7.

[45] For example, a letter to his wife of July 5, 1976, in Stus *Vikna* 57-59.

conversations with the poet about Kant, Husserl, Japanese philosophy, and particularly Rilke, with whose works Stus was intimately acquainted.[46] In the camps Stus again returns to Rilke, translating the *Sonnets to Orpheus* and *Duino Elegies.*[47]

Stus' later incarceration and exile produced two more important collections: *A Candle in a Mirror (Svicha v svichadi)* and *Palimpsests (Palimpsesty)*, both of which were published in the West (in 1977 and 1986 respectively). It should be noted that even though the major portion of these collections was written either during the years of imprisonment or exile, some poems had been written earlier. Inasmuch as the poet's archives have not yet been fully systematized and studied, the task of dating each poem is quite difficult. Stus included earlier poetry in later collections, relying either solely on memory or deliberately creating new variants of the same poem. Thus, for example, the poem dedicated to Mykola Zerov, which had been part of *The Merry Cemetery,* also appears in *A Candle in a Mirror,* under "Poems from Prison." It is basically the same text with one stanza missing.[48]

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[46] Heifetz 24-25, 29.

[47] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Stusove samosoboiunapovnennia," *Suchasnist',* No. 6, 1995, 137-144. Dating Stus' translations of Rilke is not easy, inasmuch as he returns to the German's works over many years. For example, in an introduction to V. Stus's collection *Chas tvorchosti,* D. Stus states that Vasyl' Stus began to translate Rilke in the camps (D. Stus in Stus *Tvory* Vol.2 8). However, this does not square with the facts. In a letter to Ovcharenko (Stus *Tvory* Vol 4, 410), written in 1972, Stus writes that over a period of 8 months in 1971 he translated all *Duino Elegies.* Years later, in 1983, in a letter to his family, Stus states again that he translated Rilke's Elegies, about 900 lines (Stus *Vikna* 235). This points to the continuing appeal of Rilke's works for Stus who deemed it important to reconsider the intricacies of rendering the German's text.

[48] Vasyl Stus, *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd edition. (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 55.

Scholars generally agree that the collection *Palimpsests* is the pinnacle of Stus' poetic writings.[49] As the title of the collection suggests,[50] it is quite probable that Stus consciously signaled the difficulties involved in prison writing. Because some of his poems were lost while being smuggled out of the camp, he had to recreate them from memory. This led to the existence of variants of the same poems, creating for literary scholars a dilemma: did the poems result from "the author's creative quest or the failure of [his] memory"?[51]

A Candle in a Mirror and *Palimpsests* are regarded as two separate collections. It is plausible, however, that the former might be part of the latter. Consider the following: *A Candle in a Mirror* was not compiled by Stus but by the Canadian editor of the publication, Marco Carynnyk, who also assigned it a name on the basis of the recurring images of the mirror and the candle. Another issue to be considered is the fact that both *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests* contain poems which had appeared in *Winter Trees* and *The Merry Cemetery,* and which now emerge in *The Time of Creativity. A Candle in a Mirror* consists of 79 poems, nine of which were first published in *Winter Trees,* five in *The Merry Cemetery,* whereas the remaining 65 were purportedly written in

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[49] This was noted, for example, in Bohdan Rubchak's "Peremoha nad prirvoiu", *Vasyl Stus*, Baltimore-Toronto: Smoloskyp, Inc., 1987) 320, in Kotsiubyns'ka's "Strasti po Vitchyzni" 206.

[50] A palimpsest is "a parchment or the like from which writing has been partially or completely erased to make room for another text." *Webster's College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1991) 974.

[51] Nadia Svitlychna, "Vid uporiadnyka", Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 11.

the Mordovian camps between 1972-1976. As it turns out, however, five of the latter poems have been included in *The Time of Creativity*, which in effect suggests that they are the product of Stus' pre-trial period. *A Candle in a Mirror* also contains Stus' translations of a poem by Ragel Farngagen and three items from the *Sonnets to Orpheus* by Rilke.

As for *Palimpsests*, it contains 355 poems. Out of those, eight belong to his pre-arrest legacy (one to *Winter Trees* and seven to *The Merry Cemetery)*, 143 reflect his prison writing (of those 25 appear in *The Time of Creativity)*, and 204 represent works written in exile. Both *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests* contain witnesses of earlier poems that coincide to a greater or lesser degree, but not exactly, with previously published versions. For example, while the variants of "Meni zoria siiala" (A Star was Shining at Me) from *Palimpsests* and "Plach nebo" (Cry, Heaven) from A *Candle in a Mirror* and those in *The Time of Creativity* are almost identical, the variants of "Za chytanniam Yasunari Kawabaty" (While Reading Yasunari Kawabata) from *Palimpsests* and "Iz sebe vyklych leva" (Summon the Lion from Within Yourself) from A *Candle in a Mirror* are quite different in comparison with the poems from *The Time of Creativity.* "Sosna iz nochi vyplyvla" (The Pine Emerged from the Night) is the only poem that was written in confinement and included in all three collections. It is noteworthy that the variants from the *Palimpsests* and *A Candle in a Mirror* are closer to each other.

Whether *A Candle in a Mirror* was originally designed by Stus to be part of *Palimpsests* or not is an open question. What cannot

be disputed, however, is that the number of poems Stus wrote in confinement and exile is far greater than those he created before incarceration. Consider the following: *The Circuit*, *Winter Trees*, and *The Merry Cemetery* are the products of a ten-year period and contain 115, 62 and 40 poems respectively, or 217 altogether. By contrast, *The Time of Creativity*, written during 9 months of pre-trial incarceration, contains 302 poems and 129 translations. The five-year period of incarceration in the Mordovian camps (1972-1977) produced 208 poems (143 from *Palimpsests* and 65 from *A Candle in a Mirror*).[52] The three-year period of exile (1977-1979) produced 204 poems.[53]

Blank verse and iambic pentameter dominate Stus' poetry of incarceration and exile. This is not accidental, inasmuch as their employment is determined both by the nature of Stus' poetry and by his insistence on adhering closely to a conversational language. Let us consider first iambic pentameter. Its growth is one of the main tendencies in the development of Ukrainian poetry of the 20th century, particularly during the 1960s and the 1970s (the time when Stus wrote the main portion of his works). According to one scholar, iambic pentameter ideally implements "the type of conversational intonation," popular in Eastern Slavic poetry of the

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[52] *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests* share 9 poems with the same title. The relationship between the poems from the two collections range from being identical (e.g. "Ia tak i ne zbahnuv" / I Haven't Yet Understood) to quite different (e.g. "Posoloviv od spivu sad" / The Garden was Intoxicated with Singing).

[53] Some of the poems, written in exile, appeared in earlier collections, e.g. "While Reading Yasunari Kawabata" was originally part of *The Time of Creativity*, while "V meni uzhe narodzhuiet'sia Boh" (God is Being Born in Me) *Palimpsests* 409 -- part of *The Merry Cemetery*.

second half of this century.[54] With time the universal application of the pentameter allowed it to be used in different genres, and not be linked to a particular mood.[55] It is perhaps for this reason that this meter occurs in different contexts of Stus' poetry: when he discusses existence (e.g. "Ty tin" / "You are Shadow"), love (e.g. "Ty tut" / "You are Here"), space (e.g. "Chervnevyi snih" / "June Snow"), time (e.g. "Tvoie zhyttia" / "Your Life"), and death (e.g. "Skhovatysia ot doli" / "To Hide from Fate).[56] Blank verse, an unrhymed iambic pentameter, is associated with reflective and narrative poetry,[57] a feature that generally characterizes Stus' poetic works. It is noteworthy that some of his most hermetic and philosophical works were written in blank verse (e.g. both poems entitled "V meni uzhe narodzhuiet'sia Boh" / "God is Being Born in Me).[58]

The last collection of poetry that Stus was writing in the penal colony was entitled *The Bird of the Soul (Ptakh dushi).* In a letter to his wife, he described it as extremely prosaic, virtually without any pathos, sad, calm and stoic.[59] The absence of rhymed poetry in the collection is explained by Stus thus:

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[54] N. V. Kostenko, *Ukrains'ke virshuvannia XX stolittia* (Kiev: Lybid, 1993) 45-47.

[55] Kostenko 154.

[56] Stus *Palimpsesty* 191, *Svicha* 81, *Palimpsesty* 363, 198, 309.

[57] *A Dictionary of Literary Terms,* ed. by J. A. Cuddon. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) 84-85.

[58] Stus *Palimpsesty* 400, 409.

[59] Kotsiubyns'ka "Strasti po Vitchyzni" 212.

> All [poems] are unrhymed and close to conversational language, because, being 46 years of age, it seems almost shameful to rhyme (as if rhyming were some kind of child's entertainment).[60]

Significantly, the KGB has never returned this work to the poet's family, claiming it was lost.

Those portions of Stus' legacy that were preserved by friends and returned by the KGB is gradually becoming accessible to readers and scholars. When approaching this legacy Ukrainian readers face complex issues intimately connected with the history of modern Ukrainian literature. During the last few decades of nation-building, the Ukrainian urge to canonize its heroes has turned writers into official literary icons. This fate has not escaped Vasyl' Stus. This, in the words of the writer and critic Volodymyr Dibrova, will be "one more failure on the road of building national consciousness and one more triumph of the national subconsciousness."[61] Similar fears were expressed by Kotsiubyns'ka.[62] According to her, Stus' image as a martyr who died for the freedom of Ukraine might diminish his stature as a writer.

The linguist and critic George Shevelov wrote that "the heroic biography of Vasyl' Stus somewhat obscures our perception of his significance as a poet. We look for, and we find, an image of personal honor and firmness beyond the literary word... But we must

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[60] Letter to mother, sister and niece of 12.9.83 in Stus *Vikna* 235.

[61] Volodymyr Dibrova, "Problema zberezhennia natsional'noi totozhnosti za umov totalitaryzmu," *Slovo i chas*, 3 (1991): 17.

[62] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, *Vasyl Stus in Modern Ukrainian Context*, lecture given at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, 1991.

think of the universal aspects of his poetry: those that will transcend time and place, and the brevity of mortal life."[63] It has become a fact of life that the most popular verses by Stus in today's Ukraine are those that are the most comprehensible, where his opposition to the Soviet regime is most conspicuous. This is regrettable, since Stus' strengths as a poet are much more complex. His works contain a considerable amount of hermetic poetry whose multilayered meanings require and deserve thorough and painstaking analysis.

In an essay on the poetics of responsibility and the responsibility of criticism in Ukrainian literature, Petro Savchak made a number of perspicacious observations.[64] Firstly, Stus' biography, as the foundation of the poet's creative activities, has acquired a certain symbolism and didacticism, coming close to hagiography. According to Savchak, the parallels between Stus' life and the three prerequisites for canonization -- a life and exploits, miracles and undecayed remains -- are striking. The poet's "exploits" are his heroic stand in defence of Ukrainian intellectuals; the "miracle" is his ability to stay alive for many years in the camps. And, finally, his reinterrment (*à la* Shevchenko), with pious exhibition of his remains, closes the circle.[65]

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[63] George Shevelov, "Potion and Poison," *Vasyl Stus. Selected Poems* (Munich: The Ukrainian Free University, 1987) xxix.

[64] Petro Savchak, "Poetyka vidpovidal'nosti i vidpovidalnist' krytyky: dekanonizatsia tvorchoi osobystosti i tvorchosti Vasylia Stusa," *Stus as Text,* ed. Marko Pavlyshyn. (Melbourne: Monash University, 1992).

[65] Savchak 83.

Savchak also pointed out the similarities between the biographies of Stus and the nineteenth-century poet Shevchenko (1814-1861): both poets wrote under conditions of national and political oppression; they opposed the policy of Russification in Ukraine and spent a significant part of their creative life in prison or exile; both died when they were 47 years of age and were reinterred in Ukraine. These factors, writes Savchak, explain the prominent place of the following three groups of questions in the reception of their respective works: the theme of national consciousness; the concept of prison poetry, permeated with "martyr's pathos"; and the poetic, pseudo-mystical importance of the Motherland.[66] Savchak finishes his essay by stressing the importance of decanonizing Stus' creative personality and legacy and pursuing a serious study of his works.

In an attempt to avoid the problems pointed out by Shevelov and Savchak, this thesis considers Stus first and foremost as a poet. It focuses solely on his poetry of incarceration, as represented by the collections *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests.*[67] This decision is motivated by the fact that Stus' prison poetry is considered his best. For example, Shevelov, writing

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[66] Savchak 84-85.

[67] I will use the editions of *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests* that came out in the West (Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha v svichadi*, 2nd edition, and *Palimpsesty*. n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986). Even though some of the poems included in these collections were not written in confinement proper, they will still be examined because Stus insisted on making them part of the collections and, hence, must have been convinced that they are thematically and ideologically related to the poems written in prison. Some of the poems from *Palimpsests*, identified as written in exile, first appeared in *The Time of Creativity*, for example, "Za chytanniam Yasunari Kawabaty" (While Reading Yasunari Kawabata), "Tak i zhyvy" (And Thus You Have to Live).

about prison poetry in Ukrainian literature, noted that this type of poetry

> was of the highest quality in its beginnings in Ukrainian literature as seen in the works of Shevchenko. After him, it declined to the level of rhymed memoirs and impressions of genuine sorrow with all the literary infelicities attendant to amateur genres. Stus returned this poetry to the high artistic level of its beginnings. He progressed from complaints of physical and spiritual exhaustion to a philosophical plane that transcends the boundaries of biography and politics. Thus, his prison poetry breaks away from the prison, transcends the boundaries of Ukrainian literature, and belongs to the whole world.[68]

The central preoccupation of my thesis will be with the themes, motifs, and philosophical implications of Stus' prison poetry. I will pay close attention to the dominant images in his works.

The question of Stus' themes and images deserves a separate comment. In an attempt to characterize the poet's works, Shevelov provisionally divided the poetry into the "programatic" and "unprogramatic." The programatic poetry reflects a certain system of ideology and a particular worldview, according to Shevelyov. The unprogramatic poetry, on the other hand, even though not necessarily devoid of ideology, is concerned more with the actual process of thought and emotions. Due to this feature, it does not require constant change of themes and plots, like the programatic poetry, but can continually develop the same theme. In this sense,

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[68] Shevelov xxix.

this poetry is intensive rather than extensive, and is characterized by invariably changing moods and feelings. According to Shevelov, most of Stus' works can be characterized as unprogramatic poetry. Being intensive in nature, they contain a limited set of themes and motifs and portray the actual incarceration in sparse detail: barbed wire, iron bars, a puddle, a lantern, pine trees, a raven, seasons of the year, a world without light, two human shadows, a bitch's howl; dreams about the beloved, wife, mother, son; Ukraine behind iron bars. The critic writes that for Stus themes and motifs are only a starting point for the exploration of his own inner world and soul. The more deprived his outer world, the richer became his inner one, which reflected the depth and profusion of his thoughts, moods, sentiments and spiritual dynamics.[69] Shevelov's insights into the nature of Stus' poetry are echoed by the author himself. In a letter to his parents (July 8, 1976), Stus wrote: "I see [my] main motif as follows: the human soul before the eternity of the heavens, physical and spiritual turmoil in the boundless sea of daily life, the tortures of the lonely and estranged soul."[70]

The preceding reveals Stus' appreciation of poetry as a medium for understanding and exploring universal philosophical issues. His prison poetry contains themes and motifs that attracted many writers, particularly those whose state of involuntary confinement led them to explore and to question the foundations of

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[69] Yuri Shevelyov (George Shevelov), "Trunok i trutyzna," *Vasyl Stus,* ed. Osyp Zinkevych and Mykola Frantsuzhenko (Baltimore-Toronto: Smoloskyp, Inc., 1987) 370-372.

[70] Stus *Vikna* 60.

human existence. Among the themes treated by Stus in his prison writing are those of fate, life and death, time and space, God, love, human existence, choice and responsibility. I intend to examine all of these in my thesis. Inasmuch as the same themes and motifs[71] -- to a greater or lesser extent -- are found in the endeavors of other incarcerated writers (many of whom have been canonized by their respective national literary institutions), it is safe to assert that incarceration can act not only as a powerful creative environment, but also as a generator of a particular kind of thinking and apprehension of reality. Here are some examples to illustrate this point.

Describing his mental and spiritual state during imprisonment, the 16th century Florentine goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini wrote in his "Autobiography":

> For one hour and a half each day I got a little glimmering of light, which penetrated that unhappy cavern through a very narrow aperture. Only for so short a space of time could I read; the rest of the day and night I abode in darkness, enduring my lot, nor ever without meditations upon God and on our human frailty... I began the Bible from the commencement, reading and reflecting on it so devoutly, and finding in it such deep treasures of

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[71] Writing about the Romantic writers' interest in prison images, Brombert identifies the following favorite themes: "tragic beauty of solitude, glorification of the individual and concern for the problem of identity, existential anguish..., spatio-temporal motifs (*arrested* prison time viewed as an utopian atemporality), exaltation of the rebellious outlaw who indicts society as a prison and himself becomes the hero of a double drama of fall and redemption, pride in any punishment under the dual aegis of Prometheus-Lucifer." (9) The critic also named such *topoi* of prison literature, as "the sordid cell and the hospitable cell, the cruelty of jailors..., glimpses of the landscape and of the sky, the contrast between the ugliness of the "inside" and the supposed splendor of the surrounding scenery, prisons within the prison (the image of the iron mask), the insanity of the captive, the inscriptions in the stone, the symbolism of the wall as an invitation to transcendence", transformation of even the most atrocious jail "into a mediating space where consciousness learns to love despair." Brombert 9.

> delight, that, if I had been able, I should have done naught else but study it.[72]

Several centuries later, the prisoner Paul Verlaine sought similar comfort in religion, guided by the need to experience the constant spiritual presence and a God that would lift him above his misery and misfortune. His return to Catholicism produced the collection *Sagesse,* filled with religious motifs and obsession with the past. It is considered to be his best work and the one which made him one of the greatest Catholic poets of France.[73]

Verlaine's compatriot, Francois Villon, often viewed as the finest poet of the late Middle Ages,[74] as well as one of the most well-known outlaws of the century, spent a fair amount of time in and out of prison. In spite of his bohemian way of life, a reader cannot fail to notice in his poetry the rich infusion of religious sentiment and his deep faith in Catholicism.[75] *The Grand Testament,* his most famous work, called "one of the most lucid and gay and concentratedly moving poems of literature,"[76] was written shortly after his release from prison. Denouncing human follies and meditating upon death, it praises God as a refuge for comfort and hope.

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[72] Benvenuto Cellini, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1983) 106.

[73] Joanna Richardson, *Verlaine* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971) 133, 138.

[74] *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 1031.

[75] Lewis Galantière, "Introduction," *The Complete Works of Francois Villon* New York: Covici, Friede, 1931) xx.

[76] Galantière xxiv.

While some jailed writers found consolation in studying the Bible, in long hours of prayer and communion with God, others, like Boethius, discovered it in philosophy. The Roman senator spent two years in prison awaiting execution for treason. There he wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which turned out to be "a vehicle for ancient culture throughout the Middle Ages and a consoling classic to the troubled centuries."[77] I. Edman writes that even though imprisonment was a misfortune for Boethius, "the very fact of it is responsible for a remarkable piece of prose literature as well as philosophy. It is doubtful whether anything less than agony of incarceration... could have evoked in him the intimate sense of evil in the world with which the *Consolation* begins."[78] According to Edman, Boethius' work *The Consolation of Philosophy* was

> an attempt to answer in terms of the whole system of the universal good those doubts as to goodness which arise in the mind of the imprisoned and mistreated philosopher, or of any imprisoned or mistreated human being. Where fate seems unkind, where Providence seems to bless the wicked, where deserved happiness is snatched away, where violence triumphs over reason: under such circumstances nothing less will answer these horrors to the mind and heart than a theory of the universe in which all adds up to a system of good, a system of God.[79]

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[77] Daniel J.Boorstin, *The Creators* (New York: Random House, 1992) 234.

[78] Irwin Edman, "Introduction," *The Consolation of Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1943) xi.

[79] Edman xii.

In his conversations with Lady Philosophy, Boethius discusses the deceitful character of Fortune which provides people with false riches, endowing them with luxurious things that prevent them from seeing the real good. These discussions of fortune include the themes that can later be found in the works of many other incarcerated writers, for example, the purifying nature of sorrow and suffering, the virtue of ill fortune and its effect on man's character, personal responsibility, the comforting power of God, self-exploration as an aid to one's soul. (It is noteworthy that most of these themes were explored by Stus in his prison writing.) The following lines, written by Boethius, reflect that unique existentialist flavor that seems to distinguish all great literature and is particularly inherent in prison writing:

> If any man makes search for truth with all his penetration, and would be let astray by no deceiving paths, let him turn upon himself the light of an inward gaze, let him bend by force the long-drawn wanderings of his thoughts into one circle; let him tell surely to his soul, that he has, thrust away within the treasures of his mind, all that he labours to acquire without.[80]

Being confined to one's own company and devoid of superficialities of daily existence, imprisoned writers had an opportunity to communicate with their inner self, as well as to reassess and reevaluate their life. "I want to get to the point when I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation, that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent

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[80] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1943) 68.

me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison," wrote Oscar Wilde in *De Profundis.*[81] For him, it was a chance to realize and possess his soul "by getting rid of all alien passions, all acquired culture, and all external possessions, be they good or evil."[82]

The discovery of the self by imprisoned writers generated intellectual endeavours whose rewarding experience created the concept of a "happy prison." Paul Verlaine recalled his Belgian imprisonment in the collection *Mes Prisons* almost with affection, "a real haven, after all the suffering of the past."[83] Even though he was bothered by the claustrophobia of the prison and monotony of daily existence, he was relieved to find an escape from his emotional problems and the everpresent temptations of the world.

> He had always needed to be ruled; and now an inevitable discipline was imposed on him. He was sheltered, given adequate food and strictly limited drink; he was forced to accept an austere routine. In the calm and austerity of his prison life, he was also free to turn in upon himself, to examine his emotions, to question his beliefs, and to express and lose himself in poetry.[84]

Verlaine's experience confirms V. Brombert's view that it is not a coincidence that the most anguished and "unstable" writers discovered for themselves the virtue of prison. Writing about Jean Genet, the critic stresses that the French writer "sings with

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[81] Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis," *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde, 1908-1922* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969) 57.

[82] Wilde 96.

[83] Richardson 123.

[84] Richardson 123.

arresting syntax of the consolatory beauty of cellular confinement: "...the prison cell, which I now love like a vice, brought consolation of myself by oneself (*...m'apporta la consolation de moi-mème par soi-mème*). It is for him an almost sacred world of security that allows for the stripping of all vain landings - a place where one can return to the self's center."[85]

The impact of incarceration had a profound effect on Fedor Dostoevsky. He owes to it not only his best works, like *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov,* but also that unique treatment of human psyche which places him among the prominent writers of the nineteenth century. According to E. Carr, the writer's imprisonment caused in him a gradual evolution which made him accept and glorify his punishment. It also made him take a different look at the conventional categories of virtue and vice, overthrowing every standard of morality of which he had ever heard.[86]

> It was in the House of the Dead that Dostoevsky first learned to perceive the inadequacy not merely of human law, but of the ordinarily accepted code of moral values, and to ponder on the quest for a remoter truth beyond the frontiers of good and evil as ordinarily defined.[87]

J. Frank stressed that the prison experience deeply affected Dostoevsky's portrayal of character which took a qualitative leap in depth and scale. It also "gave him a unique vantage point from which

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[85] Brombert 205-206.

[86] Edward Hallett Carr, *Dostoevsky, 1821-1881* (London: Unwin Books, 1962) 54.

[87] Carr 54.

to study human beings living under extreme psychic pressure, and responding to such pressure with the most frenzied behavior."[88]

Looking at the prison as the locus of spiritual freedom and revelation, Brombert comments on the spiritual initiation that it gave to Silvio Pellico, a Milanese liberal who experienced years of "hard prison" ("carcere duro") as a political prisoner and whose experience inspired the famous *Le Mie Prigioni.* Writes the critic:

> There were those who loudly deplored his Christian lyricism, discovered in jail, as a weakness. But the unusual success of Pellico's book... suggests that its tone and message had immense appeal. Pellico insists on the rediscovered light; he copies with deep emotion the edifying graffiti on his prison walls...; he glorifies suffering. A century and a half later, his name is still revered by another famous political prisoner, Solzhenitsyn. The author of *The Gulag Archipelago* indeed sums up the prison theme: "It has been known for many centuries that prison causes the profound rebirth of a human being. The examples are innumerable - such as that of Silvio Pellico." and Solzhenitsyn adds, as his own testament to the future: "...I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: *'Bless you, prison!'*"
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> The rebirth *in question* implies the redemptive powers of imagination. Repressed freedom and poetic inventiveness are intimately related. This would explain the specific prestige of the sequestered artist. Tasso in jail continues to be a subject of inspiration for other poets. The enclosed space is also the locus of artistic creativity.[89]

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[88] Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) 146.

[89] Brombert 14-15.

The link between repressed freedom and poetic inventiveness, as identified by Brombert, is further stressed by D. Suzuki. In his analysis of Oscar Wilde's writing, and particularly the poet's praise of suffering and its wisdom in *De Profundis,* the critic made the following point: "You will observe here what sanctifying effects his prison life produced on his character. If he had had to go through a similar trial in the beginning of his career, he might have been able to produce far greater works than those we have of him at present."[90]

As the above examples suggest, confinement and creativity can prove to be a fertile field for comparative research. In particular, they reveal that intellectuals, in this case writers, despite significant differences in cultural and personal background, as well as the cause of incarceration, can have similar responses to their existence. This, however, does not take away from their originality and individuality. It is also important to remember that each writer represents a particular socio-cultural system that is reflected in his works. A brief survey of Ukrainian prison literature will help illustrate the point.

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Ukrainian prison writing is the fact that most writers were incarcerated for political reasons (unlike, for example, French prison literature, created by writers confined on predominantly different grounds, which was the case with Fraçois Villon, the Marquis de Sade, Paul Verlaine, Jean Genet). Thus Taras Shevchenko was jailed for the

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[90] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series). (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961) 16.

participation in a clandestine organization that called for the restructuring of society on the principles of justice and equality; Pavlo Hrabovs'kyi (1864-1902) was arrested for revolutionary activities; Ihor Kalynets' (b. 1939), Ivan Svitlychnyi (1929-1992) and Vasyl' Stus were labelled as dissidents and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda. Political agendas often lay at the core of Ukrainian writers' activities, both social and literary, which resulted in conflicts with authorities and led to their incarceration. This is why Ukrainian prison literature contains numerous examples of the so-called engaged work that border on political discourse. Kotsiubyns'ka wrote that engagement is Ukrainian literature's vital characteristic feature, its curse and power. It stemed from Ukraine's political condition, her lack of full-fledged cultural development, an absence of a normal national life, and the syndrom of colonialism. Such factors are the reason why Ukrainian literature had to perfom a variety of intellectual, social and artistic functions, often uniting with politics.[91]

A particularly revealing example of engaged literature is Pavlo Hrabos'kyi's poetry. Arrested in 1886 for distributing leaflets calling for a struggle against tsarism, Hrabovs'kyi was incarcerated and exiled to Siberia. His works often deal with Ukrainian issues: the poet calls on Ukrainians to rebel, to educate themselves, to be creators of their own well-being ("Do ukraintsiv" / "To Ukrainians"),[92] praises his people's spirit and resilience ("Narodovi

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[91] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Ivan Svitlychnyi, shistdesiatnyk" 21.

[92] Pavlo Hrabovs'kyi, *Tvory v dvokh tomakh* Vol. 1. (Kiev: Dnipro, 1964) 82-87.

ukrains'komu" /"To the Ukrainian People"),[93] as well as engages in didactic discourse on the importance of social justice, education and national equality which, according to him, are important prerequisites for a better future ("Shchob nastav chas zhdannyi" / "So that Long Awaited Time Came").[94] Another example of more recent engaged prison poetry is many of Ivan Sviltychnyi's sonnets. Being acutely aware of his role as a human rights figure, Svilychnyi tends to didacticism and open accusations of the regime. His poems reveal the humiliations of prison body searches,[95] echo Shevchenko's motifs of accepting one's fate as a martyr,[96] and honor his comrades-in-arms (e.g., V. Stus, Ie. Sverstiuk).[97]

It is of interest that the sonnet as a poetic form was often employed by Ukrainian prison writers, among them Ivan Franko (1856-1916) and Bohdan Kravtsiv (1904-1975).[98] T. Salyha writes that the prison sonnet reflects the historical conditions of writers who were frequently forced to stand in opposition to the dominant regimes.[99] He emphasizes that Ukrainian prison sonnets reveal

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[93] Hrabovs'kyi 67.

[94] Hrabovs'kyi 65.

[95] Ivan Svitlychnyi, *U mene til'ky slovo* (Kharkiv: Folio, 1994) 32.

[96] Svitlychnyi 43.

[97] Svitlychnyi 56-57.

[98] The sonnet was also used in the prison writing of Mykhailo Orest, Mykhailo Drai-Khmara, Volodymyr Ianiv, etc. Arrested for Ukrainian political activities, Bohdan Kravtsiv wrote his sonnets in a Lviv prison in 1932-1933. Of interest is the fact that Kravtsiv's jail was the same place where earlier Ivan Franko wrote his own prison sonnets.

[99] Taras Salyha, "Z ievshanom kriz' doliu." Bohdan Kravtsiv, *Poezii.* Lviv: Feniks Ltd., 1993) 14.

certain specific psychological patterns, among them: violation of human dignity, an acute sense of lack of freedom, recognition of the impertinence of guards, etc.[100] These motifs are present in both Franko's and Kravtsiv's sonnets.

Even though Ukrainian prison literature provides a unique insight into the sentiments and worldview of a political prisoner, it nevertheless possesses themes and motifs that recur in other prison literatures as well, for example: death, being and fate, time, prison space. Thus Hrabovs'kyi links incarceration and death, and reflects on human existence.[101] Ivan Franko's sonnets often betray the physically confining prison space,[102] while Ivan Svitlychnyi's sonnets reveal the author's psychological state even in their very titles -- "Samota" (Loneliness), "Vidchai" (Despair), "Zavzhdy viazen'" (Eternally a Prisoner).[103] Human existence and spiritual freedom are the main motifs of the prison poetry of Ihor Kalynets', whose writing is a unique blend of literary and biblical allusions, mythological figures, and Ukrainian traditional symbolism.[104]

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Stus' poetry is the fact that even though he was confined for political beliefs, his

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[100] Salyha 14-15.

[101] Hrabovs'kyi 67, 87-88, 91.

[102] For example, in "Se dim plachu" (This is a House of Tears), "Vzhe nich" (It is Already Night Time), "Vstaiem ranen'ko" (We Get up Early), Ivan Franko, *Zibrannia tvoriv u piatdesiaty tomakh* Vol 1. (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1976) 151, 154, 156.

[103] Svitlychnyi 34, 38, 39.

[104] Ihor Kalynets', *Slovo tryvaiuche* (Kharkiv: Folio, 1997), the collection "Nevol'nycha muza."

poetry for the most part eschewed political discourse (e.g., condemning the authorities or asserting his cause). Stus treated his poetry as a deeply personal matter. His growth as a poet resulted in the creation of complex works -- multilayered in meaning, philosophical and often esoteric for an unprepared reader. Even the vocabulary of his poems -- which often includes rarely used (and thus difficult to understand) words -- seems to create an added barrier for comprehension. Heifetz recollects that Stus was reluctant to let him read *Palimpsests* because the poet was convinced that his friend would not understand his works.[105] The personal character of Stus' poems becomes even more apparent when we consider that their addressee is often the poet himself. Most of these poems, summoning forth strength and endurance,[106] point to the fact that they can function on two levels -- as works of literature and as a tool for maintaining the poet's sanity and integrity.

While dealing with the personal, Stus' works simultaneously explore the universal. Even when he speaks of his love of Ukraine, his poems raise common human problems -- choice, responsibility, the degree of personal commitment, etc. This intellectual inquiry into existence places Stus apart from many of his contemporary writers. For this reason, this thesis will refrain from considering poems that reveal Stus as a citizen and will concentrate mainly on those themes and motifs that transcend national and ethnic

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[105] Heifetz 58.

[106] For example, "Terpy" (Be Patient), "Skhylys' do mushli spohadiv" (Lean to the Shell of Reminiscences) Stus *Palimpsesty* 421.

boundaries, such as death, fate, love, time and space. The choice of these themes came to me while reading Stus' poetry and the works of other confined writers. The unfailing insistence with which they recurred pointed to their obvious importance for the authors. I will not presume to give an exhaustive analysis of these themes, but rather try to provide a general overview in order to initiate a discussion. In particular, the following questions will be raised: How did incarceration affect Stus? What was the role of philosophy in his works? How did his poems treat such concepts as Life, Death, Time, and Space? What was his contribution to love poetry, and how did his imprisonment shape it? Can one expect to find common themes and motifs in the works of Stus and other incarcerated writers?

In analyzing Stus' prison poetry, the theme of death will be used as an organizing principle, around which a constellation of themes will be discussed. This approach is justified because of the overpowering presence death has in the poet's works irrespective of the overt topic.

In addition to an introductory chapter on "Death," this thesis contains six chapters devoted to: "Death and Eastern Influences," "Fate and Existence," "Love," "Space," "Time," "The Imagination in Confinement: Beyond Stus." "Death and Eastern Influences" examines such recurring motifs in Stus' poetry as the return from the vertical crypt (or death), the purity of the soul, the self-exploration and spiritual awakening generated by the imminence of death. The latter are analyzed from the perspective of Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism and Zen. This chapter also

discusses the sources of Eastern thought in Stus' poetry. "Fate and Existence" considers the premises of the philosophy of existentialism, particularly its treatment of death, and explores the manner in which they affected the poet's perception of reality. This chapter also attempts to explain the poet's use of such concepts as fate, loneliness, anguish, and spiritual self-sufficiency. "Love" explores key poems from *Palimpsests,* discussing especially the concept of separation. "Space" concentrates on the figure of the square as a symbol of incarceration and its role in the poet's perception of reality. "Time" looks at Stus' attitude toward the past, present, and future, and at the nature of his timeline. The chapter also examines how death affects the poet's perception of units of time. "The Imagination in Confinement: Beyond Stus" places Stus' works in a broader context of prison writing. It explains the effect incarceration had on writers, especially their treatment of above-mentioned themes. Here I will point out the similarities between Stus and other writers, fleshing out Stus' own contribution.

In approaching each theme -- death, fate, love, space, and time -- I will disregard other aspects of the examined works, including more dominant themes and motifs. This will allow me to focus on a specific topic in an attempt to place it in a more general philosophical and social framework. Each section will also contain a more detailed analysis of one or two poems in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the poet's writing and approach to the topic at hand.

Inasmuch as my study concentrates on ideas -- the existentialist views of Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus; basic concepts of Buddhism and Zen; objective and subjective time, etc. -- I will employ discourse analysis[107] for Stus' works. I embrace Anthony Easthope's definition of poetic discourse as a form determined at once by language, ideology, and subjectivity. It will be slightly modified on the question of the subject-position in a literary work. Inasmuch as a poem is "an utterance constructed according to and within the system of language," poetry emerges as a "specific material discourse."[108] Discourse is determined not only materially, but also ideologically. It is always historical and "occurs only in specific local and national forms."[109] The concept of discourse as subjectivity needs special explanation. Conventional literary criticism considered poetry as an expression of an author, aligning the question "what is poetry?" with that of "What is a poet?" Poststructuralist criticism took a different stand on the role of the author (or the subject-position), claiming that "the poet" is no more than an effect of discourse on the reader, and that it is the language and not the author who speaks.[110] This raises the question of the authorial voice in Stus' poetry. While analyzing his works, I will at times refer to his lyrical persona as "the poet." I offer two reasons

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[107] Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983).

[108] Easthope 7, 17.

[109] Easthope 17, 16.

[110] Easthope 30, 31.

for using this phrase. The first is purely technical -- to avoid repetitions like "the lyrical hero" or "the lyrical persona/voice." The second explanation centers around the question of the subject-position in a literary work. While I do not intend to identify completely the thoughts of the author with the ideas expressed in his works, it is important to remember that Stus' works often relate his personal thoughts and experiences (which can be easily traced and confirmed in his letters and biography). Consequently, the approach to the subject-position, offered by Postructuralism and Deconstruction, will not be very productive in this case.

In his treatment of Antonio Gramsci's *Letters from Prison,* Massimo Lollini insists on the importance of the author (or the subject-position) in the work, emphasizing however that it "should not be equated with a notion of full identity."[111] The critic writes that Gramsci's letters can be viewed by some as a lesson in psychological survival for long-term imprisonment, an account of the torture that the government administers against its rebellious citizens. They reflect the sources of his asserted identity as a "political prisoner." Much like Gramsci's letters, Stus' poetry has a very strong authorial presence. It reflects the poet's inner struggle, alludes to biographical facts, addresses concrete individuals, and is permeated with a strong sense of mission. That is why the subject-position in his works is important for what Lollini identifies as

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111 Massimo Lollini, "Literature and Testimony in Gramsci's *Letters from Prison:* The Question of Subjectivity," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* June 1996, 520.

"the process of witnessing ... the very experience of the prisoner."[112]

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[112] Lollini 519.

Chapter 1: Death

> "...I personally feel myself a prisoner [who has been] sentenced to death."[1]

The central theme in Stus' prison poetry is death. Addressed either directly or evoked in the context of meditations on love, destiny, choice and responsibility, time and space,[2] its presence is always felt. It figures prominently in *The Time of Creativity*, Stus' first collection written in confinement. It dominates the thoughts, dreams, and philosophical contemplations of Stus' lyrical persona, as well as affects his apprehension of reality. The poet's consistent handling of the subject is also seen in the *Palimpsests* and *A Candle in a Mirror.* Death figures as a theme or a motif in more than a third of the poems from the *Palimpsests,* created in the camps. These include such programmatic and representative poems as "Dyvluis' na tebe" (I am Looking at You), "Tsia chornota poperedu" (This Darkness Ahead), "Khtos' chornyi-chornyi" (Somebody Very Black).[3]

Stus' incessant return to this theme may remind us of the ancient Roman dictum that a person should remember death even at

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[1] Excerpt drawn from one of Stus' camp notes, see Vasyl' Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 218.

[2] For example, "Ves' obshyr mii" (All My Space) discussess prison space, separation from the homeland, and death; "Tvoie zhyttia mynulo" (Your Life has Passed) deals with time and death; "Kriz' sotni sumniviv" (Through Hundreds of Doubts) links death and authentic existence. Most of the poems discussed in this chapter deal with the theme of death directly.

[3] Stus 108-109, 110, 99.

the peak of one's life. When a military hero entered the city in triumphal procession, an actor impersonating Death would stand by him to whisper in his ear: "Man, remember you will die."[4] Stus indeed never forgets about death, conscious that his own world is being created on the very edge of death („На смертній грані твориться наш світ").[5] This chapter will give only a broad outline of the theme and its multiple variations, whereas subsequent parts of my thesis will consider it in greater detail.

Why the Theme of Death?

A poet's preoccupation with death need not be solely the result of his imprisonment. The topic has a long and venerable tradition. The temporary nature of human existence has been central to philosophical discussions and the subject matter of art and literature since classical antiquity. The nature of death, the relationship between the soul and the body, the afterlife have also commanded the attention of philosophers such as Pascal, Kant, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Sartre and other more recent authors. In an effort to determine the purpose of human existence and find consolation from the despair brought about by the realization of one's own finitude, philosophers have sought answers to their questions in both religion and their own theories dealing with mortality. Plato noted that a true philosopher, seeking after truth,

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[4] Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 215.

[5] Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 109.

centered his thoughts around death and dying. Viewing the body as an obstacle to acquiring knowledge, he regarded death as a state when the soul is liberated from the chains of the bodily prison.[6] Plato's inquiries into the subject were followed by those of Aristotle (who promoted the "immortality" of reason), of Descartes (who claimed that our souls outlast our bodies), and of Spinoza (who insisted that the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed). Later centuries advanced further insights into the subject of death, such as Kant's "moral" argument for immortality, Hegel's assertion that death is the reconciliation of the spirit with itself, Schopenhauer's approach to death as the true aim of life, and Nietzsche's doctrine of the "eternal recurrence of the same."[7]

As a person who was extremely interested in philosophy, even before his incarceration, Stus could not have ignored the subject of death. His predilection for philosophical endeavours deserves special consideration. According to Mikhail Heifetz, one of his fellow prisoners in Mordova, Stus' philosophical erudition was considerable.[8] However, it appears that his confinement turned an avocation into dedicated studies. While in the camps, Stus subscribed to a philosophical journal and thoroughly studied every issue, keeping clippings in a special file. Even Soviet publications could provide information on the development of philosophy of the

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[6] Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought.* (New York, New York: The Macmillan Company, London: Collier-Macmillan, Ltd.,1963) 49-50.

[7] This overview was taken from Choron's *Death and Western Thought.*

[8] In particular, Heifetz mentions Stus' discussions of Kant, Husserl, eastern philosophy. Mikhail Heifetz, *Ukrainian Silhouettes* (Suchasnist: 1983) 23-25. The information that follows is taken from Heifetz 23-25.

post-Marxist period, provided one knew how to infer a theory from excerpted citations. In this fashion Stus attempted to keep up with developments of modern philosophical thought. His interests were not confined to Western trends, but also included Eastern philosophy.

Stus' letters from prison reflect his speculative thought. In a letter to his wife, he discusses the Frankfurt school, commenting on the value of different statements made by its representatives.[9] In yet another letter, Stus casts light on some aspects of his creative work which he considers a form of meditation and self-exploration:

> ...I was trying to comprehend myself, to incarnate myself into the cold lace of poetic text, touching upon the conscious and the unconscious - for this I should thank God: work is the best delight, and it is impossible to evade the calls of fate...[10]

Among the various schools of philosophy, Stus had particular regard for existentialism. Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka has noted that Stus' early poetry already reflects his search for the lost harmony with the world, uniqueness of expression, inclination toward self-exploration and determination not to betray himself.[11] She writes:

> His concepts of man corresponds to Kierkegaard's antithesis of "existence" and "system," as well as the idea of an individual revolt against the common and the belief in the ability of man to overcome the

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[9] A letter to wife of July 5, 1976. Vasyl' Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 57-59.

[10] A letter to family of July 8, 1976. Private archives of Dmytro Stus.

[11] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Fenomen Stusa". *Suchasnist'*, 1991, No. 9, 26.

> deindividualizing impact of the masses, to resist turning into Heidegger's "they" (Man) (even though it guarantees man with complete security, however, at the expense of losing oneself).[12]

According to Kotsiubynska, existentialism occupied a special place among Stus' philosophical pursuits. In her opinion it is quite likely that this helped him justify the choices he made in life and to overcome the difficulties he subsequently faced on a daily basis.[13]

Stus' interest in existentialism is also revealed by the carefully chosen works in his home library, all bearing numerous penciled annotations that reflect his thoughtful and analytic reading, as well as the stacks of notebooks with copius commentaries on books by and about existentialist writers.[14] Stressing that the existentialist idea of "tragic wisdom" and "tragic stoicism" is close to Stus, Kotsiubyns'ka provides the following quotation from his letter: "Everything is fine. I am full of tragic optimism, the world exists and is against me, I also exist and am against it." She stresses that the life pursuit of Stus was to

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[12] Kotsiubyns'ka "Fenomen Stusa" 27.

[13] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Poet". Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh,* Vol. 1, Book 1 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 19.

[14] Stus' books, which are now part of Dmytro Stus' private library, contain such publications on philosophy as A. S. Bohomolov's *Nemetskaia burzhuaznaia filosofiia posle 1865 goda* (German Bourgeois Philosophy after 1865) Moscow University: 1969, discussing Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger; S. F. Oduyev's *Tropami Zaratustry.* (Following Zarathustra's Path) Moscow: Mysl', 1971, discussing Nietzsche; B. E. Bykhovski's *Kierkegaard* Moscow: Mysl', 1972. Among Stus' notes are also those on Sartre, which deal with the question of individual freedom.

maintain complete concord between ideas and life's choices, between words and deeds.[15]

Existentialism, which calls on individuals to be constantly aware of their finitude, places death at its core, generating such concepts as "Being-toward-the-end," "Being-towards-Death," "will to power" and "will to die." Death is also instrumental in the relation to such important concepts as time and authentic existence. According to Breisach, death is perceived by existentialists not only as a terminal and brutal fact of human destiny, but also as a personal event. Thus Heidegger speaks of death as "je meiner" ("intrinsically my own") and Kierkegaard refers to it as "I am my death." Breisach stresses that one of the paradoxes of existentialism is that it transforms death into an enhancement of life by giving finitude a central place:

> The finitude of man's existence is actually that quality without which he would senselessly vegetate -- if in this case he could be called man at all. It is the central challenge for Kierkegaard's existential Christian as it is for Sartre's atheistic existentialist. All of Heidegger's philosophy would collapse if the experience of finitude were to be taken from its central place. Secular and religious existentialists alike have insisted on contingency as the crucial mark of man's life. It alone initiates man's wondering about the meaning of life, projects him out of superficial comfort, and is the major challenge to an authentic life.[16]

Commenting on the absurd man and freedom, Albert Camus noted that -- being completely turned toward death -- "the absurd

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[15] Kotsiubyns'ka "Fenomen Stusa" 28.

[16] Breisach 194.

man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him." He enjoys freedom disregarding common rules, with death acting as a great liberating force. This freedom has a definite time limit which stops with death.[17] Writes Camus:

> The divine availability of the condemned man before whom the prison doors open in a certain early dawn, that unbelievable disinterestedness with regard to everything except for the pure flame of life - it is clear that death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live.[18]

Stus read existentialist writers and philosophers. Camus, for instance, was one of his favorites. The poet's close acquaintance with the French writer's works has been attested by Heifetz.[19] Stus was also familiar with the writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, etc.[20]

But over and beyond Stus' serious interest in philosophy, we should not dismiss the fact that the theme of death has always attracted the attention of writers. As the scholar Jacques Choron argues:

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[17] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967) 58-59.

[18] Camus 59-60.

[19] Heifetz 29.

[20] Stus' letters to his family contain discussions of the thoughts expressed by Kierkegaard and Heideggar - see, for example, a letter to his wife of 14. 5. 1976. His private archives contain notes under the title "The problem of an individual and his freedom in Sartre's existentialism." The poet's familiarity with Nietzsche was mentioned in the Introduction in the context of his readings.

> There was Tolstoy whom the thought of death pursued incessantly and who kept asking in despair "what truth can there be, if there is death?" There was Unamuno whose insatiable "appetite for immortality" and his doubt about a life after death made him seek a vain escape from the "tragic sense of life" through ceaselessly repeating to himself that one has to have "faith in faith itself." And there was Rilke, afflicted with the "torment of transitoriness" *(Leiden am Vergaenglichen)* and struggling valiantly to transform death from a frightful spectre into the "greatest event" in life. There was Proust who sought to escape from the annihilating passage of time by trying to recapture the past in the vain hope that if he can do this "the word 'death' will have no more meaning" for him.[21]

Death is an important theme in Rilke. His *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus,* which Stus read and translated, undoubtedly influenced the Ukrainian poet's treatment of the subject. Both poets approach death philosophically, both refuse to die passively or anonymously, seeking to apprehend authentic existence through death and the concept of "authentic death," and, finally, both accept death as part of life.[22] As Maurice Blanchot emphasizes, Rilke's "distate for a mass-produced death reflects the high standards of an artist who aims at perfection in his work, who wants to produce individual works and to produce an individual death."[23] The critic maintains that such desire for a personal death elucidates the mystery of artistic creation. Blanchot considers the images in

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[21] Choron 269.

[22] The above aspects of Rilke's treatment of death are discussed in Maurice Blanchots' "Rilke and Death," *The Sirens' Song* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) 144-176.

[23] Blanchot 146.

which Rilke casts his ideas -- death as a fruit, unripe and mysterious, that should be borne and nourished. In his own words, Blanchot explains the poet's views as follows:

> we must, in some incomprehensible way, make this choice between dying the great death each one contains within him or the little, sour, unripe death he has not been able to let ripen, or perhaps a borrowed, accidental death -- not his own death but a death that carries him off in the end simply because he had not prepared himself for any other: an unfamiliar death died in the anguish of unfamiliarity.[24]

Blanchot emphasizes that Rilke's idea of becoming familiar with death is linked to the concept of being the illustrator and poet of one's own death.[25] Similarly Stus' poetry of incarceration and exile reveals his striving to become familiar with death -- to the point of becoming a poet of his own death.

Obviously the most important factor behind Stus' fascination with the theme of death was his own incarceration. The narrow walls of the cell seem to promote a special way of thinking, referred to by the Russian revolutionary Victor Serge (1890-1947), who had a first-hand experience with confinement, as a "consciousness of death." It is a determinant of a prisoner's general sensibility, his perception of existence and fate. Stressing the overwhelming presence of death in prison, Serge, in a peculiar individualistic style, wrote the following in his literary diary:

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[24] Blanchot 147.

[25] Blanchot 146-148.

> Death's multiple presence. Total helplessness before a fate as implacable as the end. Sharpened perception of time's flight; consciousness of death. The will to live weakens. Depression tortures the tired brain.[26]

Life in confinement, particularly the brutality of Soviet concentration camps, could not but make Stus think about death. The enclosed space, separation from the familiar environment and the challenges of daily prison life, witnessing the death of his fellow political prisoners -- all of this compelled him to deal with death. For, as James Carse suggests:

> ...*death confronts us wherever we experience a radical threat to the continuity of our existence.* Anything that causes us to see that our lives come to nothing, and are essentially meaningless, has the power of death, since it has thrown across our path an impenetrable boundary, a terminus to all the lines of meaningfulness that extend outward from our vitality.[27]

Stus' incarceration and exile led to distinct approaches to the treatment of death as a subject. During the Mordova period, the poet tends to apply abstract and psychological lexicon when speaking of death. Images here relate mainly to abstract notions. For example, in the poem "Skhylyvshys' do bahattia davnikh spohadiv" (Leaning toward the Bonfire of Old Reminiscences)[28] Stus expresses the anguish of separation from his loved ones and talks about the

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[26] Victor Serge, *Men in Prison* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1977) 80.

[27] James P. Carse, *Death and Existence* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1980) 7.

[28] Stus *Palimpsesty* 173.

"deathlike loneliness" („смертна самота"), whose power he intends to resist. Elsewhere he comments on the "smell of death" („запах смерти") permeating his room,[29] and describes his experience in a prison hospital stressing the "deathlike silence" („тиша гробова") of the ward and his "long and merciless thoughts" („довга дума нещадима").[30] The poetry written during exile in Kolyma, on the other hand, employs nature-related images. This shift in the perception of death can be explained by the fact that even though Stus did not feel himself free, the space of his existence considerably broadened. However, even behind seemingly peaceful landscapes, nature in Stus' poems seems to bear the ever-present traces of death. The reader learns of "dying whispers of the snow" ("O peredsmertni shepoty snihiv"), of a sky that blinds people with death ("Bratove, o iake slipuche nebo" / Brothers, What Blinding Sky), of roads-[and] cemeteries ("Idu do vas" / I am Coming to You), of funereal light shed by the trees ("Na vitri palaie osyka" / The Aspen is Burning in the Wind). In "Pozhukhle lystia" (Withered Leaves), the poet perceives fall as a funeral of life, and as the time to start a journey from which no one ever returns.[31]

As an illustration of an image both in its abstract and concrete form, let us examine the image of the cuckoo, which Stus

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[29] Vasyl' Stus, "Tsej spertyi zapakh smerty" (This Close Smell of Death), *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd ed. (Suchasnist':1986) 66 .

[30] "Kriz' shyby" (Through Window-Panes), Stus *Palimpsesty* 210. Stus refers to "deathlike silence" („гробна тиша") in yet another poem, "Vsia scena" (All Stage), where silence is also identified as "prophetic as death" („віща, наче смерть"). Stus *Palimpsesty* 196.

[31] Stus *Palimpsesty* "O Dying Whispers of the Snow" 446, 381, 347, 266, 384.

frequently turns into a symbol of the hidden presence of death. This image appears in "Iak motoroshnyi son" (Like a Horrible Dream), written in Mordova's camps.[32] The poem is about Stus' terrifying experience in a special punishment cell, which he calls a "vertical casket" („вертикальна трумна"). Stus speaks of the depressing impact of the days and nights he spent incarcerated. He compares the haunting visions of the past to "bloody cuckoos" („криваві зозулі"), claiming that they open his arteries and draw off his blood. This makes him address the visions, pleading with the cuckoos to stop calling and aggravating his already miserable existence. These metaphorical cuckoos give way to real-life birds in "Kolyms'ki zakuvaly zozuli" (Kolyma Cuckoos Called),[33] which elicit contemplations about death. Here, however, the poet does not yield to despair. On the contrary, he challenges death by dismissing his hardships, calling them "our joyful cross" („наш веселий хрест"). The deployment of this oxymoron leads to the logical renunciation of a life, which cannot be accepted on terms that contradict the poet's convictions, and to a welcoming of death:

> Ми двічі не вмираємо. Ми сущі
> раз — і навіки, і на все життя.
> Не жебраємо ласки ні від кого.
> Радій: кують колимські зозулі.
>
> (We do not die twice. We exist / once and for all time, and for all of life. / We do not beg for anyone's kindness. / Rejoice: the Kolyma cuckoos cry./)

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[32] Stus *Palimpsesty* 131.

[33] Stus *Palimpsesty* 261.

The image of the cuckoo as part of a spring landscape is employed in "My vzhe tvoi kokhantsi, smerte" (We are Already your Lovers, O Death),[34] written in exile. Stus writes: „Сидить зозуля, горем п'яна, / і просторікує ку–ку" / "A cuckoo is sitting, drunk with grief, / and calls coo-coo". This image reinforces the poet's reconciliation with death and perception of life as a thing of the past. Despite the subject matter, the poem does not convey sadness and gloom. On the contrary, it possesses a certain life-asserting mood which is linked to the motif of the continuity of the life cycle. While the opening part of the poem deals with death, whom Stus addresses as a "lover," the final stanza speaks of falling on grass "Like a baby in the cradle" („як немовлятко у колисці"). This simile points to the concept of Mother Earth as a vital and rejuvenating force, as well as to the latter's central place in the continuum of life.

Another prominent image directly related to the theme of death is that of Charon. The image appears in Stus' poetry well before his confinement, in the collection *The Merry Cemetery.* The poet might have had premonitions about his own destiny when he wrote "Kolesa hluxo stukotiat'" (The Wheels Clatter Gloomily),[35] devoted to Mykola Zerov, as mentioned earlier, a prominent Ukrainian writer and literary critic who perished in a Soviet prison camp during the purges of the thirties. Here the image of Charon acquires truly surrealist dimensions. The boatman is addressed as

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[34] Stus *Palimpsesty* 456.

[35] Stus *Svicha* 55.

"Comrade Charon" („товаришу Хароне"). This Soviet form of address, used especially in official circumstances, adds to the bitter irony and grotesqueness of the poem's imagery. Employed in the first stanza, it sets the mood for the rest of the work and leads to the construct of "the Union of Soviet socialist concentration camps" („Рад–соц–конц–таборів Союз"), a neologism that plays on the title of the USSR.

In "Diakuiu, Hospody..." (Thank You, Lord),[36] written in the camps, Charon appears in a more personal context. Haunting memories (i.e., the grief over the life and family being left behind) compel the poet to address his personal "Charons" („хароні"), whom he begs to delay death. But unable to bear the burden of hope, disappointments, and separation, Stus is ready for death whose presence he cannot ignore. The poem ends with a welcome of death: „здрастуй же, здрастуй же, смерте моя" (good day, good day, o my death). Charon also appears in Stus' poetry of exile. "I znov nesterpni..." (And Again the Unbearable...)[37] conveys the approach of death through the image of the mythological boatman waiting for good weather at the River Styx.

The mirror is yet another image Stus links with death. It first appears in an early poem, written in blank verse, where a mirror, a reflection, and death are mentioned.[38] The poet finds himself both drawn to and frightened by the mirror. Considering it a device that

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[36] Stus *Palimpsesty* 156-157.

[37] Stus *Palimpsesty* 251.

[38] The poem is part of Dmytro Stus' private archives. For full text and translation of the poem see appendix A.

shows man's road to death, he perceives demise in his own reflection. Stus turns to mirrors again in "Sto dzerkal" (One Hundred Mirrors),[39] which first appeared in the collection *The Merry Cemetery* and was later included into both *A Candle in a Mirror* and *Palimpsests*. The poem's treatment of the image and the motifs it explores later recur in several works written in confinement. In "One Hundred Mirrors" the poet examines numerous mirrors producing multiple reflections („Сто дзеркал спрямовано на мене" / Hundred mirrors are directed at me); he questions the authenticity of his reflection in the mirror („Ти справді – тут?"/ Are you really here?); he also considers the nature of the mirror image -- whether it reflects a living or dead person („Хто єси? Живий чи мрець?"/ Who are you? Live or dead?); and, finally, discusses loneliness („самота") and tears („сльози").

Stus' mirrors are associated with emptiness and death („У німій, ніби смерть, порожнечі свічад..." / In the silent, like death, hollowness of the mirrors...).[40] The soul is placed within the void created by the mirrors. Multiple mirrors, while projecting the poet's reflection, multiply it manyfold. At a certain point, this reflection, becomes a projector itself, revealing a soul whose shattered fragments also refract („Збирає око в стосики тонкі усі її розсипані відбитки..." / The eye gathers in thin layers all its scattered reflections...).[41] This process of the "synthesis of the

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[39] Stus, *Svicha* 47.

[40] Stus *Svicha* 83.

[41] Stus *Svicha* 93. The ability of mirrors to reflect one's moral self and to shine is also explored in "Jak vikna v pozaprostir" (Like Windows to Outerspace) Stus *Svicha* 99.

soul" promotes self-cognition. Reflecting on the eternal and self-rejuvenating character of the soul, the poet contemplates the human reflection within which it is placed. For him, it is the reflection in the mirror and not the actual body that commands his main interest.

The process of looking into the mirror turns for Stus into a contemplation of the Self and fate.[42] Here he manifests a combination of romantic self-exploration with existential questioning of his choice in life. His meditations often lead to thoughts about death, which is perceived as a release. While generating cogitations on mortality, human existence, and the soul, the mirror also serves as a source of support.[43]

Living Between Life and Death

The concept of living between life and death is instrumental for understanding Stus' approach to mortality. The self-addressed question "Live or dead?", asked in "One Hundred Mirrors," reflects his analytical stance in exploring the boundaries of the two realms. Much like Rilke, Stus attempts to familiarize himself with his own death, to look at it from different angles, to grow into it. This occurs on different levels. For example, Stus signals contact with

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[42] The poet directly links mirror and fate in "Nenache strily" (Like Arrows) Stus *Svicha* 90.

[43] These motifs are explored in "Like Windows to Outerspace." For more information on the image of the mirror in Stus' poetry, examined against the background of its literary development and with a special emphasis on its treatment by Rilke, see Natalia Burianyk, "Svicha i svichado v poezii Vasylia Stusa," *Slovo i chas,* No. 11, 1993, 51-57.

finitude through an erotic metaphor in the following lines: „Ми вже твої коханці, смерте: / життя нам світить крізь туман" ("We are already your lovers, O death: / life shimmers at us through the fog.").[44] Elsewhere, to express his complete disillusionment with life and apprehension of coming death, Stus strengthens the ties with death by referring to his pending "marriage with death" („зі смертю шлюб").[45]

A recurring motif in Stus' poetry is speaking of his own death as if it were already a fact. This transpires in different contexts: a) when he addresses his lost homeland and prays for a glimpse of it in his dreams: „О земле втрачена, явися / бодай у зболеному сні / і лазурово простелися, / пролийся *мертвому мені!*" (O lost land, appear / at least in a painful dream / and stretch out in azure, / pour forth before *a dead me!);* b) when he counterposes his confinement with spiritual freedom; c) or when he conveys the alienation from life and hopelessness of his cause.[46] Speaking of an "extinct desert" („вимерла пустеля"), through which his path lies (a reference to his fate), Stus refers to the past as reminiscences to which he cannot return: „Верстаю шлях – по вимерлій пустелі, / де *мертвому мені* нема життя, / за обріями спогаду – оселі / ті, до котрих немає вороття" (I am going - through an extinct desert, / where *I, lifeless,* cannot live, / behind

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[44] Stus *Palimpsesty* 456.

[45] Stus *Svicha* 58.

[46] "O zemle vtrachena..." (O Lost Land...) Stus, *Palimpsesty* 404; "Uzhe moie zhyttia v inventari" (All My Life is Already in Inventory) Stus, *Svicha* 113; "Verstaiu shliakh..." (I am Going...) Stus, *Palimpsesty* 366. Emphasis added [NB].

the horizons of reminiscences are the homes / to which I cannot return.)

The apprehension of himself as deceased is taken a step further when Stus marshalls the image of a living death („я відчуваю власну смерть живою..." I sense my own death as if it were alive).[47] "Living agonies" („живі конання") are regarded as a state conducive to the building of character and to experiencing the virtue of suffering.[48] This existential stand emerges particularly strong in "Dyvlius' na tebe..." (I am Looking at You...).[49] Here the poet, separated from his son, tries to explain to the youngster the nature of his cause and struggle. He talks about the pain of past reminiscences. He designates the choices he made in life as a voluntary cross, and the ensuing difficulties as "Golgotha." Stus calls death an essential part of existence: „На смертній грані твориться наш світ" (Our world is being created on the edge of death). Here the first-person plural pronoun „наш" (our) extends his experience to that of his comrades-in-arms, making him part of a group. This occurs mostly in poems that explore the sources of his perseverance and commitment to personal beliefs. The hardships, incurred as a result, are perceived to lead to death. This is why Stus speaks of himself and his comrades as people who live between life and death. This motif is quite prominent in the poetry of both incarceration and exile. We will first consider some representative examples from the former period.

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[47] "Ktos' chornyi-chornyi" (Someone Very Black) Stus, *Palimpsesty* 99.

[48] "Zhdannia vytratne" (Waiting is Hopeless), Stus, *Palimpsesty* 318.

[49] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 108-109.

"My dyvymos' zi smerty" (We are looking from Death) expresses reconciliation with approaching death. Stus accepts his mortality and dismisses life as a thing of the past, as something that has "distanced" itself and "retreated far away." However, the last links between him and life are not as yet severed, for life still beckons him, however "secretly and stealthily." This underlines the concept of life loosening its grip on the poet. Reconciled with the idea of his extinction, the poet claims that misfortune no longer has power over him. He is free, if only because of death:

> Ми дивимось зі смерти в спалий з нас,
> подаленілий, геть відбіглий простір,
> що ще мигоче назирці і потай,
> навтьоки дременувши. І притуга
> вже нам незнана.[50]
>
> (We are looking from death into the expanse that has fallen off from us, / distanced itself and retreated far away. / The expanse is still beckoning secretly / and stealthily. And misfortune / is no longer known to us.)

There is a different emphasis in the poem "Tsia chornota poperedu" (This Darkness Ahead).[51] Here the poet is looking from life into death and feels no alienation from life. On the contrary, he perceives himself very much part of it. With "darkness" („чорнота") standing in as a metaphor for death, he accepts the future finitude. This provides him with confidence that he has overcome death and is able to experience being in a new way:

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[50] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 107.

[51] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 110.

Ця чорнота попереду – давно
відстрашливі свої згубила чари,
відьомську силу втратила. Тепер
я годен мовити, що поборяю смерть.
Великий світ мені постав знова.

(This darkness ahead has long / lost its dreadful magic / and has released its bewitching power. Now / I can say that I am overcoming death. / The great world emerged before me again.)

In "This Darkness Ahead, " Stus betrays a similarity to Rilke in his sense of freedom about death and acceptance of life's transitoriness. Rilke wrote in his eighth Elegy: "For, nearing death, one perceives death no longer, / and stares ahead -- perhaps with large brute gaze."[52] Like Rilke,[53] Stus manages to pass beyond the moment of death, forgetting to be afraid or clinging to life. By refusing to accept death as a limitation which is imposed on our being, he achieves freedom and liberation from it.

Stus' approach to death is imbued with ambivalence. On the one hand, he wishes to die and seems reconciled with the thought that his life and suffering are coming to an end. On the other hand, he is hesitant to bid final farewell to his existence, no matter how painful and trying. Aware of his own uncertainty, Stus states that he lives between life and death („між смертю і життям"),[54] thus never giving an upper hand to either. To characterize this extraordinary state, he invents neologisms -- "death-existence"

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[52] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948) 77.

[53] Blanchot 164-165.

[54] "Tse til'ky vtoma" (This is Only Weariness), Stus, *Palimpsesty* 230.

(„смертеіснування") and "life-death" („життєсмерть").[55] If we were to apply these two concepts to the poems "We are Looking from Death" and "This Darkness Ahead" (see above), the former could be grouped under "death-existence," while the latter under "life-death." Here the point from which the poet gazes toward the object of contemplation (life or death) serves as a basis for such classification. Nonetheless, both poems reveal that the poet never questions the imminence of death in the near future, whether he speaks of a readiness or unwillingness to die. This is evident also in a number of other works. Take, for example, "Zadosyt'" (Enough),[56] a poem Stus addresses to himself. While bidding farewell to the world and to the passions of youth, he welcomes death. As in "We are Looking from Death," he is beyond the power of misfortune and other upheavals of life; he awaits the end. Anticipation of the near end is enhanced by the reference to "twilight" as a metaphor for death:

> Тепер задосить. Жди і жди і жди.
> Благословенного, мов день, смеркання.
> Ти — ген на белебні. Ти ген за гранню
> утраченої зопалу біди.
>
> (Enough for now. Wait and wait and wait. / For twilight, blessed as a day. / You are way on the peak. You are beyond the limit / of the misfortune rashly lost.)

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[55] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 309. As above examples reveal, Stus' poetry of exile directly identifies his existence as living "between life and death."

[56] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 209.

"I strilku smerty vidvedem nazad" (And We will Move Back the Hands[57] of Death) casts a somewhat different glance on death, here not viewed as the desired end. The poet (who speaks in the first person plural on behalf of a group) wants to postpone death, engaging it in metaphoric wrestling. Death, characterized as "the unknown road," elicits in the lyrical persona the feeling of dream-like uncertainty coupled with pain. Its closeness affects his perception of temporality. For example, he links time's progression with afflictions and fatality and views time-units (a "year") as being scarred by "enclosing pickets," evoking incarceration. The hands of death bring associations with the hands of time. God emerges as an agent of fate through his revelations („Господь нам передрік" / the Lord foretold to us). The poem manifests an important feature of Stus' poetry: readiness to approach death through different realms (in this case, time and destiny).

І стрілку смерти відведем назад,
на кілька літ, дарованих терпінням.
Хай доля скаже – ось ти, благостине,
котра не знає ні оздоб, ні вад.
Тож стрілку смерти владно відведем,
щоб не застановлятися на тому,
що приховала стежка невідома,
як щемний сон, або як сонний щем.
Це катастрофа часоплину, стик
обачности й зухвальства, пітьми й світла,
цей визубрений частоколом рік,
назнаменовань ледь помітні титла,
усе, що був Господь нам передрік –
осиплеться, неначе пух кульбаби,

[57] In the Ukrainian original, "hand" appears in the singular, this is the idiomatic equivalent to the hands of the clock.

де стільки смутку, спогаду і звабн.[58]

(And we will move back the hands of death / for several years, those granted by endurance./ Let destiny say - here you are, benevolence, / which knows neither embellishments nor defects. / Thus we will resolutely move back the hands of death, / so as not to consider at what / the unknown road has hidden, / like a painful dream, or like a dreamlike pain. / This is a catastrophe of time's flow, the junction / of caution and arrogance, of darkness and light, / this year left with the marks of enclosing pickets, / scarcely noticeable ligatures of presage, / everything the Lord foretold us - / will fall off like dandelion fuzz, / where there's so much grief, reminiscence and temptation.)

Probably no other poem expresses the idea of death more powerfully than "Iak khochet'sia vmerty" (How I Wish to Die)[59], written during the period of exile. Expressing a plea to die, the poem reveals man's torment and anguish, from which he seeks to be relieved through his own mortality. It also links directly incarceration and death. The poem of 67 lines belongs to Stus' longer works. Written in amphibrachic dimeter, it consists of five implicit stanzas of varied length (they consist of 15, 11, 16, 12 and 13 lines respectively).[60] The one-line refrain "How I wish to die!" serves as an important compositional and rhetorical device. It frames the poem on a whole, as well as the first and the last stanzas. The refrain reveals the central point of the poem: the

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[58] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 193.

[59] Stus *Palimpsesty* 296-298.

[60] The poem is written as one complete text. My decision to speak of stanzas is based on Stus' use of rhyme, refrain, and semantic composition. The visual breaks of the poem are mine.

poet's death-wish. The choice of meter is quite peculiar. In Ukrainian literature, amphibrach is traditionally associated with folk songs.[61] This allows to speak of "How I Wish to Die!" as a song of death, thus making Stus a poet of his own mortality.

Each stanza of the poem, with the exception of the fourth, divides naturally into two sections: one presents a self-description of the physical, emotional or psychological state of the lyrical persona; the other describes death and/or the relief provided by it. The fourth stanza is devoted to a grieving mother and serves as a digression before the final climatic part.

1. Як хочеться — вмерти!
2. Аби не мовчати,
3. ні криком кричати,
4. останню зірницю,
5. обвітрену врано.
6. Останнє спинання
7. осклілої днини —
8. діждати — і вмерти!
9. І вже — не вертати:
10. у спокій глибокий,
11. де тиша колише,
12. де пісня затисне
13. обкладене серце —
14. ані продихнути —
15. як хочеться вмерти!

16. Відмрілися мрії,
17. віддумались думи,
18. всі радощі — вщухли,
19. всі барви погасли.
20. Холодна, як проруб,
21. тропа вертикальна.

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[61] Halyna Sydorenko, *Virshuvannia v ukrains'kii literaturi* (Kiev: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1962) 56.

Не видертись нею
ні кроком, ні оком,
ні рухом, ні духом,
ні тілом зболілим,
ні гордом скривілим.

Од крику, Владико,
піднось мене вгору,
бо хочу померти!
Та й як перебути –
ці гони чекання,
пониззя безодні,
цей паверх терпіння,
цю муку прелюту
дай, Господи, вмерти!
Пропасти, забутись,
зійти себе в зойках,
на друзки розпастись,
розвіятись в вітрі,
згубитися в часі
і, вирвавши душу,
піти в безімення!

За пагорбом долі –
снігів сніговиця,
завія дороги
кушпелиця шалу,
а матірні руки –
осклілим світанням –
піднеслі над світом
шукають навпомац
синівське привиддя
родимку при оці
зажурені, згорблені,
схилені плечі.

Як хочеться – вмерти!
Зайти непомітно
за грань сподівання,
за обрій нестерпу,

59. за мури покори, за грати шаленства,
60. за лють – огорожі,
61. за лози волань,
62. шпичаки навіженства,
63. аби розплататись
64. в снігах безшелесних
65. десь між кучугурами
66. доль запропалих –
67. як хочеться вмерти![62]

(How I wish to die! / So as not to be silent, / or to scream, / the last star, / weathered early. / The last ascent / on a dull day/ to see it - and die! / And not to turn back anymore: / to deep peace, / where silence is lulling, / where song will grip / the sick heart - / not even to breathe - / how I wish to die! / The dreams have already been dreamt through, / the thoughts have been thought through, / all the joy has abated, / all the colors died away. / Cold, as an ice-hole, / is the vertical road. / You won't ascend it / either by foot, or by eye, / or by movement, or by spirit, / or by sick body, / or by contorted throat. / Let my screams, o Master, / make you lift me up, / because I wish to die! / And how can I live through - / those hony[63] of waiting, / the lower reaches of the abyss, / this peak of endurance, / this fierce pain / let me die, o Lord! / To vanish, to seek oblivion, / to disperse oneself in shrieks, / to break down into splinters, / to scatter oneself in the wind, / to get lost in time / and, after tearing out my soul, / to enter obscurity! / Behind the hill of fate - / the blast of snow, / blizzard of the road / snowstorm of rage, / and mother's hands - / at dull dawn - / raised over the world / are reaching gropingly / for the son's apparition / for the birth-mark near the eye / for the sad, , bent, / stooped shoulders. / How I wish to die! / To step unnoticed / behind the verge of hope, / behind the horizon of unbearableness, / behind the walls of submissiveness, / behind the bars of madness, / behind the rage - of the pailing, / behind the switches of howls, / the edge of

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[62] Stus *Palimpsesty* 296-298

[63] Measure of length.

> insanity, / to sprawl out / in noiseless snows / somewhere between the drifts / of lost fates - / how I wish to die!)

The composition of the poem is built on a gradual enhancement of the argument in favour of death. Foregrounding his mental state and providing a description of different aspects of his turmoil -- from the physical to the spiritual -- the poet lays a foundation for justifying his death-wish. The first stanza (Lines 1-15) expresses the poet's desire to end his existence, betraying reluctance to engage even in basic human activities, such as "to be silent" („мовчати"), "to breathe" („продихнути"), "to scream" („кричати"), or "to see" („діждати") another day. Death is presented as a relief from bodily pain and is associated with peace and silence. The second stanza (Lines 16-26) raises the plea to the emotional plane. The poet's exasperation with life is revealed in the renunciation of those of its aspects which are generally considered the source of happiness -- "dreams," "thoughts," "joy" („мрії", „думи", „радощі"). The references to the "sick body" („тіло зболіле") and "contorted throat" („горло скривіле") link the poet's emotional fatigue to the physical. The latter echoes with the incapacity to "scream" in the first stanza. Death, represented by the image of a "vertical road" („тропа вертикальна"), is described as hard to climb. This paradox -- being too weak to die (or climb a vertical road) -- is further developed in the third stanza (Lines 27-42), where a plea is made to God to lift the poet to death („підносьмене вгору"). Stus conveys his emotional and spiritual anguish by referring to "fierce torture" („мука предюта"). He attempts to

identify the boundaries of emotions and speaks of "the lower reaches of the abyss" („пониззя безодні") and "peak of endurance" („паверх терпіння"). Unlike the first stanza, where death is linked to "peace" and "silence," in the third it is equalled with a process of self-elimination and dispersion, conveyed by the verbs "to disperse oneself" („зійти себе"), "to scatter oneself" („розвіятись"), "to break down [into splinters]" („розпастись").

The fourth stanza (Lines 43-54) witnesses a switch in the person and rhetorical mode. Rather than focusing on himself, the poet has a vision of a mother in relation to her son. The woman grieves her son's absence, unable to reach for him and comfort his "sad, bent, stooped shoulders" („зажурені, згорблені, схилені плечі") which can no longer carry the burden of life. The stanza has a special function -- by creating an archetypal image of the grieving mother, it signals the poet's closeness to death. This is further emphasized by portraying the mother as being "behind the hill of fate." She is where life is, behind the boundary which her son is unable to cross. The border between the two is conveyed by the images of turbulent weather - "the blast of snow" („снігів сніговиця"), "blizzard of the road" („завія дороги"), and "snowstorm of rage" („кушпелиця шалу"). The separation between the mother and son reveal the extent of the latter's disassociation with life -- his last link with former existence is broken.

The final stanza (Lines 55-67) binds together the images of the poem and brings the poet's emotions to a crescendo. The latters' intensity is presented in references to "madness," "insanity," "howls," "unbearableness." By employing "verge," "edge," and

"horizon" („грань", „шпичаки", „обрій"), Stus identifies the limits of his endurance as proof of the inability to sustain existence. Here particularly effective is the use of vocabulary referring to the physical realia of prison, such as "bars," "walls" and "paling" („грати", „мури", „огорожа"), which incarcerate the poet's "madness" („шаленство"), "submissiveness" („покора"), and "rage" („лють"). The employment of prison jargon not only links incarceration and death, but also places both Stus and his emotions behind bars. The poet's death-wish "to sprawl out in noiseless snows somewhere between the drifts of lost fates" recapitulates the motifs of the poem by 1) employing the verb "to sprawl out" („розплататись") which echoes with the "dispersion" verbs of the third stanza; 2) the image of the snow, which is linked to those of the blizzard and snowstorm in the fourth stanza; 3) the attribute "noiseless" which reverberates with the description of death in the first stanza. The image of lost souls at the end of the stanza serves as a semantic key in identifying the poet's personal experience as part of a broader setting, i.e., incarceration.

"How I Wish to Die!" provides an insight into the feelings of a doomed prisoner and indicates that incarceration is the primary force behind them. The poem demonstrates Stus' willingness to explore the boundaries between life and death, as well as the limits of emotions. It employs many images that recur in the poet's other works, particularly those written in confinement: dreams, vertical road, God, soul, walls, bars, paling, and, most importantly, death. The poem is also a good example of the continuity in Stus' handling of the theme. For example, it shares a number of features with the

earlier examined "And We will Move Back the Hands of Death," written in the camps. In particular, both poems share the mood (gloomy and despairing), themes (death, destiny, God, dreams), images (death as a road), tendency to identify the degree of feelings experienced in the proximity of death (the "verge of hope" and "edge of insanity" in "How I Wish to Die!" echo the "junction of caution and imprudence" in "And We will Move Back the Hands of Death), and, most importantly, linking incarceration with death.

To sum up, the theme of death is extremely important for understanding Stus' prison poetry. It permeates his other themes and motifs and lays the foundation for his images. It links together his works and reveals his philosophical worldview. And, finally, death thematically connects Stus with other writers and philosophers.

Chapter 2: Death and Eastern Influences

Stus and Eastern Philosophy

The poetry of Vasyl' Stus reveals a preoccupation with the soul, its projection into different worlds, and with the "eternal return," i.e., the cycle of reincarnation: birth, death and rebirth. Stus' readings and philosophical interests often point to Eastern sources. For example, he was well-read in Chinese and Japanese poetry, which are strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism.[1] His poem, "While Reading Yasunari Kawabata," which will be examined in the context of this discussion, was inspired by a Japanese prose writer whose works are strongly influenced by Buddhism.[2]

It is also significant that some of the writers and philosophers who played an important role in Stus' formation as a poet were themselves influenced by Eastern sources. For example, Goethe, whom the Ukrainian writer held in very high esteem,[3] took a keen interest in the concept of reincarnation. This led to meditations on the subject both in his personal letters, as well as in such works as *Faust, Song of the Spirits over the Waters,* and

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[1] Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, "Poet" in Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh* Volume 1, Book 1. (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 28.

[2] Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968. For detail see Gwenn Boardman Petersen, *The Moon in the Water* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979). The poem will henceforth be cited as "Yasunari Kawabata."

[3] Stus always claimed Goethe to be one of his favourite writers. He also mentioned the latter in a number of his letters from prison. For example, in a letter to his wife and son of April 15, 1982, Stus spoke of Goethe as "the wisest" writer that he had ever read. Vasyl' Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 201.

Blissful Longing. In the latter he wrote: "As long as you are not aware of the continual law of Die and Be Again, you are merely a vague guest on a dark earth."[4] Stus' idol, Rilke, was equally open to the ideas of reincarnation. For example, in the *Sonnets to Orpheus,* the German poet asks: "But when, in which of all our lives do we finally become open and receptive?" Speaking of death and the return to earthly life, he writes: "Perhaps one only seeks a homecoming and welcome, pursues it, till the circle rounds, back to that home, feeling with a strange certainty, dreamlike and sad, that he had lost it once before."[5]

Stus was also extremely interested in the ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: the former treats reincarnation in *Literary Remains,*[6] while the latter advances his ideas on the subject through the concept of Eternal Recurrence in *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* In the "Explanatory Notes" to this work, Nietzsche states:

> The doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence is the turning point of history... The moment in which I begot recurrence is immortal, for the sake of that moment alone I will endure recurrence... We must desire to perish in order to arise afresh, - from one day to the other. Wander through a hundred souls, - let that be thy life and thy fate! And then finally: desire to go through the whole process once more![7]

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[4] Cited from *Reincarnation in World Thought,* ed. by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston. (New York: Julian Press, 1967) 267-268.

[5] Head and Cranston 359-360.

[6] Head and Cranston 313 (quoted in German as *Nachlass*).

[7] Head and Cranston 396.

Stus not only took a keen interest in Eastern philosophy, but also eagerly shared his thoughts about it with family and friends. M. Heifetz, for example, recollects discussions on this subject with Stus.[8] Among the sources on Bhuddism that Stus read and recommended to his friends was *Vostok na Zapade* (The East in the West) by Ev. Zavadskaia.[9] The book contains a description of Zen, speaks of the relationship between the soul and the body, the soul and light, spiritual awakening, heaven and earth. In particular, it describes the sun's light as giving wisdom,[10] and illustrates the unity of such opposites as heaven and earth, stressing that the space in between is Man's world.[11] Zavadskaia discusses death and Zen and connects to Zen such writers as Goethe, Rilke, Tsvetaieva and Mandelshtam (authors whose works Stus read extensively and often mentioned in his letters from prison). *Vostok na Zapade* also draws parallels between Zen and existentialism. For instance, the author states that Zen and the philosophy of the absurd, especially as represented in the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre (she refers to the latter's *Being and Nothingness*), have a number of similar features. Zavadskaia also maintains that Zen influenced Martin Heidegger and his understanding of life and death. In the course of her work, she often quotes well-known experts such as D.T. Suzuki.

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[8] Mikhail Heifetz, *Ukrainskije Siluety* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1983) 25.

[9] E. Zavadskaia, *Vostok na Zapade* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970).

[10] Zavadskaia 20.

[11] Zavadskaia 30.

Most revealing is Stus' letter to his mother and sister of March 4, 1984, where he describes his interest in Chinese philosophy, specifically Taoism, and Zen Buddhism. He stresses that these philosophies helped his soul and contributed to his mental equilibrium, providing him with an opportunity to forget about his own self and find spiritual harmony. One of the most appealing concepts for him was that of Man as a small universe:

> ...we have to wake up in ourselves those cosmic forces and live, yielding to their will, without experiencing the resistance of our self-will. It is good that they teach you to get rid of your own selfish emotions..., and... to exist in the state of permanent spiritual (world) harmony. To lose oneself in order to embrace all the world, and to be indifferent to both death and birth, but being aware of only the changes of the all-existing-states. Nowadays I am extremely happy with such books which help me feel myself here no worse than anywhere else on earth.[12]

Stus' confession of Zen's impact on his perception of reality reveals those aspects of this philosophy that appealed most to him: the cognitive approach to life, spiritual harmony with the world, and defiance of mortality. It also gave him a new way of appreciating the world. The philosophy emphasizes the idea of seeing or knowing through intuition rather than reasoning. It rejects conventional thinking, particularly its dualistic character.[13] Zen indicates the way and leaves everything else to

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[12] Stus *Vikna* 239. The book that Stus was referring to was N. A. Abajev. *Chan' buddizm i kul'tura psikhicheskoi deiatel'nosti v srednevekovom Kitaie* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1983).

[13] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series). (New York: Grove Press, Inc.,1961) 269.

one's own experience. And in this it is personal and subjective, and at the same time inner and creative. Suzuki describes Zen thus:

> Zen does this by giving one a new point of view of looking at things, a new way of appreciating the truth and beauty of life and the world, by discovering a new source of energy in the inmost recesses of consciousness, and by bestowing on one a feeling of completeness and sufficiency.[14]

> Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one's own being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom. By making us drink from the fountain of life, it liberates us from all the yokes under which we finite beings are usually suffering in this world.[15]

It is my premise that Zen's way of providing new points of view and personal discoveries proved to be conducive not only to Stus' spiritual well-being, but also had an impact on his works. The poems to be examined in this chapter reflect a Zen approach to the perception of life, striving for spiritual harmony, and liberation from the yokes governing one's life. For Stus, one such yoke was death. By learning how to face it, he freed himself from the fear of mortality. This resulted in turning the experience of living between life and death into a process of self-cognition.

Even though Stus' interest in Eastern philosophy, particularly Zen Buddhism and Buddhism, is undeniable, placing his works within this context presents a number of challenges. In my analysis, I will concentrate primarily on those aspects which, in my opinion, have roots in Buddhism and Zen. This interpretation should not be seen as

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[14] Suzuki 1961 68.

[15] Suzuki 1961 13.

limiting or precluding other readings of these texts, given the multilayered nature of Stus' poetry. Also, it is important to remember that while certain aspects of Stus' poems (for example, experiences of the soul at death, spiritual awakening with the discovery of truths never known before, etc.) echo those of Buddhism, the philosophy itself is often antithetical to the poet's own ideas and beliefs. Among them, for instance, are the concepts of Self and passivity. According to Suzuki, the conception of Self in Buddhism is "complex and elusive." The Self is not considered to have an independent existence, and moral responsibility "seems to be a kind of intellectual makeshift." Buddhism is not concerned with criminals or sinful souls, because it finds it hard to distinguish one's personal responsibility from those of the society which shapes individuals.[16] As for Zen, the Self is considered an enemy on the path of enlightment. The Zen ethic springs from a sense of the Self's unimportance.[17] With regards to the concept of passivity, which is closely related to the concept of self, Buddhism promotes accepting existence as it is.[18] Stus clearly embraces a different position on the issues of Self and social responsibility. Here his views are closer to those of existential philosophers (e.g., Jean-

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[16] Suzuki 1971 239-240.

[17] Christmas Humphreys, *Zen Buddhism* (London: A Mandala Book, Unwin Paperbacks, 1976) 62-63.

[18] Suzuki explains the concept of passivity thus: "To believe ... is to be and not to become. Becoming implies a dissatisfaction with existence, a wishing to change, that is, to work out "my will" as against "thy will," and whatever we may say about moral ideals of perfection..." (Suzuki 260)

Paul Sartre).[19] Stus' conception of the self and personal responsibility are closely connected with social engagement.

The final comment with respect to the handling of Stus' poems concerns the fact that he naturally explored only those areas of Buddhism and Zen which were of interest to him. This is reflected in such motifs of his poetry as the purity of the soul, reicarnation, awakening, and the occurrence of physical death.

The Elements of Eastern Philosophy in Stus' Poetry

The collection *Palimpsests* contains a group of poems, written in the form of philosophical contemplations, with a peculiar approach to the theme of death. "Peculiar" in the sense that they evoke elements of Eastern religions and philosophy, explore the relationship between body and soul, inquire into the nature of physical death, and assert the possibility of a return to earthly life after death. It is my contention that in these poems Stus employs such elements of Buddhism and Zen as the ascent of the soul into the sun with the past life following in a stream of light; the soul's entering eternity, an area of timelessness and obscurity, where passions and desires no longer trouble or exist; and, most importantly, reincarnation. All these motifs will be discussed below, preceded by a brief characterization of the group.

The selected poems include: "Shche ne vyprozorila dusha" (The Soul has not Become Transparent Yet); two separate poems

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[19] For more information on Stus' treatment of the Self and social responsibility see Chapter 3.

beginning with the same verse "V meni uzhe narodzhuiet'sia Boh" (God is Already Being Born in Me); "Bentezhnistiu vyvyshchena do neba" (Elevated Toward Heaven by Tribulation);[20] one entitled "Za chytanniam Yasunari Kawabaty" (While Reading Yasunari Kawabata). and "I dil poplyv" (And the Dale Drifted).[21] All these poems, with the exception of "And the Dale Drifted," represent Stus' writing in exile. However, they are linked thematically and chronologically with earlier periods of his life. For example, one of the poems beginning with the line "God is Already Being Born in Me"[22] was first written before the poet's arrest. Its variant in *Palimpsests* differs mainly in the final part, and shares with the other *Palimpsests* poem bearing the same initial verse the images of God and light. Judging by the edition *The Time of Creativity,* Stus wrote a poem entitled "While Reading Yasunari Kawabata" while still awaiting trial. The poem in *Palimpsests* is quite different and indicates a more philosophical approach. "Elevated" deals with the death of a friend which occurred before Stus' first arrest.

"And the Dale Drifted" (in iambic tetrameter), the only poem of the group from the period of the camps, is the shortest (16 lines). The poems of the exile period, with the exception of "Yasunari Kawabata," are written in blank verse which underscores their reflective and contemplative nature. They are all

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[20] Henceforth cited as "Elevated."

[21] Besides these six poems, I will refer to "Khtos' chronyi-chornyi" (Somebody Very Black), "Tsia chornota poperedu" (This Darkness Ahead), "Yakyi bezdonnyi tsei horishnii son" (How Fathomless is This Aerial Dream), "Otak by i ia" (And So Would I) Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 99, 110, 312, 117.

[22] *Palimpsesty* 409.

approximately the same length (from 23 to 28 lines),[23] except for "Elevated," which is one of Stus' longest poems (160 lines).

The group in question reveals the consistency with which Stus approaches the subject of death: his preoccupation with the theme is not confined to the years of incarceration, but continues in exile. For example, of the 204 *Palimpsests* poems Stus wrote in Kolyma 66 deal with the topic either directly or implicitly. The same period witnesses the appearance of a number of poems in which the image of the soul recurs (the soul is mentioned in 32 of Kolyma's poems). The characteristic feature of the group under discussion is its focus on both death and the soul.

"Elevated" is perhaps the most revealing with regard to the images and motifs to be discussed in this chapter. The poem is devoted to Stus' friend Alla Hors'ka who is believed to have been murdered by the KGB for participating in "anti-Soviet" activities.[24] "Elevated" treats the heroine's death and state of existence after death. It starts with her opening a door and entering a "vertical crypt" („вертикальний склеп") -- Stus' metaphor for death. This crypt is a place where the living may not enter („куди живущим заказано ходити"). It contains "crystal cliffs of laments"

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[23] "God is Being Born in Me" *Palimpsests* 400 which will be henceforth referred to as Poem 1 contains 23 lines, "God is Being Born in Me" *Palimpsesty* 409 which will be henceforth referred to as Poem 2 contains 28 lines, "Yasunari Kawabata" -- 28 lines, "The Soul has not Become Transparent Yet" -- 25 lines.

[24] Stus 392-396. Alla Hors'ka was an artist, who belonged to the same circle of Ukrainian intellectuals as Stus. She was found murdered in her father-in-law's cellar in a small town not far from Kiev in 1970. The poems dedicated to Alla Hors'ka are exceptional in that Stus did not generally devote poems to his comrades. cf. Juri Shevelyov (George Shevelov), "Trunok i trutyzna," in Vasyl Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist',1986) 24.

(„кришталеві скелі голосінь") and "valleys of despair" („розпачу западини"), enveloped in the cold emanating from the sky. It is skyward that the soul of the addressee is moving.[25] However, before its ascent, the body must separate itself from the soul („віддідляння від душі"). This is accompanied by visions of one's past life (referred to as the "trunk of years"), which are observed by the deceased for the first time in a new state and from a distance („стовбур літ, уперше бачений, уже в одміні"). Physical death occurs at the point when the soul sees light. The divorce of the soul from the body, its "leap," is an action that acquires positive connotations since it is compared with "liberation." It is followed by the soul's ascent. Stus describes the process this way:

> І темрява глибока залягла,
> коли напруга м'язів скам'яніла
> перед дерзким, як звільнення, стрибком
> до вічности. І тіло одмінилось:
> куріла в спогадах душа одлегла,
> возносячись, неначе рвана хмара...[26]
>
> (And deep darkness settled in, / when the muscles' tension hardened / before a daring, as liberation, leap / into eternity. And the body changed: / the separated soul was lost in reminiscences, / ascending, like a shredded cloud...)

The poem continues with a description of the funeral from the point of view of the narrating persona -- a friend of the deceased

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[25] "How I Want to Die!" (discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 55-62) shares with "Elevated Toward Heaven by Tribulation" the following features: the employment of the image of the "vertical road" as a metaphor for death, references to the ascent that follows death, an emphasis on the independent existence of the soul after its separation from the body. Stus *Palimpsesty* 296-298.

[26] Stus *Palimpsesty* 393.

-- who is strikingly estranged from the company around him. His isolation helps him see things in a new and different light. His description of the funeral leads to a philosophical discussion, part of which is devoted to the nature of death. He starts by asking about the time and place the sad event occurred; he contemplates the nature of the people around him and the world he lives in. The interrogative refrains in the poem ("And what kind of world [day, etc.] was that?" [„Що за світ...? І що за день...?"]) stress his detachment and willingness to explore the familiar environment as if he were a stranger. He concludes that he is surrounded by the dead, if only in spirit.[27] This creates a surreal situation, with the living dead burying the deceased. What is quite striking about this passage is that here Stus links light and death („осяяння, сліпучого, як смерть" / an illumination, blinding like death), a dramatic shift from the earlier passage where he drew parallels between darkness and death.

The poem moves on to touch upon the question of grief, underscoring that loneliness accompanies sorrow („горе вірить тільки самоті"). Solitude reigns in the "theater of grief" and in the "theater of death." Life's roads are portrayed as filled with pain and self-torture. In the final part of the poem, Stus asserts that he is certain about the possibility of returning from long wanderings through the same vertical crypt. He stresses that the roads within the crypt can be "self-extending" („самоподовжені"). He states that the vertical of the soul's ascent becomes a "trunk" („стовбур"), an

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[27] For more information on the way Stus treats living people as if they were dead see Chapter 1.

unexpected association which links the vertical to a tree, as well as maintains that one can go through two deaths and remain alive.

"Elevated" employs the concepts and images to be discussed in this chapter: the ascent of the soul (after being separated from the body) in bright light; light and darkness; the concept of the "trunk," related to the soul's ascent; the vertical crypt, its "self-extending" roads and the ability to return from the crypt.

The last motif deserves special consideration, inasmuch as it is perhaps the most conspicuously Buddhist-influenced element in Stus' poetry. In "Elevated," referring to the vertical crypt, the poet portrays it as containing long roads that seem to extend themselves endlessly („Сказав / про певність повертання з довгих мандрів / тим вертикальним склепом? Хто б збагнув / оці дороги – без кінця і краю / самоподовжені? "([Who] would say about the certainty of returning from long peregrinations along that vertical crypt? Who would apprehend those self-extending roads - without beginning and end?"). This characterization elicits associations with reincarnation. The round of circles (or reincarnations) continues until one attains a higher state of consciousness.[28] In this

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[28] One of the important concepts of Buddhism is rebirth or reincarnation. It refers to the pattern of life, a kind of a vicious circle, called *samsara,* the Round of birth and death. The active principle of the Round is *karma* or "conditioned action." It arises from the effect of an individual's behavior on his/her further existence and always requires the necessity for further action. (Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen.* Penguin Books: 1972 68-69). "Many Buddhists understand the Round of birth-and-death quite literally as a process of reincarnation, wherein the *karma* which shapes the individual does so again and again in life after life until, through insight and awakening, it is laid to rest. But in Zen... it is often taken in a more figurative way, as that the process of rebirth is from moment to moment, so that one is being reborn so long as one identifies himself with a continuing ego which reincarnates itself afresh at each moment of time." (Watts 69).

The ending of the circular pattern of *karma* is called *nirvana.* According to Watts, *nirvana* is a "word of such dubious etymology that a simple translation is exceedingly difficult. It has been variously connected with Sanskrit roots which would make it mean

process, previous lives are of utmost importance, since the more virtue one demostrates during one's lifetime, the less reincarnations one is going to face.

"Elevated" was written in exile, however, the motif "of returning from the dead" originated in earlier poetry. It occurs in works written in confinement. For example, in "Khtos' chornyj-chornyj" (Somebody Very Black), the poet reveals his presentiment of death by discussing the turbulence of the soul: „душа колотиться" ("the soul is stirring") and equating his end with "self-return" („...я відчуваю власну смерть живою, / як і загибель самовороттям").[29] In "Tsia chornota poperedu..." (This Darkness Ahead), Stus speaks of the road from death to life. Using "darkness" as a metaphor for death, he writes: „Ця чорнота попереду — мій шлях / від смерти до життя" (This darkness ahead is my road from death to life).[30] "Otak by j ja" (And So Would I) conveys the poet's hope to rise again: „Хай почезає час, аби в безчассі / я вдруге міг постати" (Let time vanish, so that in timelessness I could rise again).[31]

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the blowing out of a flame, or simply blowing out (ex- or de-spiration), or with the cessation of waves, turnings, or circlings *(vritti)* of the mind." (Watts 69-70). Watts stresses that the two latter interpretations of the word seem to make most sense. If *nirvana* is 'de-spiration", he writes, "it is the act of one who has seen the futility of trying to hold his breath of life... indefinitely, since to hold the breath is to lose it. Thus *nirvana* is the equivalent of *moksha,* release or liberation." It signals the disappearance of the being from the Round of incarnations, as well as attaining awakening. (Watts 70-72).

[29] Stus *Palimpsesty* 99.

[30] Stus *Palimpsesty* 110.

[31] Stus *Palimpsesty* 117.

This motif becomes particularly strong in the period of exile. For example, the "eternal return to the body" is explored in "God is Being Born in Me" (Poem 1)[32] which will be discussed later. It is also prominent in "Jakyi bezdonnyi tsei horishnii son" (How Fathomless is This Aerial Dream),[33] where the poet's timeline demonstrates a clear movement from death to living (not the reverse) and points in the direction of reincarnation. The return from the dead is emphasized in the parallel constructions "rebirth and last agony" („новонародження і скон") and "the grave and the cradle" („домовина і колиска"). Here "rebirth" is tied to the "grave", and "death" to the "cradle." The "extensions" of the soul are mentioned in "Shche ne vyprozorila dusha" (The Soul has not Become Transparent Yet),[34] and are reminiscent of the self-extending roads of "Elevated." The poem deals with that state of the soul, which allegedly prevents it from further "extensions" once it is separated from the body („[щоб] безтелеса вона не знала протягів").

"Yasunari Kawabata"[35] is perhaps the most "Buddhist" poem of this group. One of Stus' more complex works, it might seem quite esoteric for the unprepared reader. Its title, however, offers an important clue. Kawabata's name is almost synonymous with Buddhist symbols in literature. The titles of his works openly demonstrate his infatuation with Buddhism. For example, Kawabata's short story, "The Moon in the Water," gets its title from

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[32] Stus *Palimpsesty* 400.

[33] Stus *Palimpsesty* 312.

[34] Stus *Palimpsesty* 415.

[35] Stus *Palimpsesty* 288.

an established phrase employed in Buddhist literature to convey "something without substance." Besides belles-lettres, Kawabata's literary legacy consists of essays on Japanese poetry. In particular, he has a reference to a 13th century poet "who wrote of the Buddha, the manifestation of ultimate truth, being found in the sky." According to Gwenn Petersen, Kawabata's own works have the same spiritual or Buddhist foundation.[36] Stus' poem "Yasunari Kawabata" reads as follows:[37]

Розпростерся, душе моя,
на чотири татамі
і не кулься од нагая
і не крийся руками.

Хай у тебе є дві межі,
та середина — справжня.
Марне, вороже, ворожить —
молода, чи поважна.

Посередині — стовбур літ,
а обабоки крона.
Посередині — вічний слід
від колиски до скону.

Жаль — ні неба, ані землі
в цій труні вертикальній.
І заврунилися жалі,
думи всілись печальні.

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[36] Gwenn Boardman Petersen, *The Moon in the Water* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979) 127, 131. In an *Anthology of Zen Poems* the idea of "the moon in the water"is expressed in the following lines: "A pair of monkeys are reaching / For the moon in the water." It is used to admonish students who seek truth in something without substance and to teach them not to differentiate apparent opposites and contradictions, enlightment and delusion (the moon in the water), since the real is unreal and the unreal is real.

[37] Even though the poem in *Palimpsests* does not have any visual breaks, I chose to divide it into stanzas on the basis of its rhyme and composition.

Як то сниться мені земля,
на якій лиш ночую!
Як мені небеса бодять,
коли я їх не чую.

Як постав ув очах мій край,
наче стовп осіянний.
Каже: сина бери, карай,
Він для мене коханий.

Тож простерся, душе моя,
на чотири татамі
і не кулься од нагая
і не крийся руками.

(Spread yourself, [O] my soul, / on four tatami / and do not recoil from the whip / and do not cover yourself with arms. / Even though you have two boundaries, / your core is genuine. / O enemy, it is useless to divine / whether you are young or old. / In the middle -- a trunk of years, / and on both sides -- a crown. / In the middle -- an eternal trail / from the cradle to death./ It's a pity there's neither heaven, nor earth / in this vertical crypt. / And sorrows have sprouted densely, sad thoughts settled down. / How I dream of earth / on which I only spend nights! / How I yearn for heaven / when I do not hear it. / As my land emerged in front of me, / like an illuminated pillar. / It says: take [my] son, scourge him, / he is my dearest. / Then spread yourself, [O] my soul, / on four tatami / and do not recoil from the whip / and do not cover yourself with arms.

"Yasunari Kawabata" is written in anapestic dimeter, which is associated in Ukrainian literature with folk songs and ballads.[38] Indeed, the poem elicits associations with the latter by the use of

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[38] N. V. Kostenko, *Ukrains'ke virshuvannia XX stolittia* (Kiev: Lybid', 1993) 170-172.

refrain, anaphoric repetitions and parallel constructions. "Yasunari Kawabata" may be broken down into seven four-line stanzas. The first and the last are almost identical. They identify the central idea -- the soul and the virtue of suffering for the soul -- while the five middle stanzas develop it. The second and the third stanzas deal with a soul, the fourth and the fifths discuss heaven and earth, the sixth speaks of the land sacrificing its son.

The poem raises the question of the role of suffering in tempering the soul and character. It focuses on humility and submissiveness as key elements in moral training, and elevates sacrifice as an act of love. As the following discussion will show, Eastern symbols are particularly significant for the understanding of the poem.

"Yasunari Kawabata" begins with an imperative through which the soul is addressed and told to spread itself on four tatami,[39] leaving itself unprotected and vulnerable. In my opinion, this exercise in humility and the reference to the "four tatami" might reasonably be linked to the Four Noble Truths. The latter were proclaimed by Buddha during his first sermon as key discoveries. The First Noble Truth maintains that life is *dukkha,* which is usually translated as "suffering." The Second Noble Truth deals with the concept of *tanha,* or desire related to man's selfish inclinations. It is viewed as the cause of suffering. The Third states that the cure from selfish cravings lies in the overcoming of *tanha.* The Fourth Noble Truth indicates how this cure can be

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39 *Tatami* is a Japanese woven straw mat used as a floor covering.

accomplished.[40] The prescription for accomplishing the removal of *tanha* is given in the so-called Eightfold Path, which involves a particular spiritual approach to knowledge, aspiration, speech, behaviour, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and absorption.[41] In essence, the Eightfold path is an eight-step course of moral training in an effort to eliminate striving for private fulfillment. Therefore the call on the soul to accept suffering in "Yasunari Kawabata" is in accord with the Buddhist conception of spiritual exercise.

The "trunk" of years ("стовбур літ") and the "crown" in the poem evoke associations with a tree, whose symbolism in Buddhism is particularly prominent. First of all, it signifies the Tree of Life, or Cosmic Tree, which unites the three zones of heaven, earth and underworld, its branches penetrating the celestial world and its roots descending into the abyss.[42] Secondly, the tree can symbolize the axis of the universe. Stripping it of foliage, which is the part that responds to change, reveals the tree's changeless and undying centre. This transforms it into a pillar or a pole, "the vertical axis around which the visible world of the tree revolves."[43] Thirdly, the tree can signify the actual process of enlightenment.[44] And, finally, as R. Cook indicates:

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[40] Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) 70-71.

[41] Smith 72-75.

[42] Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974) 8.

[43] Cook 15.

[44] Cook 22.

The Cosmic Tree not only embodies the unity and diversity of the cosmos but also expresses both ascent and expansion. In the poet Rilke's words:

> "It develops its being in roundness
> Slowly giving itself
> The form that eliminates
> Hazards of wind."[45]

Stus presents the tree as a solid core, mentions verticality, and speaks of heaven and earth. All this corresponds to the notion of the Tree of Life. The concept of the Cosmic Tree is further reinforced by the reference to tatami, which is likely to point to meditations near the bodhi tree under which Buddha achieved enlightenment.

It is my opinion that the role of the image of the tree in "Yasunari Kawabata" evokes associations with the tree in Buddhism and ascribes its qualities to the soul. Stus reinforces this with important intertexual clues. The "trunk of years" echoes the vertical of the soul's ascent, referred to as a "trunk" in "Elevated" (recall: „стовбур літ, / уперше бачений, уже в одміні"). Also, the image of the vertical crypt in the latter poem connects soul and death.[46]

Stus clearly believes in suffering, a process he considers builds character and purifies the soul. This is particularly evident in the lines referring to the land sacrificing its "dearest son." Here

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[45] Cook Illustrations 27, 28.

[46] In "Elevated," the concept of the "crypt" is expressed by the noun „склеп" and not „труна."

a parallel is drawn between devotion and inflicting torment, which is depicted as a gift of love. The link between the two establishes the merit of punishment and its significance for the integrity of the spirit.[47] This emphasis on humility and readiness to sustain misery is consistent with the Zen belief on achieving *satori* or enlightenment.[48] The reference to the native land which emerges as a pillar of divine light suggests the sacred nature of the sacrifice, inasmuch as "the sacred often manifests itself as fire and light."[49]

Even though "Yasunari Kawabata" has undoubtedly been influnced by Buddhism, its Christian allusions cannot be overlooked either. This concerns, first of all, the image of the tree. As we know, Christ ascended toward heaven through the Tree of the Cross. The reference to the centre is no less important, inasmuch as it is from "the centre, along the Axis Mundi, that Christ, Buddha and Mohammed all made their ascensions."[50] Secondly, Stus' treatment

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[47] Stus explores the virtue of suffering in a number of poems. In particular, he states: „...над покари / немає більшої цноти" (there is no virtue higher than suffering), „прихистись –– бідою" (find refuge -- in misery), „Життя –– то кара. Кара –– благостиня" (Life is punishment. Punishment is a blessing). Stus *Palimpsesty* 441, 318, 227.

[48] The essence of Zen is *satori* or awakening. It is a turning point in one's life which opens the mind to new truths. Humphreys refers to it as a "sudden flashing into consciousness of a new truth hitherto undreamed of " cf. Christmas Humphreys, *Zen Buddhism*. London: A Mandala Book, Unwin Paperbacks, 1976 154. Suzuki describes it as a "sort of mental catastrophe taking place all at once after so much piling of matters intellectual and demonstrative. Satori comes upon you unawares when you feel you have exhausted your whole being. Religiously this is a new birth, and, morally, the revaluation of one's relationship to the world." Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. (Second Series) (Taipel: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company. 1971) 260-261. Suzuki defines satori as an intuitive looking into the nature of things as opposed to the analytical or logical treatment of matters (Suzuki 230).

[49] Cook 119.

[50] Cook 116.

of suffering can also point to Christian sources, for example, the ascetic tradition of Christianity and writers such as F. Dostoevsky. And, finally, the most obvious Christian allusion in the poem is the sacrifice of the dearest son, which acquires biographical significance in Stus' case. The use of the pronoun "my" in reference to the native land clearly points to the poet's experience and hints at a possible identification with the Christ figure. In this context, the call on the soul not "to recoil from the whip" is likely to refer to Christ's passion. Also, the "illuminated pillar" that appears before the poet brings associations with the divine fire through which God revealed himself to Moses.

The purity of the soul, which is central in "Yasunari Kawabata," is also discussed in "The Soul has not Become Transparent Yet." Here Stus endeavors to maintain a pure soul in order that it might escape further "extensions." In this thematic configuration, sorrow serves as an agent that triggers self-knowledge, a view consistent with the Buddhist approach to achieving *satori* or awakening. The Buddhist aspects of the poem also come to the fore in the assertion of the unity of light and darkness. Stus refers to the "dark trunk of conscience" („тьмяний стовбур совісті") in the context of the soul becoming lighter and transparent; he speaks of light that "cannot live without darkness" („не може жити без пітьми"); and identifies darkness as the place where the soul grows, becomes gradually more radiant and eventually melts away in the radiance of the day („і, з смерку виростаючи, світліє / і розтає в охайнім сяйві дня!").

In "And the Dale Drifted," Stus explores further the image of light. Light, retreating earth, and childhood years are just a few images which link the poem to "Elevated." "And the Dale Drifted" radiates feelings of joy and divinity. Stus describes the soul's ascent -- in a stream of light -- into the sun, calling the latter a "radiant paternal home" („отчий дім променний"). This experience is portrayed as beatific and sublime. The ascent is accompanied by doves that lift off the soul like spirits („злітали з мене голуби, як духи"). Floating in the light stream are also the poet's childhood years, apparently ascending in the same direction.[51] The ascent into the sun, the stream of light, which seems to envelope everything -- i.e., the poet, the doves, his childhood years -- produces a sensation of lightness and happiness. The images in the poem evoke associations with the visualizations of Pure Land[52] in Buddhist meditations, which contain light, streams and birds.[53]

І дім поплив. Поплив рікою.
І я, піднесений над ним,
стремів у сонце, в отчий дім
променний. Ген над головою
злітали з мене голуби,
як духи. Радісні горби –
моїх дитячих літ вітрила –
пливли в потоці.

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[51] Stus *Palimpsesty* 103.

[52] In Buddhism, Pure Land is a kind of timeless paradise where beings find themselves in the final stage of their existence. It stimulates calm and a contemplative state of mind. cf. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 129.

[53] Harvey 259.

> (And the dale drifted. Drifted down the river. / And I, raised above it, / flew into the sun, the radiant paternal home./ Above / doves were flying off me, / like spirits. The joyous hills - / the sails of my childhood years - / were floating in the stream.)

The poem represents a blend of Buddhism and Christianity. Thus the dove, for example, can be the Holy Ghost,[54] or a soul of a saint flying out of the mouth at the moment of death,[55] a symbol of purity,[56] or part of the visualizations of the Pure Land. The "leap to eternity" and the ascent of the soul in bright light can also be both Christian and Buddhist. But the Eastern sources of the poem become more salient when it is compared with "Elevated." Inasmuch as "Elevated" clearly specifies the nature of the experience described, i.e., death, it is reasonable to assume that the same holds for "And the Dale Drifted." The Buddhist inspiration for both poems can be established on the basis of the striking similarity they betray to the Buddhist idea of the death experience. Peter Harvey describes it this way: "At the time of death, all people are said to experience the blissful brightly-shining Clear Light of emptiness, thusness or pure mind."[57] According to Harvey, this is the time when a person can travel at will, see the details of his last karma, as well as have visions of the various rebirth realms. Harvey's description is

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[54] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 109.

[55] Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (Sand Francisco: Harper, 1983) 253.

[56] JCJ Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983) 86

[57] Harvey 212.

especially appropriate for "Elevated" which portrays the separation of the body and soul, the liberating leap to eternity, the light in which the soul ascends, and the visions of the past life. There is no doubt that the leap to eternity in the poem signifies death and the liberation of the soul imprisoned by the body. It might also point to the end of the round of births, thus possibly hinting at the virtuous life of the poem's heroine.

Stus' Buddhist orientation is particularly revealing in his conception of God. This is evident in two poems beginning with the same verse "V meni uzhe narodzhujetsia Boh" (God is Already Being Born in Me"), but nonetheless quite distinct works which cannot be considered variants. What unites them is a reference to God in the context of death, a noticeable presence of Buddhist elements, and intertexual allusions to other poems from this group. For convenience, the two works will be identified as Poem 1 and Poem 2. Poem 1 reads as follows:

В мені уже народжується Бог
і поступово одміняє душу
і повнить груди холодом, і світлом
мене донищує. Вітаю, певний дню!
Безкрайо розсувається овид,
земля даліє, наче тьмяна зірка,
і голова моя, налита сонцем,
вже передсмертну радість прочува.
Благослови мене, блаженна мить —
раптове самоспалення і вічне
навернення до тіла. Проминання
і входження зненацька — в сто світів,
де кожен надмолодь. Бо не живу
у жодному. Лише перебуваю,
мов на гостині. Надивлятись — марно:
до них не буде більше вороття.

Хібаще пам'ять: тут лупили шкуру
живцем із мене. Пам'ять. От і вже.
Благослови мене, мій певний дню,
початись там, де щойно закінчився,
закінчуватись там, куди повік
тобі заказано путі–дороги.
Немилосердний дню – благослови.[58]

(God is already being born in me / and is gradually changing my soul / and is filling my chest with cold, / and is extinguishing me with light. I greet you, chosen day! / The horizon is spreading boundlessly, / the earth is retreating, like a dim star, / and my head, filled with the sun, / already experiences the dying joy. / Bless me, blissful moment - / the sudden self-burning and eternal / return to the body. Passing / and entering unexpectedly - into hundred worlds, / where everyone is their youngest. Because I do not live / in any of them. I only stay there, / like a visitor. It is not worth taking a closer look: / there will be no return to them. / Save for the memory: here they were skinning / me alive. Memory. And nothing else. / Bless me, my chosen day, / to begin where [you] have just ended, / to finish where / you are forever banned to go. / Merciless day - bless me.)

This poem shares a number of features with "Elevated," e.g., the act of dying and the idea of returning from the dead. Both poems link light and death. In Poem 1, the light signals the end of physical existence. The poet presents the soul's ascent by referring to the retreating earth and indicates the direction of the movement by alluding to the boundlessly spreading horizon. The ascent is accompanied by the sensation of being filled with the sun, and the feeling of joy, born of the realization of the coming death. Much like in the earlier examined "And the Dale Drifted," the Buddhist perception of death experience comes to the fore in this poem. The

[58] Stus *Palimpsesty* 400.

concept of reincarnation is addressed in reference to the "eternal return to the body." The poet alludes to the numerous worlds allegedly visited by him. However, he does not feel close to any of them, since they are not considered something permanent. In each he feels "like a visitor." There will be no return to any of them, except in the form of memory. One such personal memory brings back feelings of pain and suffering ("...here they were skinning / me alive"). The description of existence in different worlds is consistent with the Buddhist idea of reincarnation. This is further reinforced in the lyrical persona's request, addressed to the "chosen day" (a metaphor for the day he dies), to bless him in his final moment and to help him carry on from where everything ended. This reveals his perception of death as not ending existence, as well as betrays concern about his future being. Inasmuch as the circle of reincarnations is considered in Eastern philosophy as a cycle coupled with suffering, a new round cannot be viewed as something positive. The poet addresses this by relating the turmoil of being in different worlds and by calling the day of his death "merciless."

The figure of God in this poem requires special consideration. It is associated with a power that brings death and relief, which is consistent with "the Buddhist idea of a joyful greeting of death as a supreme relief from suffering, an annihilation of life which one hopes and strives for all through life."[59] The poet's claim that God is being born in him points to God as part of his being. This is further

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[59] Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962) 194.

emphasized in the second poem bearing the same initial line.[60] There, i.e., in Poem 2, Stus claims that, on the threshold of death, when God is being born in him, he exists together with him. Even though God is intertwined with death, the poet regards him as his saviour („Він опорятунок для мене"). This is stressed by his appeal to God to save him: to bring death, putting out his "candle of pain" („свічка болю"). As a result, the lyrical persona will "exit himself" („вийшов сам із себе"), and "darkness" will grant him a different kind of existence, a different kind of life, referred by the neologisms „інобуття" and „іножиття" (other-being). Like in the rest of the selected group, the interplay of light and darkness is prominent in both poems.

Stus views God through the prism of Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism. His God can be linked to the concept of *satori* or awakening, which is related to death. Treating death as enlightenment and liberation, Stus begins to perceive the world in a different light, through the prism of mortality. This is consistent with the Zen view of achieving *satori* -- personal experience and meditation leading to a new way of perception.[61] Also, the poet's own beliefs in struggle and suffering are in tune with the Zen conception of these two aspects as an integral part of attaining enlightenment,[62] which is viewed as a leap from thinking to

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[60] Stus *Palimpsesty* 409. Since Poem 1 and Poem 2 develop the same theme and share common imagery, the full text of Poem 1 alone is provided as the most revealing of the two regarding the topic at hand.

[61] Stus' letter, examined earlier in the chapter, stresses his newly acquired way of living and experiencing the world.

[62] Clemens J. Caraboolad, *Mysticism and Zen, an Introduction.* (Washington: University Press of America, 1978) 97.

knowing.[63] For this reason Stus speaks of God *being born* in him, or, in other words, he refers to the transformations of his inner world.

A Buddhist reading of Stus' God helps explain the spiritual, psychological and physical changes the lyrical persona experiences in Poem 1. Such changes are conditioned by an approaching death which is not considered as a total annihiliation. The same idea is expressed in Poem 2, where God is apprehended as a force that kills in order to save. This brings to mind the following lines from *Zenrin*: "To save life it must be destroyed. / When utterly destroyed, one dwells for the first time in peace."[64] Stus' statement that God will extinguish his pain by being born in him also alludes to the concept of *satori.* The latter implies reaching a higher level of perception through contemplation about death and accepting it as part of existence without fear, regret or anxiety. From a general Buddhist perspective, it refers to achieving a higher level of spiritual development in a new life as a result of a round of deaths and births.

There is one other aspect that needs to be mentioned. Stus had always looked at himself as a defender of his people. He never complained about his fate and considered it his mission in life to perish for an idea. In Buddhism, the idea of karma emphasizes the importance of human action and its effects.[65] It is also believed

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[63] Humphreys 116.

[64] Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen.* (Penguin Books: 1972) 172. *Zenrin* or *Zenrin Kushu* is an anthology of poems, compiled by Toyo Eicho (1429-1504). The verses have been drawn from different Chinese sources: Buddhist, Taoist, classical literature, etc.

[65] Harvey 40.

that more advanced souls are projected into the worlds that require special assistance. Harvey describes this in the following way:

> At the seventh stage, the *Bodhisattva* goes beyond being reborn according to karma, and becomes a 'Great Being'..., a heavenly saviour being who, by his perfection of skillful means, magically projects himself into many worlds so as to teach and help beings in appropriate ways.[66]

One may question whether Stus knew about this particular aspect of Buddhism, and wonder whether the passage from Poem 1, where he speaks about entering a hundred worlds, is linked to the above quotation only by chance. Nevertheless, the resemblance between the two ideas is quite striking.

In the group of poems I have just examined the theme of death serves as the background against which Stus presents his philosophical ideas. Even though his perspective of mortality leans toward Eastern religion, the problems that interest the poet are universal, e.g., the virtue of suffering, the role of self-discipline and will, the consequences that men face as a result of their actions.[67] At the same time, these poems view death as the beginning of a new existence; accept suffering as a necessary element of one's life; and express belief in the continuity of the soul's being. The question is why was a new perspective on death so important for Stus that he chose to explore it from the standpoint of Eastern philosophy? I propose that the answer is simple. As the poet himself acknowledges, the perspective helped him become

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[66] Harvey 124.

[67] These motifs will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3.

indifferent to death, awakened in him cosmic forces, and allowed him to lose oneself in order to embrace the whole world.[68] Or, to use Suzuki's definition of Zen, it pointed out to Stus the way from bondage to freedom.

[68] Stus *Vikna* 239.

Chapter 3: Fate and Existence

Several years before his death, in a letter to his wife and son, Stus defined fate in the following manner:

> Fate is a big word. When will man come to realize what is fate? Some people become aware of it later in life after wasting their years and soul, and some will never achieve this awareness. You might argue: why does one have to be loyal to one's fate? This question will be the most improper though, since fate does not have a purpose (why do trees grow? why do rivers flow?). It exists, and in its existence, it has a purpose...[1]

After the subject of death, Stus accords poetic treatment most frequently to fate and existence. One fourth of the poems in *Palimpsests* are devoted to the latter. In this group, approximately twelve poems written in the camps and almost twice as many written in exile directly name or address destiny under the guise of "fate" („доля") or "ill fortune" („недоля"). Stus manifests an acute interest in the topic on both the personal and philosophical levels. It is in connection with his life's road that his patriotic sentiments are most articulate and conspicuous. Against such a background, the role of fate in one's life, the hardships incurred as a result of being loyal to it and the ensuing choices that one has to make, loneliness, inner turmoil and apprehension of imminent death are the main motifs developed by the poet.

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[1] Letter to wife and son of August 8, 1981, Vasyl' Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 188.

Stus' approach to his personal destiny is twofold. On the one hand, he views it from the position of determinism, as "divine foreordainment, or the predetermined and unalterable course of events."[2] He often employs Christian images -- such as God, Golgotha, the cross -- to help convey the inevitability of his turmoil. Here Stus manifests what he identifies as "khrystyians'ke vpokorennia fatumovi" (Christian acceptance of fate), an expression he uses in a previously mentioned essay devoted to Volodymyr Svidzins'kyi's poetry (see p. 10). In particular, Stus emphasizes that for Svidzins'kyi all grief, suffering and misfortune are "impersonal," something that he does not question, but rather regards as God's will that has to be endured.[3] Incidentally, Stus reveals similar approach in his own poetry.

On the other hand, the importance that Stus assigns to personal choice suggests the existentialist sources that inform his works. I believe that his interest and familiarity with such philosophers as Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, is evident in his writing. Stus' fondness for Rainer Maria Rilke, one of this century's most existential poets (whose works he translated extensively), and Camus (one of his favourite authors),[4] was, most probably, another factor behind his orientation. Stus' poetry couples deterministic

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[2] *Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Dagobert D. Runes. (Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959) 77.

[3] Vasyl' Stus, "Znykome roztsvittannia," *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh, shesty knyhakh*, Vol. 4 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 358.

[4] Mikhail Heifetz, *Ukrainian Silhouettes* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1983) 23-25.

attitudes toward fate and an existentialist approach to authentic existence. This blend is manifest in the poetry of incarceration and exile. Both the premises of the philosophy of existentialism and the fatal nature of Stus' political commitment are the reason why death figures so prominently in his treatment of authentic existence and fate.

This chapter will examine the poet's treatment of the subject against the background of major motifs such as authentic existence, spiritual self-sufficiency, loneliness, life as eternal turmoil, God and fate. For this purpose, I have selected what I consider the most representative poems that develop each of the identified motifs. Inasmuch as Stus' poetic treatment of fate and being draws substantially from the main concepts of the philosophy of existentialism, a short digression is in order.

Existentialism

Literary critics have often made references to the existentialist mode of Stus' works. They, however, have failed to define the term "existentialism,"[5] leaving the reader to wonder whether the reference is to the philosophical school, commonly associated with such names as Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, or -- more generally -- to "the situation of humankind in a universe seen as

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[5] This tendency can be observed, for example, in Tamara Hundorova's "Fenomen Stusovoho 'zhertvoslova'" in *Stus as Text* ed. by Marko Pavlyshyn (Melbourne: Monash University, Slavic Section, 1992).

purposeless or irrational."[6] I will approach Stus' works from the perspective of philosophy. And inasmuch as one of the constants in Stus' writing is the persistent allusion to death, especially to living between life and death, Ralph Harper's definition of existentialism will be accepted as the most appropiate:

> The existential creed is an outgrowth of a conversion of the soul which takes place in some persons who have been gravely impressed by the glimpse of themselves which they got in one or both of two intuitions of the self. The first intuition is of the unique, living self; the second is of the unique, dying self...[7]

The existentialists' "glimpse of themselves," to which Harper refers, accounts for their preoccupation with the individual, an isolated and creative personality who opposes social mentality and is ready to sacrifice his life for authentic existence. "Personality is aristocratic - the system a plebeian invention..."[8], wrote Kierkegaard in his *Journals*. It is existentialism's treatment of the relationship between the system and the individual that makes it clash with materialist thinking, in particular Marxism and socialism. By refusing to treat man as an object (a characteristic of the latter), existentialism considers man as a subject, insisting on existence before essence.[9] Expressing his distrust of materialist thinking, Nietzsche wrote:

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[6] *Webster's College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1991) 468.

[7] Ralph Harper *Existentialism, A Theory of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948) 35.

[8] *The Journals of Kierkegaard* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 244.

[9] "Essence" implies true nature of things, as opposed to what is accidental, phenomenal, or illusory.

> "...socialism is no more than the younger brother of the nearly dead old-fashioned despotism, which he wants to succeed. In its very core it is reactionary, since socialism strives for such a scope of governmental power as only despotism has held before. It even goes beyond despotism by striving after the annihilation of the individual, this individual which for socialism is an unjustified luxury of nature and which it wants to transform into a functional organ of the human community."[10]

Existentialists oppose turning man into a "functional organ" of society. They reject life lived in conformity and the people who accept it. Designated as "public" by Kierkegaard, "mass man" by Nietzsche, and as "they" by Heideggar, such individuals are characterized by their unwillingness to see beyond their meaningless existence. They possess, as Nietzsche calls it, a "slave morality," live in their comfortable shells, and oppose everything new. Referring to them as "petty folk," the philosopher stresses that "they all preach submission and humility and cunning and diligence and consideration and all the long etcetera of petty virtues."[11]

According to Heidegger, the "they" maintains itself "in the averageness of that which belongs to it, of that which it regards as valid and that which it does not, and of that to which it grants

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[10] The citation from *Friedrich Nietzsche's Werke,* vol. III, p. 149, is given in the translation by Breisach from Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism.* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962) 44.

[11] Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1933) 254. Even though Nietzsche' s words were aimed against Christians, for Stus, who was familiar with the philosopher's work, they could pertain to his own reality.

success and that to which it denies it. In this averageness with which it prescribes what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore."[12] Their influence, though, is strong and overpowering. Everyone becomes part of the "they" to a certain degree, thus strengthening their dictatorship. Heidegger writes:

> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they (man)* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The "they", which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.[13]

Heidegger's "they" are radically contrast with Nietzsche's "Higher Men," who are regarded as the select few that are able to resist the temptations of the crowd. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Nietzsche identifies "Higher Men" as "creators" who are engaged in "self-seeking," and whose gift of "will to power" acts as a generator of their actions. In "Of Higher Men," he makes the following allegorical plea to these creative individuals:

> Ye Higher Men, learn this of me: in the market place none believeth in Higher Men. And will ye speak there, well and good! But the mob blinketh: 'We are all equal!'
>
> 'You Higher Men' -- thus the mob blinketh -- 'there are no higher men; we are all equal; man is man; before God we are all equal!'

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[12] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962) 165.
[13] Heidegger 164.

> Before God! But now this God is dead. But before the mob we *will* not be equal. Ye Higher Men, leave the market place![14]

Nietzsche's "Higher Man" is closely connected with Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's "authentic existence." This concept stresses daily challenges on the road of man's quest for knowledge and truth. For Kierkegaard it is God and personal confrontation with Him that constitutes the highest way of life. The measure of authentic existence (or *Dasein)* for Heidegger is man's awareness of death. Its approach and finitude causes anxiety, which makes man aware of being alone and being-thrown-into-the-world. Anxiety is also linked with the fear of the dangers of conformity; it acts as an impetus for action. Interpreting the phenomenon of death as Being-towards-the-end and claiming that this is Dasein's basic state,[15] Heidegger wrote:

> Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of 'weakness' in some individual; but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end. Thus the existential conception of "dying" is made clear as thrown Being towards its own most potentiality-for-Being, which is non-relational and not to be outstripped.[16]

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[14] Nietzsche 253.

[15] Heidegger 293.

[16] Heidegger 295.

Insisting that it is the "they" who do not permit people the courage for anxiety in the face of death,[17] the philosopher praises the existential "freedom towards death" - *"a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the "they", and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious."* [18]

The looming death that plunges man into nothingness, as well as its anticipation, lies at the core of Sartre's approach to authentic existence which he refers to as *pour-soi* (for-itself or conscious being). This existence is marked by anxiety, forlornness and despair. It also gives man freedom, choice and responsibility, the cursed rights that he has to carry alone through life. In "Existentialism and Human Emotion," Sartre wrote:

> ...man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.[19]

Considering responsible actions as the very essence of existentialism and its first principle, the French philosopher insists that man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.[20] Opposing the philosophy of quietism which makes men expect others to take an active stand in life, Sartre stresses that there is no reality except in action and that man exists only to the extent that

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[17] Heidegger 298.

[18] Heidegger 311.

[19] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957) 23.

[20] Sartre 15.

he fulfills himself.[21] For this reason, existentialism defines man in terms of action. It is an optimistic doctrine, since man's destiny is within himself, and it tells him that the only hope is in his action, which is the only thing that enables him to live. Consequently, it is a philosophy that deals with an ethics of action and involvement.[22]

While Sartre emphasizes freedom in his existentialist stand, Camus stresses rebellion. For him, an individual is always threatened by the disharmony between man and his unresponsive environment. Camus' rebel recognizes the hostile and antagonistic relations between nature and society, continually redefines himself in terms of threats from each and sets his own moral limits.[23] Both philosophers share, however, a concern for the "threats to the self from without, with the battle between an interior and an exterior reality."[24]

Stus and Mass Man

Vasyl Stus' poetry draws on existentialism as a philosophy that provides comfort and support during conditions of chaos and despair. His life lived under the Soviet regime and in extended periods of confinement was fertile ground for nurturing the seeds of existentialism. Having an independent mind and a soul-searching

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[21] Sartre 31-32.

[22] Sartre 35-36.

[23] Richard Lehan, *French Existentialism and the Modern American Novel* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973) 33.

[24] Lehan 33.

disposition, Stus experienced first-hand the tensions between the individual and the system. The policies aimed at turning a country into a universal and homogeneous organism populated by the "they", at creating a mass mentality which would bask in conformity, and at silencing those who dared reject such conditions, constituted the backdrop against which Stus matured as a writer and an individual. He realized that in his country the artist was expected to praise the existing order and accept the role of official bard as one's own.

Before his first arrest, in 1970-1971, Stus wrote an essay, entitled "The Phenomenon of Time," devoted to the creative legacy of Pavlo Tychyna, a preeminent Ukrainian poet of the early Soviet Ukrainian Republic. Tychyna's genius suffered a setback after the 1920s and his talent was wasted on glorifying the Communist Party. Taking Camus' words[25] as an epigraph to his work, Stus explores the anatomy of personal corruption under socialism. In particular, he wrote:

> By becoming a social and state poet, Tychyna chose the shortest road towards the self-destruction of his talent. Let us look at it closer: what is really a social poet under our conditions? What themes does he have? Struggle for peace; struggle with bourgeois ideology, primarily that of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists who are the fiercest enemies of the Ukrainian people; the theme of social injustice -- but only in capitalist countries or in pre-revolutionary Russia; the leading role of the beloved Communist Party; advantages of socialism

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[25] Vasyl Stus, *Fenomen doby* (Kiev: Znannia, 1993) 65. The citation by Camus used by Stus is taken from the French writer's Nobel Prize speech and is presented in the essay as follows: "Every artist who wants to be famous in society must know that it will not be him who will be famous but somebody else with his name. Finally he will get away from him and, quite possibly, will kill the real artist in him." This is my translation from Stus' Ukrainian original, and not from Camus' speech.

> over capitalism, glorification of the worker (it was advisable that all professions be praised and none forgotten).[26]

Examining the conditions under which Tychyna declined as a poet, Stus came to the conclusion that this poet was a typical phenomenon of his times. Stus wrote: "His [Tychyna's] fate will testify about our time no less than the horrible testimonies of historians: the poet lived during a time when a genius could turn into a buffoon. And the poet agreed to this role."[27] Stus, on the other hand, chose not to conform. This existential decision later cost him his life.

Stus' personal revolt resulted from years of deep contemplation and assessment of the social environment within which he found himself. Unwilling to follow in Tychyna's footsteps, he refused to join his fellow writers in praising the existing order. Stus chose the road of dissent. In a purely existential fashion, he rejected both the ideology and the masses that were consumed by it. His alienation and contempt for corrupted morals echo Nietzschean sentiments toward the mass man. His word is highly charged, his metaphor is precise. In *Palimpsests,* he reveals the moral stagnation of the country by speaking of the "cemetery of souls" and the "cemetery of the people": „Довкола мене цвинтар душ / на білім цвинтарі народу".[28] (Around me is a cemetery of souls / on the white cemetery of the people). The people on the

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[26] Stus *Fenomen* 65.

[27] Stus *Fenomen* 91.

[28] Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist', 1986) 376.

street remind him of shadows („тіні"), they are speechless („безмовні"), with lipless mouths („уста безгубі"). Their life is wasted, since they "have missed" it („розминулися з життям"). Life took the wrong turn, and they are unable, or think that they are unable, to change the course of events. According to Stus, these people are dead because they are helpless and reluctant to modify the nature of their being.

In Stus' poetic world, people are generally viewed as dead and as belonging to one of two categories - those who did conform and those who did not. While the latter are considered dead because their confrontation with the regime lead them to their physical demise, the former are perceived as non-living because of the pathetic nature of their existence. The difference between the two is particularly prominent in "Nevzhe ty narodyvsia..."[29] (Were You Really Born...), which is addressed to a prison guard. In the poem, both the prisoner and the guard are referred to as "dead." However, they are as different as the space each occupies. The walls separating them symbolize the division between good and evil, and the function that each perfoms. The prisoner chose to abide by the beliefs for which he was incarcerated; this becomes clear when Stus discusses the importance of life's calling. On the other hand, the guard is doomed to his "Lucifer's" work which, among other things, consists of peeping into cells. Feeling pity for the guard and his wasted life, the poet identifies two opposite poles that each -- prisoner and guard -- represents: „Я сам, а ти – лиш тінь, / я

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[29] Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd edition (n.p.:Suchasnist', 1986) 64.

є добро, а ти – труха і тлінь." (I am alone[30], and you are but a shadow, / I am the good, and you are dust and rot). The existential declaration by the prisoner "I exist" adds another dimension to the function of the walls: they serve as the boundary between two modes of being -- the "authentic" and "inauthentic."

Choice and Authentic Existence

The capability to lead a meanigful and spiritually satisfying life was very important for Stus. In his prison letters,[31] he often touches upon the subject, stressing the gratifying nature of soul-searching and responsible decisions. His poetry sometimes provides an insight into the formation of these decisions, as well as into the agony and anxiety they bring. "I nadto tiazhko"[32] (And It is too Difficult), written in exile, is a good example of this and also of the tension between Stus' concepts of authentic being and fate. Written in blank verse (18 lines), the poem is tightly organized. The first and the last five lines describe the poet's present existence in what he designates a "desert" ("пустеля"). These introductory and concluding lines frame the poem. The eight lines between them provide a glimpse into the past, a period when he followed the call from his heart. They describe the time when the poet realized the

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[30] "Я сам" (I am alone) echoes with "Я існую сам" (I exist alone) in Stus, *Palimpsesty* 273. It is clear that in "Were You not Born..." Stus attempts to convey not only loneliness, but also his existential sentiments.

[31] For more information see Vasyl' Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992).

[32] Stus *Palimpsesty* 323.

futility of what existentialists would call "inauthentic existence" and consciously made a critical choice. The poet clearly favors intellectual endeavours, alluding to meetings with friends who brought the pleasure of learned encounters into his daily life: „Зустріч і знайомство, / наближення, упізнання, розкоші / метких порозумінь" (Meetings and friends, intimacy, the revelations, the luxuries of bright understandings). However, that was not enough. The old ties turned into the "burden of friendship" („тягар знайомства"), into the "old chains" („старі вериги") which had to be shaken off. Stus describes his abrupt realization of destiny as an order given by his heart: „...серце, /вже пересичене, гукнуло: йди. / Збирайся. Час. І не бери нічого / з собою в путь. (...the heart, already oversatiated, called: go. Get ready. It's time. And do not take anything with you on the journey.) Serving as a compass, the heart helps the poet take the right road, which represents his worldview, convictions and beliefs.[33] Stus' existential decision to leave his old life behind and "go without looking back" („йди, не обертаючись") echoes Kiekegaard's when he abandons life's riches for authentic existence. Writes the Danish philosopher: "I will hurry along the path I have discovered, greeting those whom I meet on my way, not looking back as did Lot's wife, but remembering that it is a hill up which we have to struggle."[34]

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[33] Sometimes Stus finds himself imprisoned by his own heart because it does not allow him to stray from the chosen path no matter what the cost. The motif is explored in "Dyvlius' na tebe" (I am Looking at You) in Vasyl' Stus *Palimpsesty* 108-109.

[34] Kierkegaard 48.

The existential aspect of "And It is too Difficult" finds itself in juxtaposition to what Stus identifies as "Christian acceptance of fate."[35] The latter is apparent in his reference to the "desert," which suggests the poet's identification with Moses, and the apprehension of his destiny as a sequence of predetermined events. Similar allusions, couched in the image of the desert, also appear in "I am Going,"[36] where Stus speaks of the hardships of his road in the extinct desert („вимерла пустеля") and of his beloved homeland populated by more than one Judas.

The twofold approach, revealed in "And It is too Difficult," is also characteristic of other poems that describe Stus' road to authentic existence. The path taken by the poet was not an easy one: he had to live through the turmoil of doubt and indecision, of innner struggle and hesitancy. The poet is well aware of the difficulty of his chosen path, and his works often relate the experience that helped him make his judgement. Even though Stus' biography points to the political nature of his choice, his works rarely concentrate on this aspect. The poet prefers to speak about his decisions metaphorically. His existential anguish is revealed in the descriptions of anxiety, as well as in detailed poetic accounts of the minute motions of his soul. Take, for example, "Kriz' sotni sumniviv" (Through Hundreds of Doubts), a twelve-line composition written in blank verse dating from the period in the camps. The poem is written in the form of address to "the goodness and the

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[35] Stus *Tvory* 358. For more information on the concept see p. 98.

[36] Stus *Palimpsesty* 366.

truth of the age" („добро і правдо віку") and himself addressed in the second-person singular "you," i.e. "thou" („ти"). The poem reveals Stus' inner turmoil on the road of his choice, characterized by "hundreds of doubts" („сотні сумнівів") and "a hundred disillusionments" („сто зневір").[37] These emotions contribute to the "stormy" nature of his "flight," which leads to death. This final destination of Stus' road-destiny is described as "the pillar of high fire" („стовп високого вогню"), located "where human feet have not touched the ground" („де не ступали ще людські сліди"), "beyond deadly abysses of human daring" („поза смертні хлані людських дерзань"), "beyond black emptiness where already there's neither happiness nor misfortune" („за чорну порожнечу, де вже нема ні щастя, ні біди"). The poem associates death with fire, crossing the boundary, and black emptiness.

The Biblical allusions of the poem appear in the references to the divine fire and to the poet's apprehension of himself as the leader of the "true path." As in the poem "And It is too Difficult," it is possible that here Stus also identifies himself with Moses. The existential mode of the poem is conveyed through references to choice and "anxiety." The latter echoes Heidegger's "anxiety in the face of death" which, as I have pointed out, is a basic state of mind of Dasein, or authentic existence:

Крізь сотні сумнівів я йду до тебе,

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[37] The number "hundred" occurs quite often in Stus' works. According to Kotsiubynska, it is used to enhance the writer's sentiments, as well as to intensify the emotional and expressive side of a feeling or quality. Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, "Poet" Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory v chotyriokh tomax shesty knyhakh.* Volume 1, Book 1 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 32.

добро і правдо віку. Через сто
зневір. Моя душа, запрагла неба,
в буремнім леті держить путь на стовп
високого вогню, що осіянний
одним твоїм бажанням. Яж туди,
де не ступали ще людські сліди,
з щовба на щовб, аж поза смертні хлані
людських дерзань, за чорну порожнечу,
де вже нема ні щастя, ні біди
і врочить подив: не спиняйся, йди.
То — шлях правдивий. Ти — його предтеча.[38]

(Through hundreds of doubts I come to you, / [oh] goodness and truth of the age. Through a hundred / disillusionments. My soul, [which] yearns for heaven, / in its stormy flight, is heading towards the pillar / of divine fire which is lighted / by your desire alone. It is heading / where human feet have not touched the ground, / from peak to peak, far beyond the deadly abysses / of human daring, beyond the black emptiness, / where already there is neither happiness, nor misfortune / and where anxiety casts its spell: go, do not stop. / This is the true path. You are its precursor.)

Considering death as an outcome of personal revolt, Stus often explores its emotional burden. A good example of this is a poem written in exile, "U temin' snu" (Into the Darkness of the Dream),[39] which consists of 60 lines of blank verse. It presents a whole gamut of feelings and emotions, experienced by those who choose to rebel. Employing the first person singular and plural ("I" and "we"), Stus strives to break the boundaries of personal experience, thus extending the concept of authentic existence to its adherents (a possible reference to fellow dissidents). The poet

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[38] Stus *Palimpsesty* 132.

[39] Stus *Palimpsesty* 290-291.

speaks of "surges of fright" („надоми ляку"), of "the thirst of being set on fire, of being burnt, of auto-da-fé" („жага згоряння, спалення, автодафе"), of "self-revelations" („себеявлення" -- a neologism in Ukrainian) and "self-escapes" („самовтечі"), of "the aloofness of endurance" („паморозь терпінь") and "incompleteness of daring" („недоконаність дерзання"). Most importantly though, he mentions "visible death" („видиму смерть") and crossing the boundary towards it. Death is always there, determining every motion of his soul and every movement of his conscience. It is perceived as the end of his "road," and the only power which can confront fate.

> О, ті нестерпні виходи за грань
> привсюдности! О, ті надоми ляку,
> ота зухвала згага самовтеч,
> жага згоряння, спалення, авто—
> дафе. Та паморозь терпінь
> і вічна недоконаність дерзання,
> рух руху руху. Те безмежжя сил,
> розбурханих от молодого болю,
> ті парухи зусиль, та виднота
> себеявлення, та оглухла прірва
> обрушення і заступлення за
> видиму смерть...[40]

> (Oh, those unbearable crossings beyond the limit / of omnipresence! Oh, those surges of fright, / that brazen yearning for self-escapes, / the thirst of being set on fire, of being burnt, of auto-/ da-fé. That aloofness of endurance / and eternal incompleteness of daring, / movement of the movement of movement. That boundlessness of vigour, / set in motion by young pain, /

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[40] Stus *Palimpsesty* 291.

those early motions of efforts, that obviousness / of self-revelations, that dense abyss / of falling and stepping beyond / the visible death.)

According to Sartre, this kind of existential anguish is a manifestation of freedom.[41] The mixture of emotions arising from the situation is a tribute paid to the "crossings beyond the line." Stus' reconciliation with death is also consonant with the ideas expressed by Nietzsche on Superman (or Higher Man) in *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* Describing the virtues of Higher Man, the philosopher writes: "...for his virtue's sake he willeth either to live on or to cease to live"; "...he giveth ever and keepeth naught for himself"; "...he willeth to perish by the present generation." "I love him which is a free mind and a free heart: for his head is but the bowels of his heart, but his heart driveth him to destruction."[42] Stus' heart commanded him to choose the road-destiny leading to his destruction. It also taught him one important truth concerning the nature of authentic existence: "In life the most dangerous thing... is to be in the middle."[43]

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency

One of the characteristic features of Stus' letters from prison is their intellectual nature. He constantly speaks of literature, art,

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[41] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 35.

[42] Nietzsche 8.

[43] Letter to mother and sister of April, 4, 1983. Vasyl' Stus *Vikna* 227.

theater, and philosophy; he debates different concepts and ideas, comments on his recent readings, and discusses his creative plans and accomplishments. It seems that the conditions of incarceration not only sharpened his intellectual curiosity, but also turned it into an essential source of survival. Stus' thirst for knowledge led to self-exploration and became a form of self-fulfillment. The poet reveals his understanding of the importance of the Self in "Meni zoria siiala" (A Star was Shining for Me), a poem of 19 lines written in blank verse and originating in the camps. There he writes: „...жити — то не є долання меж, / а навикання і самособою — / наповнення".[44] (...to live is not a surmounting of boundaries, / but [spiritual] practice and [the state of] being filled and sustained with the Self). According to Kotsiubyns'ka, the word „самособоюнаповнення" is Stus' own term which implies self-exploration and search for the core within oneself.[45] Here the poet's existential stance is evident. And yet the same poem contains a reference to the lyrical persona's road as a cross and fate („хрест" and „доля"), the symbols of Stus' poetry often associated with determinism.

Stus reveals similar duality in "U nebi zori" (Stars in the Sky),[46] written in exile. There his reference to the road from man to God is preceded by perhaps his most laconic existential statement: "Світ у мені. У світі я." (The world is in me. I am in the world.).

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[44] Stus *Palimpsesty* 126.

[45] Kotsiubyns'ka "Poet" 22.

[46] Stus *Palimpsesty* 433.

Reminiscent of Rilke's "Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen." (Nowhere, beloved, can the world exist but within),[47] it asserts the significance of the self. In this context it is necessary to point out that Stus translated Rilke's Seventh Elegy, which contains this quotation, and which glorifies existence and proclaims the transitoriness of human life.[48] For the Ukrainian poet, however, the statement on the prevailing nature of spiritual life, besides its purely philosophical implications, had another, very important aspect: communication with the self and reliance upon one's inner world became integral factors of Stus' life in confinement.

Loneliness and Personal Choice

Having experienced the existential feeling of being thrown into a world of chaos, Stus wrote: "The world has gone mad" („Світ збожеволів").[49] He also realized his loneliness: „Немає світу. Я існую сам."[50] (The world does not exist. I exist alone.); „Ти живеш, як пустка, / утеклий світу, давшись самоті[51] (You live

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[47] Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Seventh Elegy," *Duino Elegies* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948) 70-71.

[48] In his letters from prison, Stus often talks about his translations from Rilke, particularly about *Duino Elegies*. According to his letter of 12/9/83 to his mother, sister and niece, he finished translating the *Elegies*. Stus *Vikna* 235.

[49] Stus *Palimpsesty* 250.

[50] Stus *Palimpsesty* 273.

[51] Stus *Palimpsesty* 277.

like a waste land, / having escaped the world and having yielded to loneliness). The conscious denial of the world around the poet and escape from it are compounded by feelings of sadness and dejection. The poet clearly grieves his isolation, but, nonetheless, regards it as part of his fate, which he never questions. The turmoil that he encounters as a result hardens his will and makes him even more resolute in following his chosen path: „Впаду і знову підведусь, / на ліктях ізіпнусь" ([I] will fall and get up again, / [I] will raise [myself] on elbows).[52]

"U tsiomu poli syniomu iak l'on" (In This Field, Blue as Flax) is most revealing in portraying the poet's anguish which accompanies his decision-making and results in loneliness. It appears among the poetry attributed to the period of the camps. Its early variant, however, was first included in the collection *The Merry Cemetery.* This points to the fact that the question of personal choice and the ensuing desolation concerned the poet long before his imprisonment. Like "Through Hundreds of Doubts," the poem is an apostrophe to the Self in second person singular. Written in iambic pentameter, it reflects the emotional outlook of the lyrical persona and communicates the idea of the difficulties one incurs in making a personal choice. The idea of loneliness is communicated through the use of the pronouns "you" („ти"), "only you" („ти сам"), "you yourself" („сам себе"), "your own" („власний"), emphasizing the isolation of the addressee and creating a mood of lonely desperation. The references to being alone in the first stanza and to

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[52] Stus *Palimpsesty* 228.

being burnt by loneliness in the last provide a thematic frame. The first and second stanzas introduce the theme of loneliness:

> У цьому полі, синьому, як льон,
> де тільки ти — і ні душі навколо,
> уздрів і скляк — блукало серед поля
> сто тіней. В полі синьому, як льон.
>
> І в цьому полі, синьому як льон,
> судилося тобі самому бути,
> судилося себе самого чути —
> у цьому полі, синьому, як льон.[53]

(In this field, blue as flax, / where it is just you -- and not a soul around, / [I] looked and was dumbfounded -- there wandered around the field. / a hundred shadows / In the field, blue as flax. // And in this field, blue as flax, / you were destined to be alone, / you were destined to hear only yourself -/ in this field, blue as flax.)

The central image of the poem -- the shadows -- is related to fate. This is conveyed both directly and implicitly. While the poem published in *The Merry Cemetery* explicitly states that the poet is destined to be in the field in order to "experience fate" („спізнати долі"),[54] the *Palimpsests* version conveys the idea by employing the anaphora "destined" („судилося") in the second stanza. The lyrical persona's confrontation with the hundred shadows in the field relates the experience of making important decisions that

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[53] Stus *Palimpsesty* 221. The collection *Palimpsesty* does not contain the poem's division into stanza, however, I chose to divide it into stanzas on the basis of rhyme.

[54] Vasyl' Stus, *Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh,* Vol. 1, Book 1, (Lviv: Prosvita, 1994) 184.

influence his further existence. These decisions are difficult and incur future misery. From here the reference to the shadows as "enemies" that send him "curses" („прокльони"). The latter are linked to the poet's loneliness. The dilemma -- to stay or to escape the approaching shadows -- is solved in favour of the decision not to yield („Ні. Вистояти. Вистояти." / "No. To hold out. To hold out"). His determination to remain in the field in order to experience bondage in his land, which is simultaneously perceived as both native and foreign („І власної неволі / зазнати тут, на рідній чужині"), points to the social nature of his commitment and decisions.

The image of the shadows is instrumental in conveying the sentiments of the lyrical persona who feels it impossible to escape fate, which he considers a curse. His conscious decision, however, makes him the creator of his own fate. As we can see, here again Stus blends the existential concept of choice with a fatalistic view of life.

During the period of exile, Stus continues to explore the theme of loneliness and the concomitant motifs of forlornness and anxiety. A good example is "Dovkola mene" (Around Me). The beginning of the poem reveals its central theme, as well as identifies the absences (no friends / „немає друга") and presences ("fierce blizzard of Kolyma's dusky clouds / „дика... зав'юга колимських тьмяних заволок") in the poet's life:

Довкола мене – смертна смуга,
ніхто не ближся ні на крок.
То ж жодного немає друга.

а тільки дика ця зав'юга
колимських тьмяних заволок.
О самото! О загородо
жалких прелютих шпичаків.[55]

(Around me is the death zone - / no one may take even a step closer. / So there isn't a single friend around, / just this fierce blizzard / of Kolyma's dusky clouds. / O, loneliness! O, enclosure /of wretched and ferocious edges.)

Much like "In This Field Blue as Flax," "Around Me" links the poet's loneliness to the relationship with his homeland through the reference to his kin („рід"), characterized as "silent since ancient times" („без'язикий — з правіків"); underscores his choice to rebel against all odds and authorities; and betrays his lack of faith and disillusionment („сто зневір," „сто спроневір"). Stylistically both poems employ the figure "hundred" („сто") to emphasize the intensity of emotions, and the second-person pronouns "you" and "yours" in reference to the lyrical persona. Thematically both poems speak of the emptiness surrounding the poet, a space which cannot and will not be filled. However, the world around him is much gloomier in "Around Me": it is no longer a "field" but a "death zone" that isolates him. The zone is filled with "*dusky* clouds," which reverberates with the reference to "shadows" in "In This Field Blue as Flax." The ugly and turbulent landscape in "Around Me" contrasts sharply with the beautiful and peaceful nature of the earlier poem. The poet's lack of freedom is conveyed through "wretched" and "ferocious" space that encloses him. Much like in "How I Wish to

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[55] Stus *Palimpsesty* 362.

Die!", written during the same period, the image of the "fierce blizzard," employed in the context of confinement space and death, serves as a metaphor for the boundary that separates the lyrical persona from life.

Sentiments such as these are in accordance with Sartre's ideas that man must carry his freedom alone. For the French existentialist, forlornness is not a deficiency but a proper disposition experienced in authentic existence. This existence is realized only in deeds that are committed alone, in absolute freedom and responsibility, and imbued with the character of true creation.[56] Writes Sartre: "Forlorness implies that we ourselves choose our being. Forlorness and anguish go together."[57] By committing himself to authentic existence, Stus made the feelings of forlorness, anxiety and despair part of his being. However, loyalty to his cause is never at issue; he remains devoted and resilient: „О дух мій, не гнітися / од чаду самоти.[58] (Oh, my soul, do not despair / from the fumes of loneliness.)

Stus' portrayal of loneliness, suffering and authentic existence also reverberates with echoes of Rilke's Tenth Elegy *(Duino Elegies).* The German poet stresses the virtue of loneliness (a theme started in the Fourth Elegy, where loneliness is regarded as a necessary task for creativity) and the role of fate in pursuing one's calling: "Einsam steigt er dahin, in die Berge des Urleids. / Und

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[56] Breisach 100-101.

[57] Sartre *Existentialism* 29.

[58] Stus *Palimpsesty* 442.

nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los." (Alone, he climbs to the mountains of Primal Pain. / And never once does his step resound from the soundless fate).[59] It is interesting that Stus employs images similar to Rilke's. Thus "the fields of flowering Sadness" of the Tenth Elegy are echoed by Stus' "field blue as flax." The image of the "field" for both poets is charged with grief and loss, and is related to fate. While Rilke underscores the gloomy nature of the fields of Sadness by the images of "Tear trees" (Tränennbäume) and "herds of Grief" (Tiere der Trauer), Stus emphasizes the suffering which he experiences in the field by referring to his solitude.

Existence as Eternal Turmoil

Stus' perception of existence is closely related to the concepts of choice and responsibility. The anguish, which permeates his poems, comes as a result of facing his commitment. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre refers to this existential feeling as "pure," one which is never preceded or followed by fear. It occurs when one is raised to a new dignity and charged with an important mission. The anguish experienced under these circumstances comes from the thought of not being "capable... of fulfilling it.".[60] Writes Sartre:

> The existentialists say at once that man is anguish. What that means is this: the man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he

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[59] Rilke 98-99.
[60] Sartre *Being* 30.

> chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, can not help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility.[61]

What places Stus' poems in the tradition of existentialism is the poet's acute sense of mission. While stressing its importance and impact on the nature of his existence, he relates his feelings of anxiety. Incessantly turning to the theme of existence and personal choice, he reveals the struggle of his soul and the doubts of his heart. His treatment of existence as eternal turmoil is characteristic of a number of poems. Take, for example, "Ty tin" (You are a Shadow) from the period of confinement, written as an apostrophe to the second-person pronoun "you" and simultaneously exploring fate and existence. Shevelov suggests that the referent of the pronoun "you" is Ukraine. According to him, only this explanation elucidates this hermetic poem and allows the reader to see Ukraine the way Stus saw it: as a landscape, as a synopsis of history, as a reality and as an idea. Then the image of Orpheus can be understood as poetry, and the poet as a carrier of national spirituality.[62] While agreeing with Shevelov in principle, I would argue that here the addressee encompasses a much broader set of ideas than merely Ukraine. In fact, it also refers to the poet himself, as well as to his fate. Inasmuch as Stus identifies his destiny with that of Ukraine, the two destinies fuse in the poem.

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[61] Sartre *Existentialism* 18.

[62] Yuri Shevelyov (George Shevelov), "Trunok i trutyzna" in Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (Suchasnist: 1986) 47-48.

Ти тінь, ти притінь, смерк і довгий гуд,
і зелень бань, і золото горішнє,
мертвіше тліну. Ти бажання грішне –
пірнути в темінь вікових огуд,
із хуторів, із виселків і сіл
ти, безголова дорога потворо,
гориш в віках, немов болід, як Тора.
Горіти бо – то вічний твій приділ.
Всеспалення. Твоє автодафе –
перепочинок перед пізнім святом,
як ворога назвешся рідним братом
і смерк розсуне лірою Орфей.[63]

(You are a shadow, you are dimness, dusk and a long hoot, / and [you are] the greenness of domes, and the gold of tops, / [you] are more dead than decay itself. You are a sinful desire -/ to plunge into the dark of age-long censures, / from homesteads, from settlements and villages, / you, dear headless monster, / burn through the ages, like a meteor, like the Torah. / After all to burn is your eternal destiny. / To burn entirely. Your auto-da-fé -/ is a pause before the belated celebration, / when you are designated your enemy's brother / and Orpheus disperses the dusk with his lyre.)

"You are Shadow" counterposes the darkness in the beginning of the poem ("shadow," "dimness," "dusk," "dark") with the light at the end, which albeit unmentioned is implicit in the reference to Orpheus dispersing the "dusk." In this context, the adressee is identified with darkness, being referred to as "a shadow," "dimness," and "dusk." Concurrently the addressee is designated as a "dear headless monster," whose destiny is to burn through the ages. Before further interpretation of the poem, a short digression

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[63] Stus *Palimpsesty* 191.

concerning Stus' poetic style is in order. This will also be helpful in discussions that follow in later chapters.

Probably the most important feature of Stus' poetic world is that his images are endowed with certain specific functions. They freely cross the boundaries of separate works and enter into relations with each other, thus creating a series of connotations and associations. This does not mean, however, that their basic meaning changes. For example, the previously discussed image of a "vertical crypt,"[64] which appears in different poems, signifies death. But the image also serves to signal the proximity of death as well, although the main meaning stays unchanged. This feature of Stus' writing has been stressed by Kotsiubyns'ka, who notes that the poet's works present a poetic body with its own fixed images, favourite associative and stylistic devices, and its own vocabulary.[65]

It is quite likely that here Stus was influenced by Rilke. Consider the following. Finding himself confronted with the limitations of language, Rilke attempted to convey a particular shade of meaning or tone of feeling by placing his word in a particular position. This resulted in employing the same image in different contexts and even different works. Consequently, Rilke's readers find it helpful to operate within a set of the poet's texts rather than dealing with individual poems. Another feature of Rilke's style was the frequently occuring "you," which often meant

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[64] For more information see Chapter 2.

[65] Kotsiubuns'ka "Poet" 32.

that he was talking about himself. Even though this "you" could refer to anyone, it always had a particular application.[66]

Stus' poetry is in many ways close to Rilke's.[67] This is true both for the system of images and the use of second-person narration. For example, in the Seventh Elegy, Rilke refers to fate as an "extinguisher," which is consonant with Stus' allusions to his destiny of eternal auto-da-fé, as expressed in "You are Shadow" and "In the Darkness of the Dream." It seems that both poets associate authentic existence with fire which serves as a metaphor for their inner turmoil. Addressing the Self as "you" is also common for both poets. Stus employs "you" as a device in a number of poems. Besides the earlier examined "And it is Too Difficult," "In This Field Blue as Flax," and "Around Me," this stylistic device is employed in "Toi obraz" (That Image), "Sto dzerkal" (Hundred Mirrors), etc.[68]

Inasmuch as I consider Stus' poetic world as a particular system with recurring images bearing similar semantic meanings and evoking cognate associations, it is my opinion that "You are Shadow" is another elaboration on the themes of fate and existence, along with "In This Field Blue as Flax" and "In the Darkness of the Dream." A brief comparison of the three will help to illustrate my point.

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[66] J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, "Introduction.". Rilke 18-19.

[67] Kotsiubyns'ka "Poet" 22.

[68] This stylistic feature is also prominent in such poems, as "Terpy" (Be Patient), "Chervnevyi snih" (June Snow), "Proidy kriz' sto dverej" (Go Through Hundred Doors), "Zhdannia vytratne" (Waiting is Pointless), etc. Stus *Palimpsesty* 421, 417, 407, 318.

Let us consider first "You are Shadow" and "In This Field Blue as Flax." Both poems allow the poet to speak about himself by using the "you" as the form of address, and employ an image of the shadow. "In This Field Blue as Flax," with its emphasis on being alone in the field, reveals an existential notion of struggling alone. At the same time, the "shadows," as was mentioned earlier, are linked to destiny. Given the similarity of both poems, it seems quite reasonable to apply the grid of "In This Field Blue as Flax" (with "you" referring to the poet himself, and "shadow" to destiny) to "You are Shadow." Seen from this perspective, the phrase "You are shadow" could be perceived as "I am my own destiny." The statement agrees with Stus' own understanding of choice in life, as well as with the main premises of the philosophy of existentialism.

Besides employing second-person pronouns, "You are Shadow" shares with "In the Darkness of the Dream" references to fire. Thus in the former, Stus asserts that "burning" and "auto-da-fé" is the "you's" eternal destiny. This echoes with "thirst of being set on fire, of being burnt, of auto-da-fé" in the poem "In the Darkness of the Dream," which discusses authentic existence. The relationship between destiny, fire, and death is common to both poems, which consider the presence of each as an essential part of authentic existence.

The comparison of the three poems suggests that Shevelov's treatment of "you" in "You are a Shadow" as merely an image for Ukraine is simplistic. It is true that the poem's images of green and gold domes, "homesteads," "settlement" and "villages" evoke images of Ukraine, however, the "you" broadens its implications to embrace

the poet, his homeland, and fate. In fact, the poem identifies each of the addressees: the shadow is intertexually linked to fate; the green and gold domes, which are synonymous with Ukraine's capital and Stus' hometown Kiev, are a metaphor for that country; while the "auto-da-fé," associated with the burning of heretics, is likely to point to the poet himself. For Stus, his own destiny and that of his homeland, Ukraine, are inseparable. In fact, they fuse, and the poet does not even attempt to identify the boundaries between the two. Thus the two fates are marked with darkness ("dimness", "dusk") and death ("dead," "auto-da-fé"). Their turmoil is expressed by numerous references to "burning." This and Stus' intertexual linking of fire with authentic existence and inner turmoil indicate the possibility of him albeit indirectly speaking about himself. The image of the "dear headless monster" is likely to refer to Ukraine, inasmuch as it reflects the country's lack of leadership, as well as the poet's own love-hate relationship with his homeland (cf. Stus' references to his land as both native and foreign in "In This Field Blue as Flax" and to his kin as "silent since ancient times" in "Around Me"). It might also refer to the lyrical persona's own fate, which, as difficult as it is, is a result of his own conscious choice. The allusion to Orpheus at the end of the poem reveals Stus' apprehension of a poet's role in society. It is the poet who can disperse the dusk, or, in other words, change fate, with his creativity.

This last point needs some additional comments. Even though Stus himself was not in favour of using poetry as a platform for

promoting views and ideas,[69] some of his works nevertheless contain passages with a pronounced political orientation. They also include references to Ukraine and the sacrifices he is willing to make for her freedom. For Stus, as for Sartre, "Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom, once you have begun, you are engaged..."[70] Convinced that "a free man addressing free men, has only one subject - freedom",[71] the French existentialist believed that literature had a moral dimension. Both Sartre and Camus held that literature can not only describe man's plight, but also change it by making him aware and willing to act.[72] This premise is even more pertinent to Ukrainian literature. According to Kotsiubyns'ka, the conditions under which Ukrainian culture developed do not allow a unitary treatment of engaged poetry. A feature of modern Ukrainian culture, engaged letters were merely a response to historical circumstances.[73] Stus' own perception of literature as having a moral dimension allowed him to approach some themes with a clear patriotic voice.

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[69] The main bulk of *Palimpsesty,* which is acknowledged to be Stus' most mature work, contains only a small number of engaged poetry as opposed to the main corpus.

[70] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949) 65.

[71] Sartre *What is Literature?* 64.

[72] Lehan 13-14.

[73] Kotsiubyns'ka "Poet" 30.

God and Fate

The image of God plays an important role in Stus' treatment of fate and existence. Here, however, he reveals an approach which is not uniform and contains contradictions. On the one hand, God is considered as a power that determines the poet's fate. On the other hand, the role of a conscious choice and its importance is often underscored in Stus' poetry dealing with existence. The former feature is revealed in those poems that discuss fate and the turmoil that it unleashes. For example, In "Chervnevyi snih" (June snow), Stus writes: „Ти надто щедрий, Боже, – стільки жаху / вергаєш на мале моє життя"[74] (You are too generous, O God, - / you bestow so much horror on my short life). In "Dyvlius' na tebe" (I am Looking at You), a poem addressed to his son, Stus states: „...кажу: це волю Божу / я був на себе, наче хрест приймив"[75] (I say: this is God's will that I accepted like a cross.) Referring to his "cross," the poet strongly conveys the feelings of acceptance of fate, as well as evokes associations with Christ. These Christian allusions are further reinforced in the poem by the image of Golgotha in reference to the poet's fate („Ця Богом послана Голгота" / This Golgotha sent by God) which points to the determinism with which he apprehends his life's mission. It is noteworthy that the image of Golgotha is quite prominent in Stus' poetry, both in the period of confinement and exile. The image

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[74] Stus*Palimpsesty* 417.

[75] Stus *Palimpsesty* 108.

appears in three poems written in the camps (of those, two also employ the image of God)[76] and in two poems of exile.[77]

God is presented in Stus' poetry as both the source of the "horror" bestowed on him, as well as the source of the power that tempers his character and strengthens his spirit. The poet thanks God for his fate and depicts himself as putty in God's hands. "Like a clod of clay," he is being formed into an "image," whose main quality is "firmness":

> Та серця я, мій Господи, не маю,
> на свій талан. Це ти мене береш,
> неначе грудку сирової глини –
> і місиш, мнеш і пальцями всіма
> формуєш образ, щоб не задарма
> іще один кавалок з України
> сподобився тверді.[78]

> (But I do not complain about my fate, O my Lord. / It is you who takes me, / like a clod of clay, / and kneads, and shapes, and with all fingers / forms an image, so that not in vain / one more clod from Ukraine / may acquire the semblance of firmness.)

Stus' letter to his son, written several years before the poet's death,[79] reveals his understanding of what it means to be shaped by God. Stus employs a neologism -- "to give birth to oneself"

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[76] "Iak tykho na zemli" (How Quiet is on Earth), "I am Looking at You," "Sto plakh" (Hundred Executioner's Blocks) Stus *Palimpsesty* 88, 108-109, 182-183.

[77] "Pamiati Ally Hors'koi" (In Memory of Alla Hors'ka), "I vzhe..." (And Already...) Stus *Palimpsesty* 302, 370.

[78] Stus *Palimpsesty* 402.

[79] Letter to son of 14.9.1981 in Vasyl' Stus *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 195-196.

(„самонародитися") -- to emphasize the importance for each individual to be able to mould oneself. He writes: "Imagine that you yourself are the God who creates people. You are God. So, as your own God, knead your clay until you feel flint under your calluses." In this context, fate, as presented in the earlier quotation, acquires an existential dimension. By suggesting that man is God Stus communicates an idea of the power of personal decisions. His emphasis on spiritual self-sufficiency is reminiscent of the first principle of existentialism, proclaimed by Sartre: you are what you make of yourself.[80] Stus betrays a different attitude, however, in the reference to fate in his prison diaries, written a year later. There he writes: "This is fate, and fate is not chosen. That is why it must be accepted, no matter what."[81]

The poet's perception of God as an author of fate can be traced in a number of poems. Not only does God represent the divine power that affects the tempering of character, but his voice sometimes merges with that of fate, like, for example, in "Vel'mozhnyj son" (The Noble Dream). The poem starts with a message reaching the poet in a dream sent from heaven. It encourages him to follow his destiny, referred to as "the road of good deeds," irrespective of the future hardship and misfortune:

Терпи страсну стезю конань,
спізнай смертельні чари

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80 "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of exitentialism." in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion* (New York: Philosophical LIbrary, 1957) 15.

81 Stus *Vikna* 216.

дороги добр і почезань,
свавілля і печалі.[82]

(Bear the Holy Path of agonies, /experience the deadly charms / of the road of comfort and vanishment, / of wantonness and sorrow.)

Fate as presented in "The Noble Dream" is spiritually draining and mortally deceitful. Its "Path of agonies" and "deadly charms" beckon with gloom and sorrow. Stressing fate's inconstant nature, Stus calls it "wanton," an attribute he often marshalls in discussions about destiny.[83] However, despite the sadness that accompanies the poet's realization of the nature of his commitment, he regards it as something assumed by him freely and responsibly.

Stus' existential perception of fate evokes Sartre's statement that "...existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him."[84] This responsibility is not confined to man's own individuality, but is extended to all mankind.[85] In this context, God in Stus' poetry often emerges as a power which gives the strength to bear such responsibility, as well as an inspiration for a future

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[82] Stus *Svicha* 78.

[83] The "wantonness" of fate and referrence to it as the "road of pain" can be also seen in the following lines: „Благословляю твою сваволю, / дорого доді, дорого болю."(I am blessing your wantonness, / the road of fate, the road of pain) Stus *Palimpsesty* 282.

[84] Sartre *Existentialism* 16.

[85] Sartre *Existentialism* 16.

struggle. God also gives the poet encouragement and support. Being closely related to the image of fate, God is often mentioned when Stus' lyrical persona seeks to justify his choice and commitment.

The poet also views God as a power which could help him find a "courageous death". His purpose is to provide what Sartre calls "will to will" and Nietzsche "will to power," which does not necessarily mean "will to life." In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche wrote: "My death I commend unto you, free death, that cometh unto me because I will."[86] It is free death that is called upon by the Ukrainian poet, because for him, like for the German philosopher, "...to die is best; but the second best is to die in battle and pour out a mighty soul."[87]

> ...Господи, подай
> недугому високу допомогу –
> нехай я віднайду собі дорогу
> для мужнього конання.[88]
>
> (God, grant / to him who is ill your divine comfort - / let me discover the road / to a courageous death.)

The poet's attitude toward God, however, is not always devoid of ambiguity. The divine and invigorating powers are sometimes denied and rejected by the poet, thus revealing bitterness toward his fate. For example, in "Tse til'ky vtoma" (It's Just Fatigue), relating his experience of desperation, caused by living "between

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[86] Nietzsche 63.

[87] Nietzsche 63.

[88] Stus *Palimpsesty* 226.

life and death," the poet writes: "...жодної з надій не маю в Бозі, / і порятунку жодного нема"(I do not have even a single hope in God, / and there is no salvation).[89] His despondency increases in yet another poem, "Nemaie hospoda na tsii zemli" (There's no Lord in this World), where he delivers the Nietzschean statement "God is dead" ("...Пан–Бог помер").[90]

In conclusion, in his approach to Being Stus couples a deterministic view of life with existential authentic existence that stresses the importance of choice. Having personal experience in the conflict between the system and the individual and refusing to be treated as an object, Stus uses the philosophy of existentialism as a source of justification of his political commitment. This includes rejection of what Nietzsche would call "slave morality" and the averageness of Heidegger's "they." Stepping on the road of self-seeking, the poet found a new kind of freedom -- "freedom towards death" -- which was devoid of fear and certain of itself. However, it was full of anguish and anxiety. It endowed him with responsibility as well as the ability to thrust himself into his inner world as a source of support and self-sufficiency. At the same time, it turned every day of his life into an authentic existence, i.e., an eternal turmoil.

Concurrently, the feeling that the events in his life were predetermined never leaves Stus. His destiny follows him like a

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[89] Stus *Palimpsesty* 230.

[90] Stus *Palimpsesty* 299.

"shadow," merging at times with that of his homeland. Linked to fire and death, the poet's fate is the source of loneliness which keeps him within an impenetrable space or a "death zone." This dark and desolate place can be rejuvenated only by the poetic word, when "Orpheus disperses the dusk with his lyre." In the meantime, the man within suffers and struggles, but never questions his destiny, because, as Stus put it, destiny "exists, and in its existence, it has a purpose."

Chapter 4: Love

Denis de Rougemont, writing in *Love in the Western World,* has noted:

> Love and death, a fatal love -- in these phrases is summed up, if not the whole of poetry, at least whatever is popular, whatever is universally moving in European literature, alike as regards the oldest legends and the sweetest songs. Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion.* And passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental act.[1]

Rougemont explains the fascination with fatal love as a desire "to grow aware of what is on fire inside us. Suffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and self-awareness are in league..."[2] This, in his opinion, explains the tremendous popularity of the Tristan and Iseult myth;[3] the words "love" and "death" give "one clue to the European mind,"[4] he says.

If one were to classify prison love, it would inevitably fall into the category of unhappy or impossible love. Marked by separation, love experienced in confinement serves as a source of

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[1] Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990) 15.

[2] Rougemont 51.

[3] Rougemont 51.

[4] Rougemont 15. Rougemont begins his argument with a quotation from Joseph Bédier's *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* : "My Lord, if you would hear a high tale of love and death..."

both suffering and gratification. Being often the last link with freedom and sanity, a prisoner's love brings self-awareness and challenges death.

Stus' love poetry represents a relatively small part of his prison writing and understandably deals with unhappy or doomed love. The number of poems on love, written in the camps, is slightly over a dozen; the period of exile accounts for about a dozen poems. When considered as a group, these poems can be conditionally divided into four sub-groups, each highlighting a particular motif: separation, dreams and reminiscences, beloved as divine, and erotic love. On occasion, the first three motifs overlap. Chronologically, Stus' poetry reveals the following tendencies. The poems from *The Time of Creativity,* in contrast to those written in the camps and exile, are distinguished by concrete imagery and detailed description of his longing for the beloved. For example, in "Kokhana, shchojno ja distav od tebe" (Beloved, I Just Received from You), the poet speaks of getting a long-awaited letter from his wife. This summons in him a whole gamut of feelings and emotions. He imagines his beloved, whom he calls his "madonna in an old... dress" („моя мадонно / в старенькій... сукні"), waiting for him at night, in the dark of the house, among silent walls. She has to conceal her tears and emotions, as well as face their young son's questions about his father. The imagery and well-sketched details of the poem (a woman in a worn dress, her loneliness, daily routine through which she has to carry her misery, the son's warm hand, silent walls, etc.) make the poet's longing for his loved ones

palpable and very personal. And at the same time, Stus manages to create a universal sense of human sorrow caused by separation.

The image of the beloved as the Virgin or madonna, which appears in the above-mentioned poem, is prominent throughout Stus' poetry of confinement; however, it is especially conspicuous in *The Time of Creativity* (where Stus refers to his beloved as „Богородиця," „Богоматір," „мадонна"). Allusions to the Mother of God appear in "Chy vytrymajesh ty" (Would You be able to Endure), "Jurma zhinok" (A Crowd of Women), "Ty, nache Bohorodytsia meni" (You are Like the Mother of God to Me).[5] In several poems, Stus makes an effort to account for the grief that he inflicted on his wife by explaining the importance of his political commitment (for example, in "Tsi jabluka" / Those Apples).[6] In an attempt to console her, he uses arguments extolling her suffering, maintaining that it makes life more authentic and meaningful („Ти страждала? Отже, ти жила". / You suffered? Then you lived).[7] *The Time of Creativity* is haunted by the images of death and does not fail to underscore the hopelessness of the poet's love. Speaking of death, Stus writes: „...любов, / як і життя — пропащі" (love, / like life itself -- is doomed).[8]

Stus' poetry, written in the camps and exile, is different from the previous period in that it becomes more abstract, philosophical

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[5] Vasyl' Stus, *Chas tvorchosti Dichtenszeit* Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakx, Vol. 2 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1995) 22, 39, 126 respectively.

[6] Stus 26.

[7] Stus 23.

[8] Stus 32.

and hermetic. In the camps the image of the beloved becomes less vivid and life-like. In fact, the poet begins to forget her, as the very titles of his poems suggest: "Ty des' za bilym zabuttiam" (You are Somewhere Beyond White Oblivion), "Ty des' zhyvesh na pryzabutim berezi" (You Live Somehwere on the Forgotten Shore).[9] Stus openly speaks about his alienation from her, sometimes insisting that the memory of the past must retreat, and the road to reunion forgotten.[10] This certainly does not diminish his feelings of love, or the pain incurred by the beloved's absence, but merely points to the natural effects of prolonged separation. While Stus' poems still contain frequent references to "wife" ("дружина") and/or "beloved" ("кохана"), as well as descriptions of mutual grief over being apart, they also reveal gradual estrangement from his wife. The poet's dreams become the only link with his love; they, along with reminiscences, dominate the period. This makes the woman of the dreams an apparition, a creation of imagination, distant and unreal, like dreams themselves. Secondly, becoming acutely aware of the passage of time, Stus tends to speak of his wife as a young girl ("дівчатко").[11] As a result, his addressee is not the woman of the present, but her much younger self. She is a shadow of a youngster from the distant past. This makes the poet wonder whether he left behind a wife or a daughter.[12]

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[9] Stus *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 144, 170-171.

[10] "Idy v kubel'tse spohadu - zohriisia" (Turn to the Nest of Reminiscences – and Get Warm!) Stus *Palimpsesty* 93.

[11] "Dozvol' meni siohodni" (Allow Me Today) Stus *Palimpsesty* 166-167.

[12] "You are Somewhere Beyond White Oblivion" Stus *Palimpsesty* 144.

The period of exile reveals a new shift in Stus' treatment of love. The dreams and reminiscences that dominate the previous period almost disappear, while the motifs of erotic love -- absent in the poems of confinement -- emerge. Another conspicuous feature is that Stus almost completely stops identifying his lover (e.g. "wife" or "beloved" as he does in the previous period),[13] preferring merely the pronoun "you" („ти"). The poetry reveals even more estrangement from the object of his love, becoming less personal and more abstract. Separated from her by "years and distance" („роки і версти"),[14] Stus describes himself and his beloved as "forgotten" and unable to recognize each other („Ти не спізнала, забута, мене. / Я, призабутий, тебе не спізнаю". // Forgotten, you did not recognize me. / Forgotten, I will not recognize you).[15] At times the woman is mentioned only briefly before the poet moves on to discuss death, existence or some philosophical question.[16] The image of his wife gradually expands to embrace not only her, but also his homeland and mother. For example, in "Koly b ne ty" (If not for You), Stus' addressees become simultaneously the Motherland, Mother, and Wife („Вітчизно, Матере, Жоно!").[17]

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[13] Only one poem of the period, "Mete nadvori snihova porosha" (The Snowstorm Outside), identifies the object of the poet's love as "wife." Stus *Palimpsesty* 387.

[14] In Ukrainian „верста" is a measure of length.

[15] "Zboku, o zboku" (To the Left, o to the Left) Stus *Palimpsesty* 334.

[16] A good example would be "Bula ty tak daleko!" (You were so Far Away) Stus *Palimpsesty* 255.

[17] Stus *Palimpsesty* 305.

The Theme of Separation

The theme of separation is present in Stus' love poetry of both confinement and exile. The poet speaks of the barriers separating him from the beloved, of the temporary character of meetings with her, and of dreams and reminiscences as his means of communicating with her. Occasionally he turns toward the concepts of death, fate, time and space, as tools by which he measures and identifies the boundaries separating him from the beloved. Interestingly, he derives a peculiar gratification from the idea of condemned love.

The blank verse of "Ne zblyzhuisia" (Do not Approach), written in confinement, is a good example of the feelings experienced by separated lovers. Consisting of imperatives, the poem employs three negative exhortations ("Do not approach") to urge the beloved to keep the distance, defined as a test of the heart and a magical hallucination of the soul. The lovers are destined to remain standing, apart from each other. Their "unbearable losses" shape a metaphorical sword that severs their union. They are to experience the presence of both "beauty" and "the sorrowful world":

Не зближуйся. На відстані спинись
і нахиляйся, скільки в тебе стане
зухвалого бажання. Ні на крок
не зближуйся. Бо відстань — іспит серця
і феєричне мариво душі.
Так і стояти нам. Так і стояти.
Яби сусідували ліпота
і світ притужний. Хай синіє лезо
утрат нестерпних — о порі молінь.
Не зближуйся. За пагорбами втеч

є гони мрії — тодока поетів
і прихисток невдах, котрим відрада
спогадувань — єдина з нагород,
що безоглядно їм дала поразка.[18]

(Do not approach. Stop at a distance / and lean toward me as long as you have / this bold desire. Not even a step / closer. For distance is a test of the heart / and a magical hallucination of the soul. / Thus we must stand. Thus we must stand. / So that beauty / and the sorrowful world may surround us. Let the blade of unbearable losses cast blue light / - at the time of prayer. / Do not approach. Behind the hills of escapes / there are furrows of dreams which are the pasture of poets / and the refuge for the unfortunate, / who have the delight of reminiscence - the only reward, / which failure gave them without regard.)

Reconciliation with separation governs the mood of the poem. The poet never expresses any hope of seeing his beloved again. He even sets the terms and conditions for the couple's divided existence by defining its spiritual parameters ("For distance is a test for the heart/ and a magical hallucination of the soul"). Having resigned himself to "unbearable losses," he views reminiscences as "the only reward" granted to him. This resignation, however, is only one -- albeit the most conspicuous -- aspect of the poem. A more subtle one is the poem's concern with the beauty of suffering and creativity. It is this aspect that determines the ideational profile of the work. Stus commands the lover to maintain the distance so that beauty and the sorrowful world may prevail. It is they that make existence tolerable. By linking beauty and sorrow Stus alludes to the positive aspects of separation. This idea is further developed

[18] Stus *Palimpsesty* 161.

in the final passage, where he refers to dreams as "pasture of poets" and "refuge for the unfortunate." By establishing parallels between poets and the unfortunate, Stus aligns misfortune with creativity, revealing that even "failure" can provide a "reward." From this perspective, separation emerges as a source of inspiration of poetry and creative reverie, as well as an inception of romantic feelings. The physical absence of the beloved, rather than her actual presence, is considered more conducive to creativity. Consequently spiritual love is placed on a higher plane than earthly and consummated love.

The treatment of the theme of separation in "Do not Approach" brings to mind the legend of Tristan and Iseult as invoked by Rougemont. He notes that the driving force of the couple's relationship was the idea of love and of being in love. Their feelings were intensified and kept alive by numerous obstacles. When these were finally overcome, the lovers were forced to invent new ones (e.g., placing the sword of chastity between them, while sleeping in the forest; Tristan marrying another). The critic writes:

> They behave as if aware that whatever obstructs love must ensure and consolidate it in the heart of each and intensify it infinitely in the moment they reach the absolute obstacle, which is death... Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are. What they need is not one another's presence, but one another's absence. *Thus the partings of the lovers are dictated by their passion itself,* and by the love they bestow on their passion rather than on its satisfaction or on its living object.[19]

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[19] Rougemont 38-42.

"Do Not Approach" has elements of the Tristan myth. The ecstasy, born of separation, the metaphorical sword between the lovers (evoking associations with the sword of chastity), and the desire to keep a distance create a charged psychological and emotional atmosphere. The feelings, bared raw, promote the exhilaration and contribute to the creative process.

"Iak lev, shcho prychaivsia v khaschakh prysmerku..." (As a Lion that Hid in the Depths of the Dusk...)[20], another poem in blank verse exploring the feelings of distanced lovers, reflects Stus' writing in exile. Here the theme expands to include such aspects as time, space and fate. The poem has two addressees -- the beloved and separation itself (addressed in the last stanza). The first two lines of the poem generate three sets of mesarchias[21] that organize the work into four stanzas of differing lengths (12, 4, 14 and 5 lines respectively).[22] The opening line of the first stanza has the lyrical hero comparing the horizon with a lion that hides in "the depths of the dusk." In the subsequent stanzas the comparison is drawn between a lion that hides in "the depths of the horizon" and the lyrical persona. The latter analogy is emphasized by the second line, in which „отак і я" ("and so do I") points to personal experience.

Як лев, що причаївся в хащах присмерку,
заки й збудив, отак від мене обрій

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[20] Stus 338-339.

[21] Mesarchia is a repetition of the beginning and the middle part of a clause, but not its ending.

[22] Even though *Palimpsests* do not offer stanzaic division, I identify stanzas on the basis of mesarchias and identification of separate units of thought.

відбіг, залігши в чорних шпарах спогаду –
минувшини чи будуччини.
Сичить піщаним нашептом годинник,
розвалюються храми, щойно зведені,
і голос болю вільно розтікається
по риті часу, що стікає вспак.
Стоять світи зголілі довкруги
безобрійні – куди не скинеш оком –
черга видінь, немов дереворити,
на білому екрані миготять.

Як лев, що причаївся в хащах обрію,
заки й збудив, отак і я, зморившись
од тяготи доріг, розтав, як порох
по розстанях і зазубнях чекань.

Як лев, що причаївся в хащах обрію,
заки й збудив, отак і я валандаюсь,
від тебе відмежований навіки,
і всеспогадую – немов живу.
За частоколом чорних загород
багріє сонця пишне покотьоло,
а далі – ніби цятка мого болю,
роз'ятрена вітрами начувань –
ти світишся. Як крихта світла в вістрі
пекучого двожалого ножа
і мерехтиш вогнем моїх темнот,
подвійно обережена чеканням,
і кожне коло в'ється вколо стану:
одне об одне вдаряться – й лящать.
Як лев, що причаївся в хащах обрію,
заки й збудив, отак і я від тебе
далію, наближаючись.
Розлуко,
ти порізняєш нас чи єдиниш?

(As a lion that hid in the depths of the dusk / until he got lost, the horizon has run away from me, / hiding itself in the black cracks of reminiscence - / the past or maybe the future. / The clock is hissing with its sandy

> whisper, / the temples just erected tumble down, / and the voice of pain freely spreads / along the path of time that flows away. / The bare worlds stand / without a horizon - wherever you look - / a stream of visions, like woodcuts, / are blinking on the white screen. / As a lion that hides in the depths of the horizon, / till he is lost, I too / melt like powder in separations and jags of waiting, having grown tired / from the hardships of the road. / As a lion that hides in the depths of the horizon, / till he is lost, I wander around, / being separated from you forever, / and reminisce - as if I were living. / Behind the paling of black fences, / the round sun casts crimson light, / and further - like a speckle of my pain, / you shine, alarmed by the winds of bad tidings. / As a small refraction of light at the tip / of a two-edge burning knife, / you shimmer with the light of my own darknesses, / being twice guarded by waiting, / and every circle goes around the waist: / striking one another with a shrill clamor./ As a lion that hides in the depths of the horizon, / till he is lost, / I am getting further away from you, while coming close. / Separation, / do you make us more distant or unite us?)

The first stanza presents an unstable and receding world, which has no contours or outlines. This is emphasized with the reference to the "horizon" that "ran away" („від мене обрій відбіг"), leaving "The bare worlds stand[ing] without a horizon" („Стоять світи зголілі довкруги безобрійні"). The instability of the poet's surrounding world is further intimated by the verbs associated with dispersion and annihilation -- „розтікається" (spreads), „стікає" (flows away), „розвалюються" (tumble down). Stus employs dark colors when he speaks about his world ("the lion that hides in the *dusk*) and his memory ("*black* cracks of reminiscence"). These are contrasted with the "*white* screen" against which a series of visions. The stanza introduces the theme

of time. The poet speaks of his reminiscences that contain "the past or maybe the future." This is a typically Stusian treatment of temporality, in which the past and the future merge or can be substituted for one another.[23] Measured by a sinister "hissing" clock, time in the poem is associated with pain (cf. the reference to the "voice of pain" which "spreads along the path of time").

The second stanza is rather brief. To the theme of time, it introduces distance as the division factor between the two lovers. The third stanza characterizes the poet's existence as one of aimless wandering („валандаюсь" -- a synonym for "travel" with a negative connotation). Only when he reminisces about his beloved does he experience some semblance of life („немов живу" / as if I were living). In contrast to previous stanzas, the world in these lines has well-defined countours and boundaries. Stus emphasizes his separation from the beloved woman both in temporal and spatial terms -- „від тебе відмежований навіки" ("separated from you forever"). Here the passive participle „відмежований" is derived from the verb signifying "to set a boundary." Then he refers to himself as being behind "the paling of black fences." And, finally, he identifies the boundaries around his beloved who is encircled by waiting. The circles wind around her waist, clamoring shrilly when they strike against each other. Once again, as in the first stanza, Stus contrasts darkness with light which are linked to him and his beloved respectively. Thus he finds himself in a dark world ("*black* fences') and mood ("my own *darknesses*"). His beloved emerges as a

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[23] For more information on Stus' treatment of time see Chapter 6.

light against a gloomy background. Referring to her, Stus writes: "you shine," "you shimmer." Hers, however, is a tormenting light, being associated with "a small refraction of light at the tip of a two-edge burning knife." The motif of waiting is employed in the references to the beloved being "guarded by waiting" and to "the winds of bad tidings" (in Ukrainian "bad tidings" appears as „НАЧУВАННЯ" which means "waiting for something unpleasant to happen").

The last stanza, written as an address to separation, takes an unexpected shift. The emotions sustaining the longing for the beloved give way to a more analytical stance in the face of her approach ("I am getting further away from you, while coming close"). The oxymoron attempts to draw parallels between physical closeness and spiritual distance. In this context the rhetorical question addressed to a personified Separation -- ("Separation, do you make us more distant or bring us closer?") -- leave the poem open ended.

The structure of the poem has each of the succeeding stanzas, while introducing a new aspect in the relationship of distanced lovers, thematically linked with the previous one. For example, the first two stanzas employ "dispersion" verbs and speak of the fragmented nature of the poet's emotions (the "*cracks* of reminiscence" in the first stanza echo the "jags of waiting" in the second).The second and the third stanzas explore the motif of waiting, while the first and the third develop the motif of reminiscence and juxtapose light and darkness. The sinister hissing of the clock, which ticks away the life of the poet in the first

stanza, reverberates in the third in the equally threatening shrill clamor of the circles of waiting guarding his beloved. Both the fourth and the second stanza -- which are the shortest in the poem -- deal with distance between the two lovers. The structure of the poem is designed to emphasize continuously the anguish of separation, the darkness of the loveless world, the painful flow of time, and the menacing space of confinement. All this creates a picture of two doomed lovers, trapped in space and time, as well as an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. At the same time the poem suggests the complexity of love that is devoid of logic. Like in "Do not Approach," Stus emphasizes that the distance between the couple, despite grief and distress, brings the acuteness of feelings and gratification otherwise unknown in the presence of the beloved.

Beloved as Divine

Stus' confinement and exile produced three poems that depict the beloved as divine. "Ty tut" (You are Here), a poem of 30 lines written in iambic pentameter, is part of the collection *A Candle in a Mirror* and belongs to the poetry of confinement. "Ty vsia v doshchi" (You are all Soaked in Rain), another poem written in iambic pentameter that consists of 16 lines, and "I sialo sontse kriz' vikno" (And the Sun was Shining Through the Window), a poem of 12 lines written in iambic tetrameter, represent the period of exile. The image of the divine woman in Stus' poems echoes the poetry of courtly love. It is particularly close to the Italian tradition with its "formal Christian spiritualization of courtly

love."[24] For example, Stus' shares with Dante's *Vita Nova* a tendency toward Christian symbolism, and the presence of the beloved is conceived as purifying and offering salvation. With Petrarch's *Canzoniere* Stus shares an acute awareness of the passage of time; both poets betray a stronger feeling for the absent rather than present beloved.[25] It is difficult to determine whether Stus was influenced by these Italian poets. However, given his broad scope of reading, it is quite likely that he was familiar with their works.

"You are Here"[26] presents the beloved as divine (referring to her as „пречиста" / "the immaculate one") in the context of the purifying power of suffering and concomitant images related to water. The poem describes a brief meeting of the divided lovers. Their feelings and emotions are presented in fragmentory form (sorrow, reminiscences, pain caused by separation) containing references to liquid elements of nature: "wave," "river," and "rain." Witness, for example, the "rain" of reminscences („дощ спогадувань"); the "river of age-long separations" („ріка — з роздук правікових"); and the "wave" that "made haste in sorrow" („квапилася...хвиля у горечах"). By employing water-related images, Stus seeks to communicate a new state of purity, which derives from suffering. He develops this concept even more in "Ty vsia v doshchi"[27] (You are all Soaked in Rain), a poem that links

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[24] *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990) 409.

[25] *Princeton* 410. Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Petrarch, *The Canzoniere* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

[26] Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd edition. (n.p.: Suchasnist, 1986) 81.

[27] Stus *Palimpsesty* 375.

water, tears, and purification. Addressed to a woman who is separated from her beloved, the poem treats her distress as a manifestation of universal female sorrow (a feature which again links her to the Virgin Mary). She is alone, weeping in the rain that cleanses off her sin. Stus emphasizes the purifying power of water in the following manner: „Ти вся в дощі. Ти вся зійшла плачем / і сходив плач. Як гріх стікав тобою" (You are all soaked in rain. You are awash in tears, / and weeping. Like sin [it] was trickled off you). The forlorn woman in the poem awaits her loved one. She is frightened, her fearful eyes search for Ariadne's thread („Й очі ляку все чогось чекають / і Аріядниину шукають нить".) The reference to the princess of Crete, who helped Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth where he had been confined to be killed by the Minotaur, suggests a parallel with Stus' personal life. In his case, however, the "thread" is never found, and the woman in the poem mourns her inability to meet her beloved („стрітися з явою"). She dreams („мріє"), but her dreams have no future.

"I sialo sontse kriz' vikno" ("And the Sun was Shining Through the Window") casts another glance at the relationship of separated lovers. Echoing the references to light and shining in "As a Lion that Hid in the Depths of the Dusk," the poem presents the sun' rays as a medium for reminiscencing about his beloved:

То ти. То ти. То ти була –
нема, котру я знав, а марив
котрою – мерехтіла з марив –

всім обрієм на мене йшла.[28]

(It was you. It was you. It was you - the one that I used to know is gone, but the one I dreamt of - as gleaming in the dreams, came at me from the whole horizon.)

The image of the beloved comes through the light of the sun, from above, and possesses a divine quality, which is reinforced by the use of the word „хоругви" / "gonfalons" (in Ukrainian churches, banners bearing religious images). The spiritual communication with the woman, reminiscent of a holy vision, intimates a religious experience. What connects this poem with "Do not Approach" and "As a Lion that Hid in the Depths of the Dusk" is its preference for the image created in dreams over the real person ("the one that I used to know is gone, but the one I dreamt of..."). Thus the woman becomes an icon, holy and pure, created during moments of longing for love.

Love as Dreams and Reminscences

The motif of dreams and reminiscences dominates Stus' love poetry written in the camps, and makes the lexicon of "dreams," "memory," and "reminiscences" among the most frequent in his prison works. Such nouns define the nature of his relationship to his wife, which is marked by reverence and veneration. A frequent visitor of the poet's dreams, she is often perceived as a "shadow" of youth, love, happiness, and sorrow. "Ty des' zhyvesh" (You Live

[28] Stus *Palimpsesty* 422.

Somewhere),[29] a blank verse of 48 lines, turns dreams into a meeting place for divided lovers. Incarceration figures prominently in the poem, with references to the "cell" („келія" – the word in Ukrainian suggests a monk's cell) and four walls („чотири мури") that surround him. That Stus addresses his beloved woman as if someone from his past is revealed in the numerous allusions to youth („молодощастя", „молодість утрачена", „молодість"), memory and time.

> Ти десь живеш на призабутім березі
> моїх змілілих пам'ятей. Блукаєш
> пустелею моїх молодощасть,
> як біла тінь суворої скорботи.
> Так часто Бог нам зустрічі дарує
> в цій келії. Так часто я тебе
> зову крізь сон...
>
> (You live somewhere on the forgotten shore / of my memories turned shallow. You roam through / the desert of my youthful happiness, / as a white shadow of dire sorrow. / So often God gives us meetings / in this cell. So often I call you / through my dream...)

The "forgotten shore" inhabited by his beloved clearly separates the world of Stus' dreams and reminiscences from reality. The woman of his imagination represents the best of his former existence. However, his links with her and the past are feeble, inasmuch as his memories have "turned shallow," and the beloved reminds him of a "shadow." The woman from his past, like the one in the poem "And the Sun was Shining Through the Window," is not a real person, but rather an image created in his dreams. It is

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[29] "Ty des' shyvesh" (You Live Somewhere) Stus *Palimpsesty* 170.

only there that the separated lovers possess the power to eradicate the boundaries of space and time, traverse prison walls or return to their youth („до молодости"):

> ...Ти знову в сни мої заходиш, –
> вельможно мури прочиняєш всі...
>
> (You come into my dreams again, / majestically dissolving all the walls...)

For Stus all communication with the beloved is confined to dreams. Consequently, many of his poems deal with sleep -- both his own and, curiously, his wife's. Her sleep and existence are depicted from the point of view of incarceration. For example, Stus describes the interior of her living space as bare and ascetic, strangely reminiscent of his own cell. Surrounded by walls and tired of waiting, the lonely woman lapses into restless sleep caused by worries over her husband and the absence of news from him:

> У порожній кімнаті
> біла, ніби стіна,
> притомившись чекати,
> спить самотня жона.[30]
>
> (In an empty room, / tired from waiting, / the lonely wife, / white as a wall, is sleeping.)

> У пустці тій – метелики чотири
> усілись по кутках і тугу тьмлять.

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30 "You are Here" Stus *Palimpsesty* 87.

Кохана спить...[31]

(In this deserted house, four butterflies / have settled in the corners and cloud grief. / My beloved is asleep.)

The woman is trapped in a lonely and deserted place. The emptiness of the interior makes the room reminiscent of a prison cell; the expressions "grief," "deserted," "empty," "tired of waiting" point to her involuntary condition. Although the woman is not actually incarcerated, she is the victim of her husband's confinement because she is forced to waste her life in waiting. The poet's exhortation to his beloved to close her eyes and plunge into dreams can be viewed as a means of communication and spiritual recuperation: „...склепи, кохана, вії..." ("...close your eyes, my sweetheart..."). [32]

For Stus, dreams are a passage home, or, as he puts it, "the road to himself."[33] Their interruption brings forth the reality of prison life, aptly called by Fedor Dostoevsky the "ugly dream."[34] This reality, with its "wire," "pailing," "blind dome lamp," "wish-wash" and "piercing bell," stands in sharp contrast with Stus' dreams:

Урвався сон. Гойдалась на стіні
вздовж перетнута зашморгом дорога
до мого двору. І колючий дріт,

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31 "Go into the Nest of Reminiscences" Stus *Palimpsesty* 93.

32 "I iak ty ozoveshsia' (And How Will You Call Back) Stus *Palimpsesty* 159.

33 "Tsei shliakh - do sebe" (This Road to the Self) Stus *Palimpsesty* 189.

34 Fedor Dostoevsky, "Zapiski iz mertvogo doma", *Polnoie sobraniie sochinenii v tridtsati tomax, Tom chetverty* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972) 130.

набряклий ніччю, бігав павуками
по вимерзлій стіні. Глухий плафон
розбовтував баланду ночі. Досвіт
над частоколом висів. Деручкий
дзвінок, мов корок, вибив з пляшки снива
нової днини твань...[35]

(The dream was broken. On the wall, the road to my home hung, / intersected by a noose. / And the wire, / swollen with the night, ran like spiders / along the frozen wall. The blind dome lamp / was stirring the wish-wash of the night. Dawn / hang over the paling. The piercing / bell, like a cork, pulled out the mire of a new day / from the bottle of dreams ...)

The quotation above is taken from "Dozvol' meni siohodni..." (Allow Me Today...), a blank verse of 62 lines. The poem is a good illustration of the role of memories that constitute the essence of dreams. The poem describes a dream in which the poet returns home. Following his wife to their house, he is overcome by a range of contradictory feelings encompassing happiness, passion, and bitter pain. His perception of the woman as pure and chaste, like a child, gives way to fierce anger over their endless separation. The agonizing nature of longing for the past and "the memory of forgotten days" is characterized as "scars" :

З мурашника людського, з прірви років
я вирву пам'ять днів перезабутих,
що стали сном і журною явою,
мов рани, геть затягнуті рубцем.[36]

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[35] Stus *Palimpsesty* 167.

[36] Stus *Palimpsesty* 166.

(From the human ant-hill, from the abyss of the years, / I will tear out the memory of forgotten days / which have become like dreams and a sad apparition, / as if they were scars completely covered by scabs.)

One can not underestimate the biographical veracity of these lines. After his arrest in 1972 at the age of 34, the poet's meetings with his wife were sporadic. With the exception of the eight months between exile and his second arrest, Stus did not see his family for many years. His last meeting with them took place in the spring of 1981; he died in the camp in the fall of 1985.[37] The suffering and anguish caused by separation found their expression in a poetry that abounds with images of dreams and memories. "It seems that I lost all feeling of reality, because everything looks like a dream to me," wrote Stus in a letter to his wife. And then he added: "I think of you all very often, inasmuch as reminiscences have become once again the best minutes of my present existence."[38]

Stus' real world was devoid of warmth, happiness and, above all, human touch. It is therefore not accidental that the image of hands (the primary symbol of physical contact) recur in the poems devoted to his beloved. Take, for example, "You are Here," mentioned above, compares a meeting with his wife at the camp with a "long-awaited dream" („заждалий сон"). In this poem the woman's nervousness is depicted by the constant folding of her handkerchief („хустинку бгаєш пальцями тонкими"). This and the image of the

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[37] "Brief Biographical Information About Vasyl' Stus", Stus, Vasyl, *Veselyi tsvyntar* (Warsaw: Vydavnyche ahentstvo Obiednannia ukraintsiv u Pol'shchi, 1990) 103.

[38] Vasyl Stus, *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 170.

lovers' trembling arms („трепет рук") capture the anxiety and fluidity of the moment. In another poem, "Mov lebedynia" (Like a Swan), the woman's hands turn into wings, when she is described as a swan. Colored by folk imagery, the swan emerges as a symbol of loyalty, beauty and stoicism.

> Мов лебединя розкрилила
> тонкоголосі дві руки,
> збілілі губи притулила
> мені до змерзлої щоки.[39]
>
> (Like a swan, she spread the wings of / her two thin-voiced arms / and touched my frozen cheek / with her pale lips.)

In this poem, as in others, the female swan is portrayed as a supportive partner, ever ready to spread her wings to comfort her lover. The recipient of her embrace is also winged. His wings, however, are broken, evoking images of a soldier forced to retreat from the battlefield. In "Allow me Today," for instance, the lyrical voice speaks about his "broken wing" when referring to his physical and spiritual misfortunes. References to "pain" („мука") and "grief" („печаль") amplify the anguish experienced by doomed lovers:

> Тож не жахайся: я пройду, мов тінь...
> В ту арку муки я ввійду, мов тінь.
> Торкнусь крилом обламаним, губами
> зголілими – аби краєчком уст
> твоєї причаститися печалі –
> тож не жахайся – я пройду, мов тінь.[40]

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[39] Stus *Palimpsesty* 179.

[40] Stus *Palimpsesty* 166.

> (Do not be frightened: I will pass by, like a shadow. / Like a shadow, I will enter that arc of pain. / I will touch you with my broken wing and bare lips / in order to take communion of your grief by a mere touch of lips, / so do not be frightened - I will pass, like a shadow.)

Both Stus and his beloved turn into shadows in each other's lives, turning into reciprocal images of dreams and reminiscences. It is not accidental then that in the poem "Zboku, o zboku" (To the Side, o to the Side), written in exile and exploring the degree of estrangement of the separated lover, the absence of physical contact between the two is underscored by the lack of touch of the she-swan's wing.

Erotic Love

Stus' poetry contains very few erotic poems. The collection *Palimpsests* has only three that can be classified as such: "Toi spohad" (That Reminiscence), a blank verse of 20 lines; "Vbery no bilu sukniu" (Put on the White Dress), a 24-line poem, written in iambic trimeter; and "Vona lezhyt', iak zibhana voda" (She Lies Like Crumpled Water), a poem of 16 lines, written in iambic pentameter. All three belong to the period of exile. They are addressed to a woman, but her relationship to the lyrical persona is not specified. The first of these poems, "That Reminiscence," describes an encounter between young lovers, which is buried in the poet's memory and associated with youth and spontaneity of feelings. "Put on the White Dress" focuses on the relationship of a more mature couple. Here youth and eroticism are linked by the man's request

that the woman don a young girl's dress ("дівоча сукня"). The request is explained as an attempt to evade the years that have elapsed. The graphic and simultaneously abstract imagery of "She Lies Like Crumpled Water" makes this poem radically different from the others:

> Вона лежить, як зібгана вода –
> Усепокірна і усеприймуща.
> І геть здирає з неї шкаралущу
> глуха, як пуща, вікова жада.
> Як водограй, піднісся пагорб хіті,
> щоб дужче бути спаленим дотла.
> Коли, як млість солодка, увійшла,
> ввігналася в її устяж одкриті
> звогнілі надра пружна і движка
> нестерпна, живодайна і убивча
> шалена міць. І втіха таємнича
> її протнула – з ніг до бордака.
> Порожня руро, під ядром волань
> дерися вгору, чи зривайся з кручі,
> як задвигтіло кишло згаг дрімучих
> у реві родив, натерпу й конань.[41]

(She lies like crumpled water - / all-submissive and all-receptive. / And age-old passion, dense as a virgin forest, / tears off her shell. / Like a fountain, the mountain of desire rose / to be burnt even more thoroughly. / When, like sweet giddiness, / resilient and stirring, / the unbearable, life-giving and murderous / mad power entered, bursting into her wide-open / moistened entrails. And mysterious pleasure / pierced her through - from the legs to the throat. / The empty vessel, in the core of screams / climb upward, or fall from the chute, / when the nest of dense desires moved / in the roar of births, endurance, and deaths.)

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[41] Stus *Palimpsesty* 307.

The tension of the work builds up with the use of contrast. The seemingly quiet and peaceful surface ("She lies like crumpled water - all-submissive and all-receptive") is contrasted with the fervour stirring without. The dynamics and overbearing powers of the passion are expressed by the verbs "to tear off," "to rise," "to be burnt," "to burst into," while desire itself is described as "dense," "unbearable," "mad," simultaneously "murderous" and "life-giving." Human lust, "resilient" and "stirring," is compared to a fountain. Unlike the other two poems mentioned above, "She Lies like Crumpled Water" does not refer to a concrete individual. The woman here is rather an embodiment of human desires, as well as a symbol of the life cycle. Stus' reference to water in this context is quite appropriate. According to Barbara Walker, water was considered "mother of all things" and often used as a metaphor of love. She writes:

> Like water, love stayed with the man who held it loosely, as in an open, cupped hand; but the man who tried to grip it hard, in his fist, found that it flowed away and left him gripping nothing. And water, like love, was essential to the life-forces of fertility and creativity, without which the psychic world as well as the material world would become an arid desert, the Waste Land.[42]

The "life-forces of fertility" mentioned by Walker are suggested in the poem with the description of the "life-giving" passion, as well as the comparison of the woman to a "vessel" giving life. When Stus alludes to life, he never fails to underscore its opposite -- death.

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[42] Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia Of Myths and Secret* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 1066.

For example, desire is decribed as both "life-giving" and "murderous." Also, the last line of the poem juxtaposes "births" and "deaths." This reveals not only a binary approach, but also a characteristic feature of Stus' poetry - namely, the inquiry into the different aspects of life from the viewpoint of death.

Love and Death

In one of the last letters to his wife, Stus mentioned his translation of Rilke's poem "Orpheus, Euridice, Hermes":

> I will translate this to you further, since this part is the very essence of the poem: 'Holding on to Hermes, she was walking - her feet faltered in her deathly walk, she was so uncertain, submissive and tender. Wrapt in herself, she did not see hope, or the road, or the traveller next to her, she was walking into life. Wrapt in herself. She was filled with cold non-existence. As a fruit, full of sweetness and darkness, she was filled with death. She possessed a mysterious mark of something new. In her new chastity, she was so intangible, her sex recalled a young evening flower; her hands grew so unaccustomed to marital pleasures that even the god's careful touch disturbed her, like some insolent intimacy. This was no longer that fair woman who entered the poet's songs, no longer an object of conjugal love, no longer some man's property. She was like loosened long hair, like fallen rain, she was self-sacrificial like communion bread, divided among everyone. She became root. And when the god stopped her and said with pain in his voice "He turned around!" - she did not understand and only asked softly: "Who?". This is Euridice, Valia. That is You. Euridice is the essence of Rilke's poem, its main theme which is so close to me now, especially after we failed to obtain a rendezvous.[43]

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[43] Stus *Vikna* 241.

In the same letter, Stus expresses doubts about ever seeing his wife again. The cancellation of the poet's meeting with his family resulted from his inability to overcome "the barrier of pre-meeting humiliations" imposed on him by the camp authorities. In my opinion, this explains why the image of Rilke's Euridice, so distant, so beautiful and so inaccessible, was very dear to Stus.

In one of his letters, Rilke expressed his attitude on love and death in the following way: "Only from the side of death (when death is not accepted as an extinction, but imagined as an altogether surpassing intensity), only from the side of death, I believe, is it possible to do justice to love."[44] For Stus, during the last years of his life, the vertical of duration and passage, which, according to Rilke, includes life and death, became part of existence. Accepting death as inevitable, Stus regarded love as part of his being. This conviction made him speak of eternity and glorify dreams as the meeting place of doomed lovers. It also brought self-awareness, challenged death and celebrated love despite all the barriers. With its praise for the distance between two lovers, preference for the loved one of the dreams, and tribute to suffering caused by separation, Stus' prison love poetry demonstrated, once again, that doomed love never dies.

...І не страшися. Вдвох
ми ще пробудем вище цього муру,

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[44] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948) 151.

НА РІВНІ СНІВ...[45]

(And do not fear. The two of us / will be above those walls, / at the level of dreams...)

[45] Stus *Palimpsesty* 151.

Chapter 5: Space

In *The Gulag Archipelago,* Alexander Solzhenitsyn reveals the profound impact that confinement has on a prisoner's psyche and existence. In particular, he underscores the impact of the prison cell in making or breaking an individual, as well as its contribution to loneliness and even insanity.[1] The cell, as a primary unit of prison space, is naturally an important element of incarceration. This is the place where a prisoner's day begins and ends, where his fears and anxieties are born, and where he engages in philosophical thought, self-exploration and inquiries into death.

Not surprisingly, the cell is an important focal point in Stus' poetry. *The Time of Creativity* contains about a dozen poems which explore the theme of prison space. Out of the latter, five verses with the same title can be found in the *Palimpsests,* and two in *A Candle in a Mirror.*[2] The insistence with which the poet treats the subject particularly affects the collection *Palimpsests* which has about two dozen works that deal directly or evoke the theme of prison space. Most of them were written in confinement. This period is marked by the poet's claustrophobic apprehension of his

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[1] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Archipelag Gulag* Sobranije sochinenij Tom piatyj, (Vermont, Paris: YMCA Press) 177-181.

[2] The collection *Palimpsests* contains the following poems with the same titles from *The Time of Creativity*: "Taka khruska" (So Brittle), "Vzhe tsilyi misiats' obzhyvaiu khatu" (One Month Already), "Uzhe moie zhyttia v inventari" (My Life is Already Part of Inventory), "Na odnakovi kvadraty" (Into Equal Squares), "Tiuremnykh vechoriv smertel'ni alkoholi" (The Deadly Alcohols of Prison Evenings). Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist', 1986) 128-129, 130, 125, 94, 176. *A Candle in a Mirror* shares with *The Time of Creativity* the poem entitles "Iz sebe vyklych leva" (Summon the Lion from Within Yourself). Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd edition (n.p.: Suchasnist', 1986), 87. The collection also contains a variant of "My Life is Already Part of Inventory," which can also be found in *Palimpsests.*

environment and by the recurrence of the following motifs: geometrically precise portrayal of the cell, the square as a symbol of confinement, and the deadly nature of prison space. The poems of this period are relatively short. Most of them contain between 12 to 20 lines. They can be identified perhaps as the most "uniphilosophical" poems by Stus, given his tendency to write contemplative and reflective poetry. Some of them are colored by sarcasm, for example, when the poet compares his living quarters with a resort[3] or addresses the "democracy of obedience and the freedom to be silent" („демократіє покори і свободо німувань").[4] Poems with the theme of space often begin with a description of the cell, identifying its size and geometrical parameters,[5] and then shift to other subjects, namely separation from family and homeland,[6] the state of being watched through a peep-hole,[7] or the psychological impact of prison space.[8] Much like Solzhenitsyn, Stus emphasizes the mental effect of the cell and reveals the feelings

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[3] "Proschaite vy, chotyry mury" (Farewell, Four Walls) Stus *Palimpsesty* 174.

[4] "Na odnakovi kvadraty" (Into Equal Squares) Stus *Palimpsesty* 94.

[5] "So Brittle", "One Month Already," "All My Space is Four by Four" in Stus *Palimpsesty* 128-129, 130, 137. It is interesting that even a poem devoted to Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), an Italian writer and poet who spent many years in prison, begins with an empasis on the cell's parameters. Stus *Palimpsesty* 185.

[6] Stus speaks about the family that he left behind in "Tserkva Sviatoji Iryny" (The Church of St. Irene), grieves his separation from Ukraine in "All My Space is Four by Four), refers to Kiev and his residential district Sviatoshyn in "Nerozpiznane misto dorohe" (Unrecognized Dear City) in Stus Palimpsesty 83, 137, 154.

[7] For example, "I dushu obliahlo znesyllia" (And the Soul was Overpowered by Exhaustion), "One Month Already" in Stus *Palimpsesty* 122, 130.

[8] This occurs, for example, when the poet draws parallels between a prisoner and a caged animal in "Iz sebe vyklych leva" (Summon the Lion from Within Yourself) in Stus *Svicha* 87, or perceives his cell as a carrier of death in "Unrecognized Dear City" in Stus *Palimpsesty* 154.

which it evokes in him. These feelings range from the anxiety born of closed space to the apprehension of approaching death.

"Iz sebe vyklych leva" (Summon the Lion from Within Yourself) reveals the three main motifs: claustrophobic apprehension of the cell, its psychological impact, and despair bordering on insanity and/or death.[9] The idea of the poem is effectively presented by alligning the powerless anger of an inmate with the primeval rage of a caged lion. It appeared as a result of Stus' first encounter with confinement and was included in the collection *The Time of Creativity*. An extent variant from the collection *A Candle in a Mirror* is quite different though. It reveals not only a more mature and skillful poet, but also a tendency toward abstract and philosophical apprehension of reality (a feature that sets it apart from the majority of such poems). This version of the poem, written as a self-address in iambic pentameter, consists of four quatrains. It is built on a juxtaposition of prison space with the emotions of a person there. Each stanza, with the exception of the third, begins with a refrain (repetition with variation) and touches upon two aspects -- incarceration and the feelings that it elicits.

Із себе виклич лева і збагни
безмежжя мурів у безмежжі люті,
коли волання, кригою окуті,
клекочуть від стіни і до стіни.

Із себе виклич лева і волай,
нехай ричання, деручке і чорне,
цю огорожу світову огорне,

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[9] It is noteworthy that the variant of the poem from *The Time of Creativity* directly links prison space with death. Vasyl Stus, *Chas Tvorchosti Dichtenszeit* Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhakh (Lviv: Prosvita, 1995) 55.

завівши душу в фесричний гай,

де спогади стримлять, як шпичаки,
де літа – ніби вигорілі стерні,
і де жалі, гієни ненажерні,
на тебе гострять ікла і кліки.

Із себе виклич лева і шалій
між засувами, гратами, замками,
бо зацвітає всесвіт шпичаками,
колючими дротами веремій.[10]

(Summon the lion from within yourself and apprehend / the boundless walls in boundless rage, /when screams encased in ice, /boil from wall to wall. / Summon the lion from within yourself and scream, / let your growl, piercing and dark, / embrace this world fence, / having let the soul into a bewitching grove, / where reminiscences stick out like thorns, / where years - like burnt stubble, / and where sorrows, insatiable hyenas, / sharpen for you their teeth and fangs. / Summon the lion from within yourself and go insane / behind bolts, bars and locks, / because the universe blossoms in thorns, / the barbed wire of shrieks.)

The first quatrain calls on the inmate "to apprehend" the vast nature of the walls that separate him from the outside world, as well as betrays his "rage" and "screams." The second stanza encourages him "to scream," comparing his outcry with the snarl of an animal, loud enough to embrace the "world fence." The third quatrain relates the poet's anxiety, caused by reminiscences and sorrow. The final stanza sees the poet approach the level of insanity, inasmuch as being behind bars and locks makes him perceive the whole "universe" as covered with barbed wire.

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[10] Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha v svichadi* 2nd edition (n.p.: Suchasnist', 1986) 87.

"Summon the Lion from Within Yourself" betrays a gradual progression in the intensity of feelings. This is achieved, first of all, through the refrain, when the poet moves from recognizing his powerlessness to an extreme emotional outbreak (conveyed by the verbs "to apprehend," "to scream," and "to go insane"). A similar escalation of emotions transpires through the poet's vocal outcries in the first, second and fourth stanzas, which range from "screams" to "growl" and "shrieks" respectively. The expansion of prison space at the expense of "free" space is parallel to that of emotions. Thus the confining "walls" in the first stanza yield to a "world fence" in the second, which in turn becomes a "universe" surrounded by "barbed wire."

The third stanza is different, because it deals solely with the inner world of the lyrical persona, revealing his dejection and despair. The source of his misery are reminiscences of the past. To convey his hurt, Stus employs nouns denoting sharp objects. His memory is compared to "thorns," past years -- to "burnt stubble," and his agony -- to hyenas with "teeth and fangs." The "sharp" emotions in the third stanza echo the "piercing growl" and "fence" in the second, and "thorns" and "barbed wire" in the fourth. This and the previously mentioned devices fashion a tight structure, underscoring a "sharp" and unfriendly world and creating an atmosphere of physical and spiritual disaster that offers neither faith nor hope.

Stus' poetry betrays recurring associations between the prisoner and a caged animal, a natural outcome of the restrictions imposed by the cell. In "I dushu obliahlo znesyllia" (And the Soul

was Overpowered by Exhaustion)[11] space within the cell and the cage have much in common: "locks and bars" („Замки і грати"), the smell of "old mould" coming from the corners („З кутків несе старою цвіллю"), the condition of being watched („У вічко зирить бузувір"), and the sense of a free world outside (На дозвілля – / в квадрати шиби – чорний бір. // At leisure - / in the squares of the window-pane -- a black pine forest). The poet feels that the enclosure he inhabits has the potential to erode the differences between man and animal. This compels him to address himself thus: „Ти ще людина? Ти вже звір?" (Are you still human? Are you already an animal?).[12]

Anger and anxiety are only some of the emotions generated by the cell. Most importantly, the cell brings acute suffering to the soul, weakening it despite all intentions to remain strong („І душу облягло знесилля – / всім намірам наперекір"). The cell possesses a dehumanizing power, forcing the prisoner to change even his perception of the Self. Consequently, Stus begins to see himself, along with his "dreams" („сни") and "thoughts" („думки"), as part of the prison's chattel, a mere entry in the register, hidden behind solid locks.[13]

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[11] "I dushu obliahlo znesyllia" (And the Soul was Overpowered by Exhaustion) in Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist: 1986) 122.

[12] The image of a caged animal had always attracted Stus. In a letter to his wife and son, Stus wrote that he translated R. M. Rilke poem "The Panther," stating that he made it a point to make the animal be male (in Ukrainian „пантера" / "panther" is feminine; that is why Stus chose the noun „барс" to identify the animal as male panther). Vasyl Stus *Vikna v pozaprostir* (Kiev: Veselka, 1992) 234-235.

[13] "Vzhe tsilyi misiats" (One Month Already), Stus *Palimpsesty* 130.

For Stus, prison space is impregnated with death. His poetry suggests this on a number of levels. For example, in "Like a Horrible Dream," he refers to his place of confinement as a "tomb": „...мені так тяжко без землі, / завислому у вертикальній трумні."[14] (It is so difficult for me to be without the ground, / hanging in a vertical tomb). Prison space, he writes, "ate" his soul („Всю душу з'їв"),[15] and its walls, like a vampire, "drink" his blood („мур вип'є кров'ю, як упир").[16] The confines of the cell make him apprehensive of an imminent death in a strange land; he grieves the separation from his homeland.[17]

At times, the prisoner's cell evokes in Stus associations with a monk's cell. In such instances his feelings are contradictory. On the one hand, for example, in "O, vlasnu strity smert'" (O, to Meet One's Own Death), he denounces his "cramped [monastic] cell" („келії тісній") and welcomes death, because his suffering is unbearable.[18] On the other hand, he praises the cell, revealing the creative inspiration that it brings. One of Stus' first poems, written shortly after his first arrest, at a time when he was subjected to pre-trial solitary confinement, mentions "the bliss of solitude"

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[14] "Iak motoroshnyj son" (Like a Horrible Dream), Stus *Palimpsesty* 131. The image of a vertical tomb recurrs throughout Stus' prison poetry.

[15] "Ves' obshyr mii chotyry na chotyry" (All My Space is Four by Four), Stus *Palimpsesty* 137.

[16] Stus *Palimpsesty* 122.

[17] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 137.

[18] Stus *Palimpsesty* 160. Stus refers to his prison space as a monastic cell in yet another poem, "You Live Somewhere," examined earlier in Chapter 4. Stus *Palimpsesty* 170-171.

(„блаженство самоти").[19] Later in the camps Stus commented, without a trace of irony, on the positive impact solitary confinement had on his creative endeavours. "I have the following advantages here: solitude, peace, concentration," he wrote to his wife. "With God's help, I will be paid back with poems."[20]

According to Michel Foucault, the comparison of a prison cell with a monastic one is quite natural. He maintains that prison space possesses features which cannot be considered altogether negative. Solitude brings communication with oneself and the ability to confront one's inner world and temptations. It also helps some individuals to discover the road to God:

> Discipline organizes an analytical space. And there, too, it encountered an old architectural and religious method: the monastic cell. Even if the compartments it assigns become purely ideal, the disciplinary space is always, basically, cellular. Solitude was necessary to both body and soul, according to a certain ascetism: they must, at certain moments at least, confront temptation and perhaps the severity of God alone."[21]

In my opinion, Stus' incarceration led him to the creation of some of his best works. But confinement in a prison solitary was also responsible for his death. Thus it should not surprise us when the recurring image of the cell in his poetry develops into a symbol of incarceration that foreshadows death.

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[19] Stus *Chas* 22.

[20] Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka, *Vasyl' Stus' Letters* Series of programs for Radio Kiev, Program Three, 1996.

[21] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.* (New York: Pantheon Books,1977) 143.

The number of works exploring the theme of space decreases dramatically during the period of exile. The collection *Palimpsests* has only five poems on the topic.[22] This is not surprising, inasmuch as Stus' personal space expanded considerably. Like the prison camp poems, those written in exile are relatively short, ranging from 12 to 24 lines. The new environment in which Stus found himself is reflected in references to Kolyma and descriptions of the local landscape.[23] Stus reminiscences about the family,[24] shows anger for being betrayed by his homeland,[25] and, above all, contemplates his fate in a context of death.[26] "Chervnevyi snih" (The June Snow),[27] from the period of exile, providing insight into the poet's mental state, merges three themes: space, fate and death.

Червневий сніг — на безоглядній сопці,
модрини граціозні — де—не—де.
Я ти — в коробці, геть тісній коробці,
душа ж, як дуб, — нічого вже не жде.

Повзуть горби, неначе птероптахи,
Господні сфінкси, загадка буття.
Ти надто щедрий, Боже, — стільки жаху

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[22] They are "Otak i zhyv" (And This is How I Lived), "Uzhe Sofia vidstrumenila" (Sofia Already Eradiated), "Na Kolymi zapakhlo chebretsem" (Kolyma is Filled with the Aroma of Thyme), "A ty" (And You), "Chervnevyi snih" (June Snow) Stus *Palimpsesty* 280, 282, 363,364, 417.

[23] For example, "And This is How I Lived," "Kolyma is Filled with the Aroma of Thyme" Stus *Palimpsesty* 280, 363.

[24] "Kolyma is Filled with the Aroma of Thyme" Stus *Palimpsesty* 363.

[25] "And You" Stus *Palimpsesty* 364.

[26] Stus speaks of fate and death in "And This is How I Lived," "Sofia Already Eradiated" and "June Snow" Stus *Palimpsesty* 280, 282, 417.

[27] "June Snow," Stus *Palimpsesty* 417.

вергаєш на мале моє життя.

Потерпли руки, спрагли в горлі крики,
а вседорога вужиться, як вуж.
Хрести модрин. І запропалі лики.
І дріт колючий замість харалуж.

(June snow on a vast hill, / gracious larches - here and there. / And you are in a box, in a very cramped box, / your soul [hardened] like an oak - does not expect anything. / The hills are crawling, like pterobirds, / Lord's sphynxes, being's mystery. / You are too generous, o Lord, -- so much horror / you bestow on my short life. / The hands grew numb, the thirsty screams in the throat, / and the Road narrows, like a snake. / The crosses of larches. And lost faces. / And barbed wire instead of steel weapons.[28])

The three stanzas in iambic pentameter develop separate themes: the first -- that of space, the second -- fate, and the third -- death. The first quatrain contrasts the poet's close quarters -- referred to as a "cramped box" („в... тісній коробці") -- with the world outside. The snow on a "vast hill" and the "larches - here and there," evoking associations with boundless expanses, are juxtaposed to the space occupied by the lyrical persona. Even though incarceration is not mentioned directly, the lack of freedom is quite evident from the context. The doomed nature of the prisoner's situation and his reconciliation with it are emphasized in the statement that the soul "does not expect anything." The second stanza is infused with a sense of determinism, with the poet

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[28] The dictionary of the Ukrainian language does not contain the word „харалужа", which is a noun, but only „харалужний", an adjective which in poetic language designates something made out of steel and is employed with nouns denoting weapons. That is why I translated „харалужі" as steel weapons. *Slovnyk ukrains'koi movy* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1970-1980).

accepting fate from God. The last stanza suggests the imminence of death by portraying the physical exhaustion of the poet and his perception of life's road as coming to an end. The image of barbed wire links death to confinement.

The poem has a tight structure. Both the first and the last stanzas allude to incarceration. The horrors of fate, mentioned in the second quatrain, lead to death in the third. The image of the larches at the beginning and at the end of the poem creates a frame. Being first presented as "gracious" and full of life, the larches in the last stanza signal death. The shapes that they form are "crosses," possibly placed on the poet's grave.

"The June Snow" shares a number of features with "Summon the Lion from Within Yourself," which points to the continuity of the poet's approach to the present topic. Both poems, written in iambic pentameter, deal with the psychological impact of prison space, underscore the poet's claustrophobia, and employ the image of barbed wire in the last quatrain. "The June Snow" is different though in that the lyrical persona has been weakened by the struggle and reconciled with death. It is no longer a man, raging and pacing in the cell, ready to direct his anger at those responsible for his confinement. The man in "The June Snow" is tired and exhausted; his only expectation in life is death. The treatment of death in the poem links it to "How I Wish to Die!", written during the same period[29]. The "sick body," the "contorted throat", the images of the snow and the "drifts of lost fates" in "How I Wish to Die!" echo the

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[29] For more information on "How I Wish to Die!" see Chapter 1.

"numb hands," "the thirsty screams in the throat," the snow, the hills and "lost faces" in "The June Snow." Both poems identify incarceration as a factor responsible for the acceptance of death.

The Square as a Symbol of Incarceration and Death

The image of the square as a symbol of incarceration and death is employed by Stus in the poetry of both confinement and exile. The origin of the symbol is rooted in the prison cell itself and its geometric configurations, which Stus never fails to emphasize. Depicting his ascetic and deprived existence, devoid of any movement, Stus continuously intimates the figure of the square, by either naming it directly ("three spare squares") or by identifying the cell's geometrical configurations ("four by four"): „Весь обшир мій – чотири на чотири. / Куди не глянь – то мур, куток і ріг"[30] (All my space is four by four. / Wherever you look - there's a wall, a corner and an edge). „Стілець і ліжко, вільних три квадрати, / в віконці грати, а в кутку – пара...[31] (A chair and a bed, three spare squares, window bars, and in the corner - *para* [32]). Sometimes the square is evoked merely by association, as is the case with the barred window. In such instances, it appears either as

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[30] "All My Space is Four by Four", Stus *Palimpsesty* 137.

[31] "One Month Already" Stus *Palimpsesty* 130.

[32] *Para* is a prison jargon for the excrement container kept in Soviet prison cells. An almost identical description of a room with a barred window appears in "Proshchaite vy, chotyry mury' (Good-bye to You, Four Walls): „Прощайте ви, чотири мури, / три двері, грачене вікно." (Good-bye to you, four walls, / three doors, and a barred window). Stus *Palimpsesty* 174.

a form on the grid, or, as a peephole, whose square shape is identified in some poems (e. g. „квадратний отвір вахти").[33] Treating the square as an ever-present attribute of his cell, Stus gradually turns it into a symbol of incarceration. He steadily expands the symbol to embrace physical, geographic and abstract domains.

The metamorphosis of the square into an imaginary window through which the poet looks at the world[34] reflects Stus' changing perception of reality. In "Tserkva sviatoji Iryny" (St. Irene's Church), whose first variant was written in a pre-trial solitary, Stus refers to his lost homeland thus: „Київ за гратами. Київ / весь у квадраті вікна."[35] (Kiev is behind bars. Kiev / is all in the square of the window). To be sure, the image of the city "behind bars" serves as a metaphor for political oppression. But the image of the city framed by the prison cell's window emphasizes that the square window is the poet's sole means of communicating with the world outside. This spacial boundary of perception gradually expands, broadening the horizon from the window of the cell to the whole planet: „...поділено світ на квадрати /і в душу вгризаються грати..." (The world has been divided into squares / and bars gnaw at the soul), „Заклечано землю дротами, /

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[33] "Na Kolymi zapakhlo chebretsem" (Kolyma is Filled with the Aroma of Thyme) Stus *Palimpsesty* 363. The square opening of the watchers was mentioned by the poet in yet another poem, "A Ty..." (And You...) where he wrote: „Аж задрижить тюремних вахт квадрат" (364) (And the square of prison watchers will tremble.)

[34] This feature was also noted by Pavlyshyn in examining the poem "Nemov kriz' shyby" (As if Through the Window-Pane) in Marko Pavlyshyn, "Kvadratura kruha," *Stus as Text* (Melbourne: Monash University, Slavic Section, 1992) 47.

[35] Stus *Palimpsesty* 83.

планету дроти оплели..."[36] (The earth is squared with wire, / wires braided the planet).

In portraying the world beyond prison walls, Stus employs prison vocabulary (e.g. "bars" and "wires"). Like the poet's immediate environment, it is not free. It is a world of incarceration, "braided" and "squared with wire." As a symbol of confinement, the square shapes the perception of reality. Stus broadens the application of this term by using it to identify both concrete objects (e.g., cell, window, bars, Kiev, earth, planet) and abstract ones (the latter feature reflects the poet's approach to the theme during the period of exile). He does this on a number of levels. First of all, he deploys the square as an attribute of actions and objects which are not traditionally associated with this shape, but often with a circle - "the square sun," "a square heart," "a square circle." By doing so, the poet stamps these objects with the mark of confinement. For example: „Квадратним кроком ідемо, / квадратне сонце в очі сяє"[37] (We march in a square step, / and the square sun blinds our eyes); „Квадратне серце – в квадратнім колі, / в смертнім каре ми падемо долі"[38] (A square heart - in a square circle, / in a mortal square we will fall to our destiny).

Secondly, the ever recurring presence of the square, which expands from the physical to the spiritual domain, reflects a shift

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[36] "Sto plakh pereidy" (Live Through Hundred Executioner's Blocks), Stus *Palimpsesty* 182.

[37] "Otak i zhyv" (And This is How I Lived) Stus *Palimpsesty* 280.

[38] "Uzhe Sofia vidstrumenila..." (Sofia Already Eradiated...) Stus *Palimpsesty* 282.

in the poet's sensibility. His emotional response to the square ranges from fiery outburst, expressing rage and anxiety, to continuous references to and meditations on death. In fact, the function of the image of the square also broadens to include not only a symbolic representation of incarceration, but also that of death. For example, in "Otak i zhyv" (And This is How I Lived), which employs the images of the "square step" and "square sun," Stus refers to Kolyma and his existence there as being 'in the valley of live burials" („в падолі живих могил"). In "Uzhe Sofia vidstrumenila..." (Sofia Already Eradiated...), the square is directly linked to death ("mortal square"). Being within its boundaries involves experiencing "fury" („лють"), "horror" („жах"), and a "deathly scream" („смертний скрик").

The square in Stus' world is like a self-expanding organism which absorbs everything around it. It moves from a prisoner's cell to the universe, embracing human emotions and foretelling death. Most importantly, it makes the poet carry over his perception of the square to other geometrical figures. A good example of this can be found in "Mov mertvi dereva" (Like Dead Trees), a poem written in the camps and permeated with feelings of despair and the imminence of death. Here references to prison space are particularly revealing. Naming his cell a "lair" („лігво") that "craves for verticality" („запрагло вертикалі"), Stus intimates the deadly nature of his prison space.[39] The geometric configurations mentioned in the poem have negative connotations and speak nothing

[39] For more information on verticality and death, in particular the image of a "vertical tomb" see "Chapter 2: Death and Eastern Influences."

of joy and happiness. The poet uses squares, rhombuses, and rectangles to convey "troubles," "loneliness," and "misfortunes":

> Квадратура
> таємних бід і ромби самоти,
> і прямокутники старих напастей,
> і лінії спадні усевпокори,
> і вертикальний понадзірний щем.[40]
>
> (Squaring / the circle of secret troubles and rhombuses of loneliness, / and rectangles of old misfortunes, / and the falling lines of all-obedience / and the vertical all-blinding pain.)

Stus' description of emotional states in geometrical terms is determined by the physical configurations of his cell -- its resemblance to a box, well-defined corners and walls. This logically leads him to link confinement with death. Stus emphasized their relationship in a number of poems that do not necessarily employ geometrical images. For example, in "Tiuremnykh vechoriv smertel'ni alkoholi" (The Mortal Alcohols of Prison Evenings),[41] where the theme of death is particularly prominent, prison space is not mentioned directly. However, the poet's reference to "prison evenings" and "prison dawns" bespeak of the time spent incarcerated and, thus, indirectly evokes the image of the cell. The "deadly alcohols" and the "mercury" emitted respectively by the evenings and the dawns convey their ominous character:

> Тюремних вечорів смертельні алкоголі
> тюремних досвітків сліпа, як близна, ртуть.

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[40] Stus *Palimpsesty* 200.

[41] Stus *Palimpsesty* 176.

Й сто мерців, обсівши серце ждуть
моєї смерти, а своєї волі.

(The deadly alcohols of prison evenings, / the mercury of prison dawns, blind as a cataract. / And hundred corpses, having settled around the heart, / are waiting for my death and their freedom.)

Stus' peculiar treatment of space has been noted by Marko Pavlyshyn. Examining the recurring image of the square in the collection *Palimpsests*, he remarks that the world of Stus' prison poetry presents a microcosm whose symbol, the square, is opposed to the circle, a symbol of the universe with its stars and planets.[42] Within the second group, Pavlyshyn includes those images in Stus' poetry "which have, or can have, positive associations" and which are traditionally related to a circle, such as flowers, "round cheeks" of the beloved woman, cherries, an egg, etc. After considering the images of Stus' poetry that belong to the realms of the square and the circle, Pavlyshyn concludes that in general the former embraces concepts with a negative connotation, whereas the latter's concepts tend to be positive. In his opinion, the *Palimpsests* offer an original portrayal of the world, one that is expressed by pictures of geometric abstraction. In this synchronic and abstract world in the form of a square in a circle, the eternity of prison is juxtaposed with the eternity of the planets.[43]

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[42] Marko Pavlyshyn, "Kvadratura kruha," *Stus as Text* (Melbourne: Monash University, Slavic Section, 1992) 39.

[43] Pavlyshyn 40-43.

Pavlyshyn's insights are very valuable. Nonetheless, his interpretation of the circle is not always persuasive. For example, he maintains that "the moon in the mountains," which "starts as a pulse" („місяць горовий", який „скидається, як пульс живий"), as well as the images of dawns and evenings belong to the "circle category." While the latter grouping can be defended by the fact that dawns and evenings occur as a result of the circle movement of the Earth, Pavlyshyn does not explain the reasons behind the first grouping. He simply assumes that it is self-explanatory.

In my opinion, the attempt to oppose the "microcosmic" square (i.e., prison reality) to the "macrocosmic" circle (i.e., stars, planets, flowers, dawns and evenings, etc.,) is not productive. First of all, the poet's works do not reveal any conscious or consistent attempt to counterpose the circle and the square. In fact, the circle does not have a conspicuous presence in Stus' poetry -- either as a lexical item or as an image, particularly in reference to prison reality. Also, as my own discussion has sought to demonstrate, Stus does not limit the square to the microcosm of the prison, as Pavlyshyn would have it, but transfers it to the macrocosm, attributing its qualities to the sun, the earth, and the planet. This alone contradicts Pavlyshyn's claim of the "positive" value conveyed by the circular images of the celestial bodies.

Commenting on the poem "Jak motoroshnyj son" (Like a Horrible Dream), which employs the image of a "vertical tomb," Pavlyshyn argues that, for Stus, verticality intimates righteous death.[44] In my opinion, the mere fact that the vertical tomb is

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[44] Pavlyshyn 40.

employed in some poems which discuss the poet's cause and the death brought upon by noble commitment, does not necessarily imply an aspect of evaluation on Stus' part. As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, in Stus' poetry, death involves the separation of body and soul, and the latter's subsequent ascent.[45] It is from this viewpoint that death and verticality are closely connected. Consider "Na vitri palaie osyka" (The Aspen is Burning in the Wind) as an example. The poem, in typical Stus fashion, explores the boundaries between life and death. Of interest for this discussion are the following lines:

> У штольнях ночей вертикальних
> іде схарапуджене дляння
> всебезруху...[46]
>
> (In the galleries of vertical nights / happens the frightened duration / of the complete lack of movement...)

The vertical nights, characterized by the "divine lack of movement," bring death. The poem speaks of the "cold forehead," "lost body," and "pale lips," which are ascending "above the stars of life," "to the other side of obsolete desires." The poem does not mention either fate or personal choice, the concepts which for Stus are related to righteous death. This shows that while verticality is linked to death, it does not necessarily carry a specific evaluation.

The poem reveals that in his treatment of prison space, Stus uses not only geometrical figures, but also geometrical lines. In

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[45] For more information see "Chapter 2: Death and Eastern Influences."

[46] Stus *Palimpsesty* 266.

this case they are vertical. However, the poet also employs horizontal lines. For example, in "Sny skladeno u stosy" (The Dreams are Put Away in Piles), a horizontal orientation is created metaphorically, by allusion. Thus, dreams are compared to skeletons which are put away: „Сни складено у стоси, / неначе кістяки...[47] (The dreams are put away in piles, / like skeletons). The poems "The Dreams are Put Away in Piles" and "The Aspen is Burning in the Wind," illustrate Stus' negative application of geometry and its association with death-related images.

In conclusion, to describe prison space, Stus creates a world, composed of geometrical figures, dominated by the image of the square. Originally employed in the portrayal of a prisoner's cell, the function of the square expands to embrace the whole planet and even the universe. Relying on Foucault's premise that the aim of a disciplinary space is "to establish presences and absences,"[48] it is possible to draw the following conclusions regarding the physical and emotional aspects of the two. First of all, "absences" are mostly "expressed" by the lack of any reference to them. The reader can recognize the things missing from the prisoner's world by choosing the opposites from the identified "presences." For example, when the poet speaks of "the divine lack of movement," it is the movement that is missing. The presence of a "cramped box" emphasizes the lack of space. The "smell of mould" points to the

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[47] Stus "The Dreams are Put Away in Piles" *Palimpsesty* 269.

[48] Foucault 143.

lack of fresh air; "rage" to the absence of peace; "loneliness" to the absence of company; "misfortunes" to the lack of happiness, etc. The poet is much more explicit concerning "presences." On a physical level, they are comprised by walls, bars, locks and bolts. On an emotional level they signal anger, anxiety, pain, loneliness and misfortune. The most powerful presence, however, is that of death.

The proximity of death fills the space of confinement with hopelessness and doom. The geometrical configurations of the cell seem to influence not only the physical objects around the poet, but also his feelings and emotions. That is why the world of his poetry is a dark, unfriendly place, shaped with sharp edges and well-defined angles. This world, which Pavlyshyn designates as Stus' microcosm, is safely guarded from the outside by thick prison walls. Belonging to the mortal square and associated with death, the walls that define the poet's confined space led him to write the following prophetic lines:

> Не пустять мури – надто вже грубезні...
> І швидше вб'ють, ніж пустять. Швидше вб'ють.[49]
>
> (The walls will not let [me] go - they are too thick... / They'd sooner kill than let [me] go. They'd sooner kill [me].)

[49] Stus *Palimpsesty* 154.

Chapter 6: Time

During his first incarceration in pre-trial solitary Stus wrote only a few poems on the theme of time. Nevertheless, two poems from *The Time of Creativity* -- "Otsei svitanok" (This Dawn) and "Plach, nebo" (Cry, Heaven)[1] -- can be viewed as programatic in this respect. They evoke the three time modalities simultaneously -- the past, the present and the future (a feature limited to these two works); they reflect the author's evaluation of these time modes and reveal his psychological and emotional response to temporality that will be made manifest in subsequent poems. Both works also link incarceration and death (implicitly in "This Dawn" and explicitly in "Cry, Heaven"), betraying the painful experience of time by a condemned prisoner. "This Dawn" and "Cry, Heaven" were later included into the collections *Palimpsests* and *A Candle in a Mirror* respectively.[2]

"This Dawn" consists of 44 lines, written in blank verse. The choice of the meter agrees with the contemplative nature of the poem, which reflects the poet's attempts to portray his current existence. The poem begins with a description of a dawn and gradually moves to meditations on Stus' current existence. To underscore his alienation from life, the poet employs all three time modalities, all of which for him are devoid of any positive

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[1] Vasyl' Stus *Chas Tvorchosti Dichtenszeit* Tvory u chotyriokh tomakh shesty knyhax, Vol. 2 (Lviv: Prosvita, 1995) 31, 92.

[2] The versions of "This Dawn" in *The Time of Creativity* and *Palimpsests* are almost identical, while those of "Cry, Heaven" in the former collection and *A Candle in a Mirror* differ in minor ways.

connotation.[3] For example, the poet's gloomy view of the future is conveyed by the image of the black crow („чорний ворон") associated with the eve of the apocalypse („апокаліпсису переддень"), as well as by references to lack of faith („спроневіра"), misfortune („нещастя"), and approaching death.

"Cry, Heaven" is composed of 20 lines written in iambic hexameter. The meter reflects the elegiac mood of the poem, in which the lyrical persona calls on heaven to mourn his fate. The use of spondee in the first foot of the refrain draws attention to his despair. The words „Плач, небо, плач і плач!"/ "Cry, heaven, cry and cry!" serve as a refrain and signal the beginning of a new stanza (with the exception of the fourth, where the refrain is not employed).[4] The poem identifies incarceration as a source of the poet's misery (e.g. „тюрма" / jail, „неволя" / lack of freedom) and directly links it to death.

The number of poems dealing with time significantly increases during the period in the camps and constitutes about a dozen. These poems explore a variety of themes and are directed at different addressees. Some of them -- "Rozsotane pavittia lisu" (The Disentangled Web of the Forest), "Rika zhyttia" (The River of Life), "Ty des' zhyvesh" (You Live Somewhere) -- link time directly to the realities of incarceration (e.g., barbed wire, a fence separating the poet from the outside world, the cell's dimensions,

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[3] Stus' approach to the time modalities in "This Dawn" will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

[4] The collection *Palimpsests* does not divide the poem into stanzas, however, its rhyme allows for such a division.

etc.).[5] Others deal implicitly with confinement, for example, when Stus discusses the price he has to pay for being loyal to his convictions (e.g., "Dyvlius' na tebe" / I am Looking at You, "Uzhe todi" / Already Then).[6] About half of the poems are written in blank verse and present the poet's reflections not only on the subject of temporality, but also love, authentic existence and fate. For instance, the themes of love and time merge in "Ty des' zhyvesh" (You Live Somewhere), authentic existence and time -- in "I strilku smerty vidvedem nazad" (And We will Move the Hands of Death Back), fate, being and time -- in "Dyvlius' na tebe" (Iam Looking at You).[7] They belong to Stus' longer works ranging from 30 to 60 lines. Most of the poems of the period also touch the theme of death.[8] They convey the poet's acceptance of mortality, exasperation with existence, and his despondent mood.

The period of exile produced only five poems where time is mentioned directly: "Viddai meni svoiei smerti chastku" (Give Me Part of Your Death), "U temin' snu" (In the Darkness of the Dream), "Uzhe todi" (Already Then), "Iak khochet'sia vmerty" (How I Wish to Die), "Iak lev, scho prychajivsia v khashchakh prysmerku" (As a Lion That Hid in the Depth of the Dusk).[9] With the exception of the first,

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[5] Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnist', 1986), 194-195, 197, 170-171.

[6] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 108-109, 293.

[7] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 170-171, 193, 108-109.

[8] For example, "The Disentangled Web of the Forest," "The River of LIfe," "Zadosyt'" (Enough), "Tvoie zhyttia mynulo" (Your Life has Passed) in Stus *Palimpsesty* 194-195, 197, 209, 198.

[9] Stus *Palimpsesty* 260, 290-291, 292-293, 296-298, 338-339.

these poems are rather long, consisting of 35 to 68 lines. Three of them are written in blank verse, which in Stus' case signals contemplative and philosophical poetry.[10] Along with temporality, these poems also approach such topics as love ("As a Lion That Hid in the Depth of the Dusk"), authentic existence ("In the Darkness of the Dream"), reminiscences ("Give Me Part of Your Death"). All the poems, with the exception of "As a Lion That Hid in the Depth of the Dusk," mention or discuss death.

My investigation of the function of time in Stus will rely on concepts used by Hans Meyerhoff in his *Time in Literature*.[11] Thus, my analysis of the poems in question will center around three major concepts: measurement, order, and direction. In his book, Meyerhoff examines two kinds of time: objective and subjective. He identifies the former as "public" time, which is measured with the aid of watches and calendars in order to synchronize people's

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[10] The poems written in blank verse are "In the Darkness of the Dream," "Already Then," and "As a Lion that Hid in the Depth of the Dusk."

[11] I chose to use Meyerhoff's *Time in Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), inasmuch as it discusses concepts which are particularly prominent in Stus. However, I am aware of the postmodernist conception of time which contests the premises of the so-called historical time, e.g., linear time, the principle of causality, etc. The postmodernist approach to time, linked to the nature of the postmodern narrative, experiments with the forms of time that such narrative makes possible. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth writes: "In postmodern narrative, the infinite future does not exist, nor does the finite subject, or at least they are so massively attenuated that they no longer function as controlling conventions. For postmodernism, historical time is a thing of the past in more than one sense. History now is not just a convention that uses the past to hold the present in a controlled pattern of meaning: history now takes up the interesting position of confronting its own historicity." Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History* Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 43. For more on time and postmodernism see Stephen Hawking, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twetieth Century.* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" ("Les temps des femmes," 1979). Trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *Signs 7,* no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 5-35.

private time experiences for the purpose of performing social functions. This time refers to an "objective structure in nature rather than to a subjective background of human experience."[12] Subjective time, on the other hand, is directly linked to the Self, and, according to Meyerhoff, can be illustrated by time in literature which he defines as "private," "personal," and "psychological."[13]

The differences between the two kinds of time result from the manner in which time is measured. Meyerhoff notes that everything that transpires within a time-unit -- a minute, an hour, etc. -- can be experienced by an individual as either too long or too short. This results in the compression or extension of time, depending upon the nature of the individual experience.

The concept of the order of time is closely related to the experience of a "specious present," which suggests that our present already contains some elements of order and direction pointing toward a "past" and a "future."[14] According to Meyerhoff, the last two concepts are associated with memory and expectation, which introduce a basis for distinguishing between events that took place "earlier" and those that will happen "later." The concept of the order of time acquires an objective meaning when it is coordinated with

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[12] Meyerhoff 5.

[13] Meyerhoff 4-5.

[14] "Subjectively, each individual constructs his own time-order from the standpoint of the 'specious' or felt present by means of images in which past and future, not actually present, are represented. It is only from this standpoint that the terms past and future thave proper meaning. In this construction are included not only the times of the individual's private experiences, but all times which may be dated from the present 'now'." *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology,* ed. James Mark Baldwin. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1960) 698.

the principle of causality.[15] Time in nature, the critic notes, consists of a uniform or linear order in terms of cause and effect. A good example of objective order of time would be historical records. On the other hand, memory relations, being part of subjective time, are much more complex and exhibit a nonuniform or dynamic order of events. In our memory, the past, present and future events are dynamically fused and associated with each other.[16] Meyerhoff calls this specific order a "disorder" of time and emphasizes its centrality in the subjective apprehension of time. In particular, he points out that the sequences of events for each individual are charged with value or the lack of value. For this reason "the inner world of experience and memory exhibits a structure which is causally determined by significant associations rather than by objective causal connections in the outside world."[17]

The concept of the direction of time is linked to irreversibility which implies movement in one direction, i.e. from the "earlier" event to the "later," or from the past to the future.[18] Time's arrow (i.e., the direction in which time progresses) in nature moves forward irreversibly, while in human life it advances toward death. Meyerhoff writes that the latter is, "without a doubt, the

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[15] The principle of causality helps reflect a relationship between two events. For example, if A is the cause of B, then A happened earlier and belongs to the past, while B occurred later and belongs to the future. Meyerhoff 19.

[16] Meyerhoff writes: "In the poetry of symbolists and imagists, in the stream of consciousness of the novel, the dynamic fusion of temporal elements is one of the most pervasive and striking characteristics of modern literature." Meyerhoff 24.

[17] Meyerhoff 23.

[18] Meyerhoff 64.

most significant aspect of time in human experience, because the prospect of death thus enters, as an integral and ineradicable part, into the life of man."[19] Accordingly, the direction of time can become a condition under which we cling to the belief in the realization of our hopes and aspirations, opportunities for progress and creation, as well as personal happiness.[20]

Inasmuch as time in Stus' poetry is subjective, personal and psychological, it results from a unique interaction of value-charged sequences. This chapter will consider the duration and measurement, dynamism and fusion in relation to memory and expectation, as well as the progression and irreversibility of these sequences. The theme of death will serve as the background against which the theme of time is explored, and will be linked to the poet's apprehension of his life's mission.

The Present, Past, and Future

A characteristic feature of Stus' perception of time is a constant awareness of the present. Although it is not frequently identified by references to "today," "the present," etc.,[21] the poet's continuous use of the present tense verbs reflects the need to describe his immediate existence. The psychological impact of the

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[19] Meyerhoff 66.

[20] Meyerhoff 68.

[21] Stus' failure to mention the present altogether, while discussing other time modalities - the past and the future, is revealed in "Meni postav ty" (You Emerged Before Me) that deals with the poet's current existence. Stus *Palimpsesty* 100.

present on Stus is immense. It evokes in him a wide range of feelings and emotions. He speaks of the pain and suffering that he has to endure. His present is depicted as joyless, dreary and desolate. It is also interminable. Regarded as a heavy burden, it generates despair and calls for contemplation of eternity. Witness, for example, "Rozsotane pavittia lisu" (The Disentangled Web of the Forest), where the poet makes extensive use of present tense verbs to reveal his current experience:

> Не горнеться серце до серця,
> не тулиться тіло до тіла,
> *бо вже, напростована в вічність,*
> *давно остобісіла путь.*
> *І дні, наче ланці, чавунні —*
> і жодної більше одміни
> бряжчить, ніби досвіток віку,
> тяжкий гудзуватий ланцюг.
> *Миттєво збігають століття,*
> *століттями плинуть хвилини,*
> *і кутий вмерзає до грунту*
> *пристебнутий неба округ.*
> Гадючаться круглі дороги,
> напоєні кров'ю і потом,
> іскріють сніги, і самотність
> уже солов'ями лящить.[22]

(The heart does not cling to another heart, / the body does not snuggle against the other body, / since I/ *got fed up with the road, / headed for eternity, long ago. / And days, like chains, are cast iron, /* and not a single change, / the heavy knotty chain / is clanking, like the dawn of the century. / *Centuries fly by instantaneously, / and minutes drag along like centuries, /* and *the sky's dome, forged and fastened, / freezes into the ground. /* The round roads, / nourished by blood and sweat, / run

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22 Stus *Palimpsesty* 194-195. Emphasis added [NB].

like snakes, / the snows are sparkling, and the solitude /
already shrieks with nightingales.)

Stus' measurement of time reflects the subjectiveness of his inner time-clock. Take his treatment of "minutes," "days," and "centuries." The duration of each does not correspond to the objective perception of time: centuries "fly by instantaneously," while minutes "drag along like centuries." A day seems endless because not a single change occurs; it is compared to cast-iron, heavy and burdensome chains. The painfully slow movement of days and minutes reflects the weariness with which Stus faces the present. Aggravated by solitude, his existence does not offer either hope or relief. The poet feels that the whole world is against him. Even the sky is perceived as a threat. "Forged and fastened," it "freezes into the ground" and presses the man down, ready to crush him. He is ready to die, inasmuch as he has nothing to cling to either physically or emotionally ("The heart does not cling to another heart, / the body does not snuggle against the other body") and is worn out by existence. Stus' reconciliation with approaching death is revealed when he asserts that his road is "headed for eternity." The present for him is a time between past events and finitude in the future. This determines the function of the present as the anticipation of death, which is clearly identified in another poem, "Zadosyt" (Enough): „Задосить. Приостань і жди кінця".[23] (Enough. Stop and wait for the end.).

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[23] Stus *Palimpsesty* 209.

"The Disentangled Web of the Forest" betrays Stus' particular manner of handling temporality. The poet focuses attention on the following three aspects: 1) the compression of long time units and the extension of short ones; 2) emotional withdrawal from life which he considers a heavy burden; and, 3) reconciliation with death. These elements distinguish his dealing with the present and can be found in almost every other poem concerned with temporality. For example, "This Dawn" and "Tvoie zhyttia mynulo" (Your Life Has Passed) speak of the present as a heavy burden and convey imminence of death. "Your Life Has Passed" is of interest especially because Stus conveys his renunciation of life by employing the lexicon of time. The poem, written in iambic pentameter, consists of eight lines. It can be conditionally divided into two parts: the first six lines deal with the poet's current existence, while the last two are an apostrophe to poetry.

Твоє життя минуло й знебуло.
І гусне крик. Довліє злоба дневі.
І спроневіра спалює чоло,
і дивен див біжить поверхи древа,
і ніч біжить — поверхи давніх днів,
і тінь лягла на заволоку часу.
Поезіє, красо моя, окрасо,
я перед тебе, чи до тебе жив?[24]

(Your life has passed and disappeared. / And the scream thickens. Anger toward another day prevails. / And loss of faith burns the forehead, / and a strange dyv[25] runs over trees, / and the night runs -- over past days, / and a shadow fell over the curtain of time. /

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[24] Stus *Palimpsesty* 198.

[25] In Slavic mythology, "dyv" is an evil spirit in the form of a bird.

Poetry, my beauty and adornment, / did I live before you
or earlier than you?)

The selective use of the past and present-tense verbs determines the composition of the first part: its initial and final lines employ verbs denoting action in the past; the lines in-between refer to action in the present. Therefore the poet's present finds itself framed by the perception of life as finished (the first line) and time as doomed (the sixth line). The anaphoric conjunction "and" („і") helps to underscore the factors contributing to his "ill-being," namely, anxiety, loss of faith, and reluctance to face another day. The use of the parallel construction with the image of the "dyv" ("and a strange dyv runs over trees, / and the night runs -- over past days") enhances the fatalistic view of temporality, further strengthened by the reference to the shadow that fell over the poet's time.[26] Even though death is not mentioned directly, its presence is implicit. The poem's final two lines address and praise poetry. The lexicon of time (the synonymous phrases „перед тебе" and „до тебе" meaning "before you"), used in relation to life, underscores poetry's importance in Stus' existence. As we can see, the main opposition in the poem is that between life and death. Despite the prevalent mood of despair and reconciliation with death in the first part, the poem does not end on a low note. By asserting the power of poetry Stus simultaneously asserts the power of life.

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[26] The discussion of the image of the shadow in Chapter 3 reveals that Stus links it to fate and death.

The poem above illustrates two main aspects of Stus' approach to temporality -- reconciliation with death and emotional alienation from life which is viewed as a burden. "Rika zhyttia" (The River of Life)[27] adds a third aspect -- the short duration of long time-units. Much like "Your Life Has Passed," "The River of Life" betrays the poet's tormenting present. The iambic pentameter of the poem is organized into three quatrains.[28]

Ріка життя уже тече повз мене,
і жди не жди і, скільки не чекай –
та оббігає течія шалена
забуту гору і забутий гай.
Окремо день – синіє стьожка болю,
окремо космос – чорна чорнота.
Забутий, світе, я назнався вволю,
чого ти варта, дорога мета.
Проносяться століття – не спинити
ув алкоголь біди, у забуття.
Збігає час – страждати і любити,
а за парканом кулиться життя.

(The river of life is already flowing past me, / and no matter whether you wait or not, and no matter how long you wait, / the fierce stream passes around / the forgotten mountain and the forgotten grove. / A day is like a blue-colored path of pain, / space is like black blackness. / Oh world, being forgotten, I experienced to the full / what you are worth, dear goal. / The centuries are flying by / into the alcohol of misfortune, into oblivion, / and they are not to be stopped. / The time to suffer and to love is slipping away, / and life cringes behind a fence.)

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[27] Stus *Palimpsesty* 197.

[28] The collection *Palimpsests* does not divide the poem into quatrains, however, I chose to divide it into quatrains on the basis of rhyme.

The poem's first line identifies its main theme -- receding life and reconciliation with death. This is conveyed metaphorically by referring to the river of life passing the lyrical persona. The verbs "to flow past" and "to pass around" in the first quatrain emphasize his alienation and reverberate with the verb "to slip away" in the reference to time in the last quatrain. This underscores the fluidity of the moment and retreating life on the thematic level and binds the poem together structurally. The present is not mentioned by name, however, the use of present-tense verbs points to its overpowering presence. The encumbrance of the present is disclosed by comparing the days with a "path of pain" and a beckoning "blackness" ahead (Stus' metaphor for death). Every day, whose painful duration is contrasted with the quick flight of centuries ("The centuries are flying by... and they are not to be stopped" [cf. "Centuries fly by instantaneously" from "The Disentangled Web of the Forest"]), brings an acute realization of time slipping away. The precious time for loving and suffering does not belong to the poet, who has already reconciled himself with death. Life, compared to a "river" and a "fierce stream," no longer touches him because it belongs to others. It "cringes behind a fence." Like the poet himself, life finds itself incarcerated, once it is fenced off from freedom.

Stus' discussion of the happenings and feelings of his current existence involves evaluation. His emotional and psychological apprehension of the present as a heavy burden is emphasized in those infrequent instances when this time modality is mentioned. For example, "This Dawn" characterizes the present as revealing

"only the tracery of a numb soul" („Сьогодні лиш візерунок стерплої душі"),[29] while "Cry, Heaven" views it as an entity that has been wasted in suffering („Сьогодні згибіло"),[30] thus betraying Stus' approach to this time modality during the period in the camps. The poem "Uzhe todi" (Already Then), written in exile, reveals a similar attitude by referring to the present as "stolen" („сьогодні вкрадене").[31] Such a description makes the present look deficient, bleak and feeble. This is not surprising, inasmuch as the poet treats it as an inconsequential interval before a significant event in the future -- his death.

In Stus' poems, the past is distant and removed, something to which he can never return. This idea is emphasized both in the poetry of confinement and exile. For example, in "Cry, Heaven" Stus wrote: „Минуле не вернути" (The past cannot be returned). Similar sentiments are expressed in "Verstaiu shliakh" (I am Going) from the Kolyma period: „...за обріями спогаду – оселі / ті, до котрих немає вороття" (...behind the horizons of reminiscences are the homes / to which I cannot return).[32] The poet's distance from his past is metaphorically imagined as a paternal home, locked and inaccessible. Describing a dream in which he visits his native village, Stus finds himself unable to enter his house. His home is hidden behind thick („грубі") walls. The poet writes: „Від мене

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[29] Stus *Palimpsesty* 118.

[30] Stus *Svicha* 71.

[31] "Uzhe todi" (Already Then), Stus*Palimpsesty* 293.

[32] Stus *Palimpsesty* 366.

замуровано / моє минуле..."[33] (My past / has been sealed off from me...). Thus, both the man and his past find themselves incarcerated. The gulf between the two layers of time is further emphasized by the image of burnt bridges in "Meni postav ty" (You Emerged Before Me): „І помолися ще – / вчорашньому, коли немає завтра. / Геть за минулим спалено мости"[34] (And pray still - / to the things of yesterday, if there is no tomorrow. / The bridges have been burnt behind the past completely).

Stus depicts the past as a time of former happiness, love, meetings with friends and family, life in his beloved Ukraine. It is full of meaning and reminiscences. The poet's approach to his reminiscences possesses ambiguity. On the one hand, he regards them as a source of endurance and survival, as for example, in "Skhylys' do mushli spohadiv" (Lean to the Shell of Reminscences) and "Idy v kubel'tse spohadu - zohriisia!" (Turn to the Nest of Reminiscences - and Get Warm!), whose very opening lines imply the healing power of memory.[35] On the other hand, remembrance of happy times brings him unbearable pain. Emphasizing the past's tormenting nature, Stus compares it to a star made of hundreds of needles, which burns him during sleepless nights („Минуле – наче зірка в сто голок, / котра пече мені в безсонні ночі...").[36] Stus' contradictory feelings toward the past are

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[33] Stus *Palimpsesty* 201.

[34] Stus *Palimpsesty* 100.

[35] Stus *Palimpsesty* 89, 93.

[36] Stus *Palimpsesty* 108.

reflected in "Ty des' zhyvesh..." (You Live Somewhere), a poem in which he emphasizes the joy of painful memories. Addressed to his wife, the poem speaks of forfeited youth and happiness. Employing oxymoronic phrases "the happiness of misfortune" („нещастя щасть") and "the luxury of defeat" („здигоднів розкоші"), Stus identifies the content of his memories, which provide both pain and comfort. Maintaining that he lives "in order to remember" („і жив, і житиму, щоб пам"ятати"), Stus pleads to be left in this painful time of ordeal („Дай мені лишитись / у цьому часі страдному" // Let me stay / in this pained time) that is accessible to him only in dreams.[37]

Examining the question of memory and the past, Meyerhoff writes that the recollection of single events, together with their significant associations, sets the process of creative imagination. The goal of this process is "to reconstruct the world of experience and the self."[38] The function of the creative recall also lies in the "search for time lost as a means for regaining the continuity and identity of the self."[39] Stressing the importance of such recapture of time, Meyerhoff writes: "If there are severe breaks in the recollective, imaginative reconstruction of one's past, continuity and identity of the self are impaired likewise."[40]

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[37] Stus *Palimpsesty* 170-171.

[38] Meyerhoff 48.

[39] Meyerhoff 54.

[40] Meyerhoff 52.

For Stus recollecting the past is an important process of regaining the identity of the self. Perhaps the paradox of confinement derives from the fact that, although it carries a strong dehumanizing dimension, it also evokes an acute desire of self-cognition and self-apprehension.[41] Consequently, when Stus speaks about lost time, it is important for him to remember the positive aspects of the past in order to reconstruct the continuity of the self. His recollections of his wife, son, family, friends, and the emotions that accompanied his happy existence serve to convey what Meyerhoff designates as "a meaning of selfhood which could not be elicited from the contents of immediate experience."[42]

Stus' treatment of the future, in particular the concepts of order and direction of time, is very complex. Stus' poetry evaluates the future as it does other time modalities. The future consists of his expectations, or, to be more exact, his loss of them. For example, in "The Disentangled Web of the Forest," Stus, overcome by visions of approaching death, bids farewell to his future expectations, which are identified as follows: „Прощай, сподівання — всі завтра, / всі згодом, всі скоро, всі потім..." (Farewell, expectations -- all *tomorrows*, / all *later ons*, all *soons*, all *afterwards*..."). [43] This assessment of the future can be traced in a number of poems during the period of incarceration. For example,

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[41] Stus' reference to the dehumanizing power of confinement is discusseds in "Chapter 5: Space." Examples of the impact of incarceration on self-cognition and creativity are examined in the "Introduction."

[42] Meyerhoff 48.

[43] Stus *Palimpsesty* 195. Emphasis added [NB].

in "Cry, Heaven" he directly announces that his future does not exist („майбутнього нема"). This statement echoes almost identically the one in "You Emerged Before Me" („немає завтра", / tomorrow does not exist).[44] The examples suggest that the future may be insignificant, or -- at the very least -- contradictory. In other poems, however, the future is clearly not as meaningless. Firstly, because it is closely intertwined with the past which, as we know, is very important to him. He emphasizes the interdependence and unity of both kinds of time by maintaining that "The future is all in the past" / „Майбутнє -- все в минулому"[45] ("This Dawn") and that the past has become the future („проминуле, що майбутнім стало")[46] ("Viddaj meni svojeji smerti chastku" / "Give Me Part of Your Death" from the period of exile). The time-arrow from the first quotation reveals the movement from the future to the past: the lyrical persona's future was experienced long ago and has nothing to conceal. The second example demonstrates a change of the time-arrow in the opposite direction -- from the past to the future and reflects the poet's desire to live a full life rather than one consisting of reminiscences, which, in his opinion, determine the nature of his future. As a result of this dynamics, there occurs a fusion of both temporal layers, which renders them interchangeable.

The future is also important because it can affect the present and determine its nature. This can be seen in "Uzhe todi" (Already

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[44] Stus *Palimpsesty* 100, *Svicha* 71.

[45] Stus *Palimpsesty* 118.

[46] Stus *Palimpsesty* 260.

Then), a poem, written in exile, that recounts the poet's emotional state on the eve of his arrest and the premonition he had that the last Christmas he celebrated in Ukraine was his farewell to "Homeland, world, life" ("прощання.. з Вітчизною, зі світом, із життям"). Stus wrote: "...будучина писала навмання / своє сьогодні вкрадене"[47] (...the future was writing at random [about] its stolen present), thus emphasizing the direction of the time-arrow from the future to the present. In "This Dawn" Stus explains the peculiar nature of his time-arrow thus:

> І так здалося: предковічним мітом
> не можна вже душі переконати,
> що однонапрямкова, як одвіку,
> надій, погроз і часу течія.
> Бо вже давно усе те пережите,
> що довго крилося будучиною.[48]

> (And so it seemed: by eternal myth / one cannot convince the soul / that the stream of time, hopes and threats / is unidirectional as it has been forever. / Since all that the future concealed / was experienced long ago.)

Stus' time-arrow can move in both directions. This reflects not only the ambiguity of his treatment of temporality, but also his existential approach. Here the role of the future -- the time of death -- is particularly prominent. The future can direct the time-arrow to the past and the present and, thus, influence both. It also appears as something whose course was determined "long ago" ("І

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47 "Uzhe todi" (Already Then), Stus, *Plaimpsesty* 293.

48 "Otsei svitanok" (This Dawn) Stus, *Palimpsesty* 118.

got fed up with the road, / headed for eternity, long ago"),[49] and which acts as a link to the past. Stus also stresses the importance of past decisions concerning the future („проминуле, що майбутнім стало"). This peculiar relationship between the past and the future places Stus' handling of these time modalities in the context of existentialism.

Stus' Time and Existentialism

In his approach to time, Stus reminds me of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. Like Sartre, Stus views the past as the time when important choices, which influence the future, are made.[50] His apprehension of the relationship between the two time modalities and the effect which it produces is parallel to Sartre's, for whom the power of future death is a mechanism influencing the past: "...we choose our past in the light of a certain end, but from then on it imposes itself upon us and devours us."[51] Similarly, for Stus the commitments he made in the past in view of a future death have determined his present and, simultaneously, his death.

Heidegger regards death as a certain future occurrence with an uncertain date, and considers it as an important component of

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49 "The Disentangled Web of the Forest" in Stus *Palimpsesty* 194.

50 "To be free is to have one's freedom perpetually on trial. The result is that the past while confined within my actual free choice is - once this choice has determined it - an integral and necessary condition of my project." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 502.

51 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 503.

authentic existence and a part of the present moment. Thus, an objective timeline gives way to time as a dimension of an individual life. Henceforth past and future represent only the tension experienced in the present between those decisions, which have already been made, and those that will be made in the face of ever-present death.[52] Writes Heidegger:

> Our talk about time's passing away gives expression to this 'experience': time does not let itself be halted. This 'experience' in turn is possible only because the halting of time is something that we want. Herein lies an inauthentic *awaiting* of 'moments' - an awaiting in which these are already *forgotten* as they glide by. The *awaiting* of inauthentic existence - the awaiting which forgets as it makes present - is the condition for the possibility of the ordinary experience of time's passing-away. Because Dasein is futural in the 'ahead-of-itself', it must, in awaiting, understand the sequence of "nows" as one which *glides by* as it passes away. *Dasein knows fugitive time in terms of its 'fugitive' knowledge about its death.* In the kind of talk which emphasizes time's passing away, the *finite futurity* of Dasein's temporality is publicly reflected. And because even in talk about time's passing away, death can remain covered up, time shows itself as a passing-away 'in-itself'."[53]

Stus does not have an ordinary time experience, inasmuch as his existence is futural. His preoccupation with death echoes "the *finite futurity* of Dasein's temporality." It overshadows his present and makes it part of his existence. His time is "fugitive," because death always lurks in its background. The discussion of death takes

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[52] Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962) 91.

[53] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962) 426. Emphasis in the original.

different forms: it can generate anxiety over "time not experienced" („недобутий час"); it can describe the dangerous nature of his commitment; or simply it can welcome death.[54] Even the poet's references to time units bear a stamp of mortality, as, for example in "Buv doshch" (It was Raining), where he compares days in prison to rotten pears on a wet branch of existence (..ці дні, немов зотлілі груші / на мокрій гілці існувань).[55]

Inasmuch as death is sometimes discussed in Stus' poetry in the context of "eternal return,"[56] it is not surprising then that the poet employs temporality in dealing with the subject. For example, in "Otak by i ia" (And So Would I), a poem in which the lyrical persona engages in transcendental meditation on death, Stus writes: „хай почезає час, аби в безчассі / я вдруге міг постати, коли всі/ воління вщухли" (Let the time disappear, so that in timelessness / I could rise again, when all / my yearnings subsided).[57] The quotation is strikingly similar to Nietzsche's explanation of the concept of Eternal Recurrence which he gives in the "Explanatory Notes to *Thus Spake Zarathustra,*" a work that Stus knew well. Nietzsche writes:

> We must desire to perish in order to arise afresh, - from one day to the other. Wander through a hundred souls,

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[54] "Meni postav ty" (You Emerged in Front of Me), "Dyvlius' na tebe" (I am Looking at You), "Plach, nebo" (Cry, Heaven) in Stus, *Palimpsesty* 100, 108-109, 71.

[55] Stus, *Palimpsesty* 202.

[56] For more information see Chapter 2.

[57] Stus *Palimpsesty* 117.

> - let that be thy life and thy fate! And then finally: desire to go through the whole process once more![58]

As we can see, death is an important component of Stus' approach to the theme of time. It determines the poet's treatment of temporality, betrays alienation from life and reveals his existential sources.

In conclusion, Stus' literary time, is personal and psychological. It is comprised of contradictions and ambiguities which center around three main temporal concepts -- measurement, order, and direction. The poet's measurement reveals the compression of long time-units, such as centuries, and the extension of short ones, like minutes and days. And, inasmuch as Stus' time-arrow moves in both directions, his order of time is rather a "disorder." This leads to a particular dynamics of time modalities, which allows the past and the future to fuse and interchange. The basis for such dynamics is death, the unifying factor of all three times in his poetry. The past preserves the memory of important commitments which determine the poet's death in the future (this explains the fusion of the two), while the present is identified as a period of waiting for death.

Considered separately, each of the time modalities -- the past, the present, and the future -- is an important part of Stus' existence. However, a different picture is obtained, when the poet

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58 *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche,* ed. Oscar Levy. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964) XVI, Notes 62.

treats them all simultaneously. For example, in "Plach, nebo" (Cry, Heaven) he writes: „Минуле не вернути, / Сьогодні згибіло, майбутнього – нема".[59] (The past cannot be returned, / the present is wasted in suffering, the future is non-existent). Here the significance of all the times is contravened. They are regarded as distant and having no impact on his reality. This is especially emphasized in the poem "This Dawn": „Майбутнє – все в минулому. Сьогодні / лиш візерунок стерплої душі" (The future is all in the past. Today / reveals only the tracery of a numb soul). Stus' simultaneous handling of the past, present, and future reveals another level of ambiguity in his approach to temporality. If the future is in the past and non-existent, then the past is non-existent as well. The present reveals only the "tracery of the numb soul" and "has been wasted in suffering." If we were to take Stus' words literally, his poetic world would become timeless or transcendental. However, this does not happen. Time, whose role Stus attempts to diminish, exercises power over him, and forces him to discuss it continuously. "Imprisoned" by the present, Stus awaits death as a relief from time's burden, watching "minutes drag along like centuries."[60].

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[59] Vasyl' Stus, *Svicha* 71.

[60] Stus *Palimpsesty* 194.

Chapter 7: The Imagination in Confinement: Beyond Stus[1]

To this point the main focus of the discussion was the poetry of Vasyl' Stus. I examined the impact that incarceration had on his treatment of death, fate, love, space, and time. In this chapter, I will draw parallels between his works and those of other incarcerated writers, as well as identify the differences. I intend to show that the deep psychological impact that incarceration has on the human psyche often results in common themes, motifs, and even images. In a way, confinement can be compared to hunger, pain or thirst, because it causes suffering and anxiety, as well as produces similar emotional responses in the human being. Naturally, such factors as cultural environment, historical conditions, and individual circumstances of each writer must also be taken into consideration. However, these factors are not the origin of these themes, but rather determine how individual authors handle them. It is incarceration proper that makes writers insistently explore such themes as death, fate, love, time, and space which will be examined below.

Inasmuch as this work deals primarily with the creative legacy of Vasyl' Stus, my references to other authors will be confined to general observations, rather than a thorough analysis. In quoting their works, I will concentrate only on the

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[1] I borrowed the term "imagination in confinement" from Elissa D. Gelfand's book *Imagination in Confinement* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), devoted to women's writings from French prisons.

themes/images/motifs present in Stus, disregarding other aspects of their respective works.

Death

Ioan Davies has written that

> Prison writing, more than most, is contemplation of death, our own deaths, the deaths we impose on others, the deaths imposed on us by others, the great gamble between our death and theirs. It is therefore not for nothing that most of the theology of incarceration is coupled with the theology of afterlife, that the concepts of heaven, hell and purgatory are bound up with our concepts of otherness, separation, discipline, and judgement.[2]

In my opinion, death is a major unifying factor of prison literature. Incarceration seems to compel writers to explore the subject of mortality both in prison and after release. Here the examples are numerous. Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* was inspired by the realization of approaching death. Benvenuto Cellini tackles the subject in his autobiography. Death colors the existence of Fedor Dostoevsky's lyrical persona, making him call his prison "the House of the Dead." Also, there seems to be a certain mechanism of imagination in confinement, which can generate similar psychological and even lexical reactions, revealed in the treatment of the subject. Thus mortality emerges as something whose presence can be sensed, or experienced because of its taste

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[2] Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1990) 16.

or smell. Even fatigue can carry the seal of demise. For instance, Stus speaks about "deathlike loneliness" („смертна самота") and "deathlike silence" („тиша гробова"), which echo Ezra Pound's "...the loneliness of death came upon me...,[3] and "There is fatigue deep as the grave."[4] The Ukrainian poet comments on the "stifled smell of death" („спертий запах смерти"), Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka mentions "a bitter taste of death,"[5] while Oscar Wilde provides a detailed description of the prison environment with its "fetid breath of living Death":

> Each narrow cell in which we dwell
> Is a foul and dark latrine
> And the fetid breath of living Death
> Chokes up each grated screen...[6]

Another good example of the described phenomenon would be Jean Genet's "Funeral March" and poems from Stus' *Palimpsests*, which share a number of features. First, both writers are preoccupied with death to the point that they perceive it as living. Thus the image of death which is "alive" („жива") appears in Stus' "Somebody Very Black" and "Waiting is Hopeless," while Genet portrays a condemned prisoner who states that death *must* live in

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[3] *The Cantos of Ezra Pound.* (New York: New Directions, 1970) 527.

[4] Pound 533.

[5] Wole Soyinka, "Animistic Spells", *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Rex Collings/Eyre Methuen, 1972) 62.

[6] " The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Oscar Wilde, *The Portable Oscar Wilde* ed. by Richard Aldington and Stanley Weintraub. (Markham, Ont.,: Penguin Books, 1981) 686. The breath of death becomes "icy" in another passage from the same poem: "For the Lord of Death with icy breath / Had entered in to kill." 678.

him ("Elle doit vivre en moi.").[7] Secondly, both writers demonstrate similar reconciliation with their own finitude (cf. Stus' "How I Wish to Die!") and employ cognate images that serve as its metaphors: Stus' "darkness" in "This Darkness Ahead" and Genet's "town of darkness" in the "Funeral March," where death is welcomed thus:

> Douce Mort prenez-moi me voici préparé
> En route à mi-chemin de votre ville sombre.
>
> Sweet Death take me, here I am ready,
> Half way on down the road to your town of darkness.[8]

Thirdly, both Stus and Genet use the image of death as a lover, a recurring motif in prison literature.[9] Genet, in particular, creates a special aura of eroticism around the concept of mortality. Most revealing is his description of a "danse macabre," when life, while leaving the lyrical persona, engages in a dance, "hugging death like a lover." Having their own "sublime" reasons which are "opposed to each other," life and death reveal simultaneous unity and opposition. Their grotesque waltz is being danced backwards, it is slow ("lente") and heavy ("lourde"). The reversed dance evokes associations with the movement of time toward birth, an aspect underscored earlier in the poem. The lyrical persona of Genet's poem finds himself somewhere between life and death.[10]

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[7] "Funeral March" Genet 50.

[8] Genet 50-51.

[9] Probably the most erotically explicit associations of death with love and sex are found in Marquis de Sade's writings, created during his imprisonment. Comments on Sade's works will be made later in the chapter.

[10] This is a concept, often explored by Stus. For more information see Chapter 1.

Perhaps the strongest associations summoned forth by the "Funeral March" are found in Stus' "My vzhe tvoi kokhantsi, smerte" (We are Already your Lovers, O Death). Besides the treatment of death as a lover, conveyed by Stus in the very title of the poem and by Genet in the description of the "danse macabre," both works employ and similarly express the concept of the continuity of the life cycle. Thus Stus approaches the subject by first communicating the imminence of death -- by referring to fading life that shimmers through the fog and by employing the image of a cuckoo. And then he writes:

> І як то добре на узліссі
> згубити стежку лугову,
> упавши навзнак на траву,
> як немовлятко у колисці.[11]
>
> (And how wonderful it is / to lose a meadow path at the edge of a forest, / having fallen on the back in the grass, / like a baby in the cradle./)

When Stus speaks about falling into grass, he emphasizes the comforting power of the earth for the one crossing the border between life and death. Through the simile "like a baby in the

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La vie de moi s'écoule à la mort enlacée.
Leur valse lente et lourde à l'envers est dansée
Chacune dévidant sa sublime raison
L'une à l'autre opposée.

Life's leaving me hugging death like a lover.
Their slow and heavy waltz is being danced backwards
While each one is unwinding its sublime reason
Opposed to each other.

Genet 52-53.

[11] Vasyl' Stus, *Palimpsesty* (n.p.: Suchasnit', 1986) 456.

cradle," he links this interaction with the earth to the beginning of life. As a result, the grass can be viewed as a metaphor for Mother Earth's womb and is related to the cycle of life. This is in tune with the ancient concept of Mother Earth as a vital power which initiates and terminates everything alive.[12] In the "Funeral March," Genet draws similar associations between the earth and the beginning of life. His lyrical persona, after addressing death as beautiful ("belle") and giving himself up to her arms, expresses belief in finding again the grassland of his childhood:

> Je m'abandonnerai belle Mort à ton bras
> Car je sais retrouver l'émouvante prairie
> De mon enfance...
>
> I'll give myself up to your arms Death my beauty
> For I know I'll find again the stirring grassland
> Of my unrestrained childhood...[13]

The perception of death as a process of retreating back into childhood is also found in Paul Verlaine. In "Un grand sommeil noir," written during his incarceration in Belgium, Verlaine compares himself to a cradle, rocked in a burial vault, signifying respectively life and death:[14]:

> Je suis un berceau
> Qu'une main balance

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[12] Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 264.

[13] Genet 50-51.

[14] Stus draws the same parallel in "While Reading Yasunari Kawabata," when he talks about the "eternal trail from the cradle to demise." Stus *Palimpsesty* 288.

Au creux d'un caveau:
Silence, silence.

I am a cradle that
A hand is rocking in
The pit of a burial vault:
Be silent, be silent.[15]

The theme of death with a focus on a condemned prisoner deserves a special comment. In *The Gulag Archipelago,* Solzhenitsin wondered about the emotional state of prisoners in deathcells, asking the following questions: How is all this happening? How are they expecting death? What do they feel? What are they thinking about?[16] André Chénier's "Comme au dernier rayon" (When the Last Ray), written in the Saint-Lazare prison the night (or as certain critics argue a few days)[17] before his execution, provides some answers to those questions based on personal experience. The poem starts with a description of a beautiful day, gradually shifting to the subject of death and reconciliation with it:

Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zéphire
  Animent la fin d'un beau jour,
Au pied de l'échafaud j'essaye encore ma lyre.
  Peut-être est-ce bientôt mon tour.

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15 *Baudelaire Rimbaud Verlaine Mallarmé* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) 274-275.

16 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag* Sobraniie sochinenii, tom piatyi. (Vermont, Paris: 1980) 429.

17 Richard A. Smernoff, *André Chénier* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977) 148-149.

> ("When the last ray, when the last breeze, / animate the end of a beautiful day, / at the foot of the scaffold I will play my lyre. / Perhaps it will be soon my turn.")[18]

The slow, steady rhythm of the poem creates a sense of inexorability. Death is imminent and is rendered all the more awesome by using images of nature, as man's comforter:

> The scaffold is not frequented by ghostly spectres but rather provides the poet one last opportunity to play his lyre. Death is seen as the culmination of a journey, and the poet, in his soporific state, already imagines himself dead: "Le sommeil du tombeau pressera ma paupière. / Avant que de ces deux moitiés / Ces vers que je commence ait atteint la dernière...")"the sleep of the coffin will press my eyelid / Before I end this verse which I now chant...[19]

Even though Stus' poem "Koly naipershi spolokhy svitannia" (When the Last Flashes of the Dawn) was not written under exactly the same circumstances, both works have a number of comparable features. This is true, for example, for the opening part: the two poems employ parallel constructions and a similar lexicon: "When the last ray" in Chénier and "When the first flashes of the dawn" in Stus. The poems differ only in the timing -- sunset vs. dawn.

> Коли найперші сполохи світання
> схрестять на небі голубі мечі –
> лежи й мовчи. Твоє недосягання
> простиме буде.[20]

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[18] Chénier, André. *Poésies.* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Paris: Ed. Mignot, 1912) 228. The translation is mine.

[19] Smernoff 149.

[20] Stus *Palimpsesty* 330.

(When the first flashes of the dawn / cross blue swords in the sky / - lie and be silent. Your unattainability / will be excused.)

In Stus' poem, the beauty of nature, the daily work of peasants in the field, and the triumph of life („Світ сміється" / "The world is laughing"), presented in the background of seemingly mundane activities, are in sharp contrast with the mood of the lyrical persona. When he speaks of his "unattainability," he refers to the apprehension of approaching death. From here stems his resentment of life and realization of not belonging. That is why the laughter of the world is perceived as evil („Недобре так сміється"), and the approaching evening to crown the "luxurious day" („пишний день") is associated with blood („кров'ю підбіжить"). This is when his alienation from life is threatened by an "insatiable desire to live" („невситиме пожадання жить"). His reluctance to die ends the day of resistance to the splendour of the world. This impedance, conveyed by the repetition of the imperatives „мовчи," „лежи й мовчи" and by the reference to the inability to break through the barriers of confinement („не утекти з полону"), is broken by the love of life.

The prevailing mood of sadness and contemplation of imminent death is common to both Stus and Chénier. Their use of the images of nature, which are sometimes expressed almost identically (e.g. „пишний день" in Stus and "un beau jour" in Chénier), underscores the beauty of life and reluctance to bid it farewell. Both poets imagine themselves already dead. However,

while for Chénier death is a culmination of a long journey which he accepts, for Stus this final reconciliation has not been made. This difference can be explained by the fact that Chénier knew that he was to die within a few days. That is why his poem also differs in its readiness to discuss political issues, caused by the awareness of approaching execution and desire to use his cell as the last platform for declaring his views. Chénier was imprisoned after expressing his dissatisfaction with the French Revolution, to which he was originally sympathetic. He was apalled by the lawlessness, abuse of power and excesses of the Jacobins. These sentiments are reflected in "When the Last Ray." Welcoming death "Vienne, vienne la mort!" ("Come, come, death!"), Chénier denounces hangmen and tyranny. His commitment to truth and justice and confidence in his beliefs are expressed in the last lines permeated with defiance and rebelliousness: "Toi, vertu, pleure si je meurs" ("Virtue, cry if I die"). Ideologically the poem is closer to Stus' "The Kolyma Cuckoos Called," also devoted to death, where the Ukrainian poet speaks of his social commitments.

Frequent employment of the images of celestial bodies, often in the context of death, is another important feature of prison writing. This is not accidental, since they are easy to observe from the window, and are, in fact, the prisoner's link with the outside world. Secondly, celestial bodies are likely to be missed the most in the absence of a window, since they represent the changes from day to night. This is why many works, written in confinement, use the sun, the moon, the stars, etc. as a starting point for a discussion. For example, Stus begins his contemplations of fate and

existence thus: „Мені зоря сіяла нині вранці, / устромлена в вікно".[21] (This morning a star, thrust into the window, was shining at me). His compatriot, Ivan Franko, writes in his *Prison Sonnets* ("Tiuremni sonety"): „Хто любить місяць, я без сонця в'яну" (Some [people] love the moon, but I wilt without the sun).[22] In his prison cell in Brussels, jailed for shooting Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine starts his poem with the following lines: "Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit, / Si bleu, si calme!"[23] (The sky above the roof is so blue, so calm). Chénier's "When the Last Ray" and Stus' "When the First Flashes of the Dawn," examined earlier, also begin with references to celestial bodies and gradually shift the discussion to the question of mortality in Stus,[24] and death and social issues in Chénier. Taras Shevchenko's poem, devoted to N. Kostomarov[25] and written in solitary confinement in a Russian military fortress, starts with the images of the spring sun and clouds[26] (Веселе

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[21] Stus 126.

[22] Ivan Franko, *Zibrannia tvoriv u piatdesiaty tomakh.* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1976) 163.

[23] Paul Verlaine, *Sagesse. Amour. Bonheur.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 93-94.

[24] Even though Stus' "When the First Flashes of the Dawn" does not contain references to the poet's social commitment, he has a great number of poems, written in confinement, which directly link his fate, struggle for justice and death. For more information see Chapter 3: Fate.

[25] Mykola Kostomarov was head of the secret society the Brotherhood of Sts Cyril and Methodius, with which Shevchenko was loosely associated. The Brotherhood called for the restructuring of society on the principles of justice and equality. The issue of nationality was particularly sensitive in the Russian Empire. For more information about the Brotherhood see Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine* (Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 235-237.

[26] A feature similar to Stus' "When the First Flashes of the Dawn" and Chénier's "When the Last Ray" which also begin with the sun-associated imagery.

сонечко ховалось / В веселих хмарах весняних.[27] // The happy sun was hiding / in happy spring clouds), briefly describes mundane prison activities, and turns to political matters, namely the poet's homeland and the injustice done to it. The visions of Shevchenko's homeland come in the images of his native village, the grave of his parents, and his grieving heart unable to bear his land's fate.

During his confinement at Pisa, "alone, stripped of all possessions, threatened with near-certainty of death"[28] Ezra Pound, wrote in *Pisan Cantos:* "O moon my pin-up chronometer."[29] Jean Genet's "Sentenced to Death," devoted to the poet's twenty-year-old friend who was sentenced to the guillotine, laments the coming death of the young man. Its ruthlessness is enhanced by a depiction of the coming day with its joie de vivre. The world, where the sky awakens, stars blossom, flowers sigh, and the grass greets the dew, is retreating from the young prisoner who is aware of his approaching end. Reconciled with his finitude, he welcomes the new day with its triumph of life:

> Le ciel peut s'éveiller, les étoiles fleurir,
> Ni les fleurs soupirer, et des prés l'herbe noire
> Accueillir la rosée où le matin va boire,
> Le clocher peut sonner: moi seul je vais mourir.[30]

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[27] Shevchenko 315.

[28] Anthony Woodward, *Ezra Pound and The Pizan Cantos* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 100, 87.

[29] Pound 539.

[30] Let the sky awaken, the stars blossom,
Let the flowers sigh, the bells sound,

Perhaps the most important reason why incarcerated writers employ the images of celestial bodies is that the sun, the moon, the stars and the sky might be perceived as symbols of the outer world and freedom left behind. In his longing for the life outside the prison wall, Oscar Wilde explains it thus:

> For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. The very sun and moon seem taken from us. Outside, the day may be blue and gold, but the light that creeps down through the thickly-muffled glass of the small iron-barred window beneath which one sits is grey and niggard. It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always in one's heart.[31]

What sets Stus apart from many writers dealing with the theme of death is his philosophical approach to the subject. Death seems to provide him with a particular perspective on reality. It is through the prism of death that Stus examines his current existence -- relations with other people, personal choice, immediate environment, temporality. Death becomes a learning tool directed primarily at himself. It compels him to seek within answers and to engage in self-exploration. The result is poetry bordering on philosophy. Its hermetic nature discloses that Stus did not strive to be understood by the average reader (a feature that is not typical of

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And the black grass greet the dew that morning will drink
In the fields: as for me I'm going to die.

Genet, "Sentenced to Death," 20-21.

[31] Oscar Wilde, "De Produndis," *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde, 1908 - 1922* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969) 31.

a political prisoner),[32] but to satisfy his own spiritual needs. That is why perhaps many of his poems are written as an apostrophe to the self. To illustrate the point, let us examine poetry that deals with death by François Villon and Taras Shevchenko.

For François Villon, whose preoccupation with death borders on obsession,[33] the focus is on the physical side of mortality. John Fox wrote that even though Villon's poetry is medieval in spirit (because of his absolute belief in God and in a better world beyond this one), he experiences a strong fear of death.[34] His anxiety could stem from the impact of the pestilence in Europe (where about twenty-five million people died in the plagues of the 14th century, up to three quarters of the population in some areas), as well as from his personal life experience of violence and frenzy, further intensified by confinement. Villon's cogitation on the decay of flesh is contained in *Le Testament* :

> La mort le fait fremir, pallir,
> Le nez courber, les vaines tendre,
> Le col enfler, la chair mollir,
> Joinctes et nerfs croistre et estendre.[35]

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[32] The prison poetry of Ivan Svitlychny, a friend of Stus, is a good example of the poet's acute awareness of the addressee.

[33] Lewis Galantière, "Introduction". *The Complete Works of François Villon* (New York: Covicci, Friede, Inc., 1931) xxix.

[34] John Fox, "Introduction", *Complete Poems of François Villon* (New York:Everyman's Library, Dutton, 1968) xxii.

[35] Dying, he'll tremble and grow pale,
His nose grow peaked, his veins grow tender.
His neck shall swell, his flesh shall fail,
Joints and sinews stretch asunder.
Complete Poems of François Villon. (London: Everyman's Library, 1968) 34-35.

The French poet maintains that death makes everybody equal, the rich or the poor ("povres et riches"), a noble or a villain ("Nobles, villains"), the wise or the stupid ("Sages et folz"),[36] a motif popular at the time and reflected in works of literature and art, when Death was often portrayed as a skeleton with a cloak and hood holding a scythe.[37]

The motif of equality before death had been explored for centuries after Villon and emerged in a poem, written in confinement, by the 19th century Ukrainian writer Taras Shevchenko. The latter created an image of a merciless mower as a metaphor for death and as a tool for expressing his own fears of mortality.[38] As opposed to Villon, Shevchenko's anxiety is caused by

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36 Je congnois que povres et riches,
Sages et folz, prestres et laiz,
Nobles, villains, larges et chiches,
Petiz et grans, et beaulx et laiz,
Dames a rebracez colletz,
De quelconque condicion,
Portants atours ou bourreletz,
Mort saisit sans excepcion.

This I know, that rich and poor,
Sage and fool, laymen and priest,
Mean and prodigal, noble and boor,
The fair and ugly, highest and least,
Ladies with collars prinked and creased,
Of every condition, short and tall,
Hair combed and curled and finely dressed,
Death will seize them one and all.

Complete Poems of François Villon 34-35.

37 James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 94.

38 Не благай, не проси,
Не клепає коси,
Чи то пригород, чи город,
Мов бритвою, старий голить

dying in a "foreign land," and not by a concern over physical demise. He grieves that he will not be remembered, and that his grave will be forgotten and unattended. Arrested for the participation in the Brotherhood of Sts Cyril and Methodius that called for the restructuring of society, with an emphasis on Ukraine, in the Russian Empire, Shevchenko reflects in his poem a common anxiety of political prisoners separated from their homeland:

> І мене не мине,
> На чужині зотне,
> За решоткою задавить.
> Хреста ніхто не поставить
> І не пом'яне.[39]

Усе, що даси.

Мужика, й шинкаря,
Й сироту–кобзаря.
Приспівує старий, косить,
Кладе горами покоси,
Не мина й царя.

I pray you, do not beg; do not beseech;
He does not even pause to whet his scythe;
Whether it be a suburb or a city,
The hoary fellow shaves as with a razor
Without discrimination, everyone:

The moujik, the taverner,
The lonely kobzar;
The oldster as he mows intones a song
And lays his swaths of corpses mountain-high,
He does not even miss a tsar.

Taras Shevchenko, *Kobzar* (Kiev: Dnipro, 1984) 318-319.

[39] Me too he will not miss,
He'll mow me down in a far, foreign land,
Behind barred windows he will strangle me...
No one will plant a cross above my grave
And no one will remember me!

Stus shares with Villon merely the preoccupation with the theme of death. He wonders neither about rotting flesh, nor about men's equality before death. Stus' similarity with Shevchenko naturally goes further, inasmuch as both poets were incarcerated for dissenting ideas. It is not surprising then that the two express concern over dying in a faraway land. Stus speaks about this in "Nerozpiznane misto dorohe" (Unrecognized Dear City), "Nichna khmaryna" (Night Cloud), and "Diakuiu, Hospody" (Thank You, O Lord).[40] What makes Stus different though, is that death is often a starting point for a philosophical discussion. While in "Thank You, O Lord," for instance, death in confinement summons forth reflections on the circle of life, misfortune, his love and hate relationship with Ukraine; in "You are Shadow" the discussion of death produces existential-Christian contemplations on the subjects of fate and existence, life's mission and the role of the poet.

Philosophy and Religion

Stus' interest in and readiness to discuss philosophy and religion reflect to some extent a general tendency in prison literature. In my opinion, this stems from the need for comfort in daily existence and from the apprehension of death. Here examples are numerous. Take, Villon, for example. When he began to feel that his end was near, his life of vice and debauchery gave way to "the

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The Poetical Works of Taras Shevchenko, tr. by C. H. Andrusyshen and Watson Kirkconnell. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 307.

[40] Stus *Palimpsesty* 154, 371, 156-157.

sombre preoccupation with death" and pious feelings. His *Testament* contains a rich infusion of religious sentiments, which "permitted him to put personal sin and infractions of a penal code into different categories of ultimate responsibility."[41]

New faith in Catholicism became the central fact of Verlaine's prison experience. His reconversion occured in a cell where he had a little crucifix and a lithograph of the Sacred Heart. Verlaine writes:

> I do not know what or who it was that then lifted me so suddenly, that flung me half undressed from my bed, that prostrated me sobbing and in tears before that crucifix and before its companion picture, evocatory of the strangest and, to my eyes, the most sublime devotion of the Catholic Church.[42]

Villon's and Verlaine's religious conversions were a natural response to the prison environment. Their faith gave them strength and hope for survival, filling the void brought about by incarceration. Their self-mortification and worship of God provided a fertile ground for internal control and creative thinking. The uncertainty about the future led to the creation of works, colored by relinguishing power to God and confidence in His guidance (Villon's *Le Testament* and Verlaine's *Sagesse).*

Philosophy is another realm where incarcerated intellectuals find refuge. Davies writes:

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[41] Galantière xx.

[42] Harold Nicolson, *Paul Verlaine* (London: Constable & Company Limited, 1920) 116-117.

> The philosophy of the prison is a philosophy that contemplates at once finitude and infinity, it is a philosophy of the carnal and the spiritual; of the violence of space, of the subterranean and the galactic, of the self and of the many.[43]

Among the recurring themes of philosophical discussion among prison writers are ill fortune and suffering. The subject found its most famous treatment in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Speaking about good and bad fortune, the philosopher singles out the latter as being of greater advantage, inasmuch as it "draws most men to the true good."[44] Insisting on the virtue of suffering, Boethius writes: "...many have sought the enjoyment of happiness not only by death, but even by sorrow and sufferings..."[45] The ideas regarding spiritual regeneration and salvation, provided by misfortune, are also expressed by Oscar Wilde who maintains that suffering nourishes the soul, while "pleasures" starve it. He writes:

> For the secret of life is suffering. It is what is hidden behind everything. When we begin to live, what is sweet is so sweet to us, and what is bitter so bitter, that we inevitably direct all our desires towards pleasures, and seek not merely for a 'month or twain to feed on honeycomb,' but for all our years to taste no other food, ignorant all the while that we may really be starving the soul.[46]

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[43] Davies 25.

[44] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. (New York: The Modern Library, 1943) 39-40.

[45] Boethius 29.

[46] Wilde, "De Profundis," *The First* 75.

Stus' poetry continues the tradition of praising torment and punishment,[47] a recurring motif in his writing: „Життя – то кара. Кара – благостиня". (Life is punishment. Punishment is a blessing); „Прихистись – бідою..." (Find refuge in misfortune); „...над покари немає більшої цноти." (...there's no higher virtue than punishment); „Благословляю твою сваволю, дорого долі, дорого болю." (I bless your wantonness, the road of fate, the road of pain).[48] Suffering, often associated with wisdom, provides him with great sagacity in his approach to existence: „Так мудро нас страждання піднесло / понад плавбою і понад добою..."[49] (So wisely suffering elevated us / above the flow and above the time...).

The theme of suffering is linked to the concept of the "happy prison," a romanticized view of the gratifying nature of prison experience. It is based on the assumption that the close quarters of

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[47] The theme of suffering and its glorification is also prominent in Rilke. His Tenth Elegy, which was translated by Stus along with other *Duino Elegies*, is an attempt to affirm sorrow and suffering. The Elegy's "opening lines, celebrating the ultimate triumph of suffering, or of insight into the nature of suffering, are among the most exultantly and compellingly jubilant Rilke ever wrote..." J. B. Leishman & Stephen Spender. "Commentary on the Tenth Elegy " in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948) 141."O wie werdet ihr dann, Nächte, mir lieb sein, geharmte." (How dear you will be to me then, you Nights of Affliction!) (Rilke 90-91). The above quotation was taken from the draft of the Tenth Elegy, which had the following words jotted down by Rilke: "Art cannot be helpful through our trying to help and specially concerning ourselves with the distresses of others, but in so far as we bear our own distresses more passionately, give, now and then, a perhaps clearer meaning to endurance, and develop for ourselves the means of expressing the suffering within us and its conquest more precisely and clearly than it is possible to those who have to apply their powers to something else." (Rilke 16.)

Rilke's concept of art which provides endurance and conveys affliction was very close to Stus, whose poems often reveal his own "means of expressing suffering" and its "conquest".

[48] Stus *Palimpsesty* 227, 318, 441, 282.

[49] Stus *Palimpsesty* 204.

the cell are more conducive to creativity than freedom. Obviously there are grounds for such an assumption, inasmuch as many writers created their best work either during or after incarceration. Take, for example, Wilfrid Blunt (1840-1922), an English poet and diplomat, incarcerated for an inflammatory speech against 19th-century British policies. Wilde wrote that prison experience had "an admirable effect on Mr. Wilfrid Blunt as a poet," converting him from "a clever rhymer into an earnest and deep-thinking poet."[50] In *In Vinculis*, Blunt confirms the benefit received of confinement by calling himself his jail's "debtor" and referring to his prison experience as "years of learning":

> Farewell, dark gaol. You hold some better hearts
> Than in this savage world I thought to find.
> I do not love you nor the fraudulent arts
> By which men tutor men to ways unkind.
> Your law is not my law, and yet my mind
> Remains your debtor. It has learned to see
> How dark a thing the earth would be and blind
> But for the light of human charity.
>
> I am your debtor thus and for the pang
> Which touched and chastened, and the nights of
> thought
> Which were my years of learning...[51]

The immortality of the soul and its relationship to the body is another recurring theme in prison writing. As one philosopher pointed out, "The history of religion is built upon this one question,

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[50] Wilde, From "Poetry and Prison, " *The Portable* 701-702.

[51] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *In Vinculis* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1889) 15.

one may almost say."[52] Plato's dialogues, for example, cast a glance on Socrates' approach to the subject. According to Plato, Socrates considered the soul "divine, immortal, of the intellect..., uniform, incapable of dissolution" and the body -- "human, mortal, of the senses, multiform, prone to dissolution".[53] From here the body emerged as a prison of the soul unable to function without its life-giving force.[54] In Plato's dialogues, Socrates' arguments for immortality center around the concepts of the cycle of opposites, learning as recollection, and the kinship of soul to the forms, the invariable, and the divine.[55] The importance of Socrates' ideas is not confined to the realm of philosophy, but embraces literature as well -- his philosophical discussions produced such themes as the body as a dungeon of the soul, the primacy of the soul over the body, and life and death as opposite cycles.

Centuries later, Tommaso Campanella, a Dominican monk and philosopher, who wrote most of his works during twenty-seven years of incarceration, expressed his own beliefs in the immortality of the soul and reincarnation. The lyrical voice in his "A Sonnet on Caucasus" asserts the conviction of eternal return by underscoring the virtuous nature of his life, considered to be an

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[52] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series) (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961) 30.

[53] *Plato on the Trial and Death of Socrates* (New York: Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1947), 143.

[54] *Plato* 147, 178-179.

[55] Detailed discussion of Socrates' ideas on immortality and his arguments in its favor -- as depicted by Plato –are presented in Jerome Eckstein's *The Deathday of Socrates* (Frenchtown, New Jersey: Columbia Publishing Company, Inc., 1981).

asset to humankind (echoed by Chénier's "Virtue, cry if I die."). The motif of reincarnation emerges in references to different worlds "sunk in agony," "shifting" pains from one world to the other, and misery that reigns in each of these worlds. The poem evokes associations with Stus' "God is Already Being Born in Me" (Poem 1),[56] which contains the same theme and also refers to "passing and entering... hundred worlds" that fill memories with pain and suffering.

> I fear that by my death the human race
> Would gain no vantage. Thus I do not die.
> So wide is this vast cage of misery
> That flight and change lead to no happier place.
> Shifting our pains, we risk a sorrier case:
> All worlds, like ours, are sunk in agony:
> Go where we will, we feel; and this my cry
> I may forget like many an old disgrace.[57]

Another poem by Campanella, "Io mi credevo Dio tener in mano" (I Believed I Held God in My Hand), is a good example of differences between the Italian poet and Stus in their approach to the image of God. Thus Campanella juxtaposes the powers of God and intellect in an attempt to determine what should constitute his guiding force. His decision is made in favour of God, inasmuch as "human wit" is prone to become blind and bring death. He writes:

> Io mi credevo Dio tener in mano,
> non seguitando Dio,

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[56] Stus' *Palimpsesty* contains a poem, devoted to Campanella "Campanella."

[57] *Reincarnation in World Thought*. ed. by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston. (New York: Julian Press, 1967) 245

ma l'argute ragion del senno mio,
che a me ed a tanti ministrâr la morte.

(I believed I held God in my hand, / though not following God, / but the subtle reasonings of my intellect, / that to me and so many have dealt death.)[58]

Stus' "God is Already Being Born in Me" shares with Campanella's poem the idea of proximity to God. In Stus, however, God and intellect do not find themselves in opposition. Instead they are part of the same entity, along with spiritual awakening and death. The God of Stus' poetry is a unique philosophical construct that merges Christianity, Buddhism and existentialism. Much like Campanella's God, it also guides the poet in making important choices. This guidance, however, does not eliminate the poet's own decisions and does not prevent him from being part of God.

Love

Stus' love poetry centers predominantly on spiritual and platonic love. Strengthened by separation, the feelings of his lyrical persona are directed toward the ideal beloved whose virtues become more salient in her absence. Prison literature, however, has another way of approaching the theme of love, through eroticism. Perhaps the works of Marquis de Sade are the most notorious example of the preoccupation with sin and "the violence of the heart"[59] in prison literature. *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu,*

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[58] *The Penguin Book of Italian Verse.* (Penguin Books: 1965) 215.

[59] Thomas Moore, *Dark Eros* (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1990) 86.

Juliette, La Philosophie dans le boudoir and *Les 120 Journees de Sodome* were written by the Divine Marquis during his years of incarceration. In 1784, in a letter to his wife, he referred to prison as a place of evil whose solitude gives power to obsessions and the derangement which such a force brings about becomes more rapid and inevitable.[60] However, Sade, whose imagination was considered pornographic and perverse and whose works were censored and persecuted for ages, is now looked at by some as "a doctor of the soul, treating our loneliness, our violence, and our various forms of dehumanization with homeopathic images, with scenarios of mythic proportions that unveil the darkly ominous themes hiding behind cheery rationalizations."[61] Rougement wrote that Sade's philosophy insisted on the presence of suffering where pleasure existed, with the suffering being a sign of redemption. Considering evil as a means of purification, the Marquis called on sinning to the utmost in order to destroy it by subjecting it to tortures.

> A dialectal frenzy seized Sade. Only murder can restore freedom, and it must be the murder of the beloved, inasmuch as loving is what fetters us. Only one's love can be really killed, for one's love alone is *sovereign.* The crime of an impure love will redeem purity.[62]

Sade's writing reflects the freedom with which French writers, among them Verlaine and Genet, handle sexuality. For

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[60] Donald Thomas, *The Marquis de Sade.* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976) 100.

[61] Moore 87.

[62] Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990) 212.

example, Verlaine's collection *Sagesse* contains a number of poems, which might be considered by some as pornographic.[63] Verlaine was fiercely sensual, and his need to express his sensuality was intensified by his months of solitary confinement. This resulted in recollections of his passionate past and the creation of no less passionate poetry.[64] Richardson writes: "Verlaine's contrition is frail, but it intensifies the forbidden pleasures of the past, the obsession with Rimbaud, with women..., with drink, with sin, with the seven deadly sins."[65]

Another example is Genet's prison poetry, which is extremely erotic, emotional and often quite graphic in displaying sexual desires. For example, his poem, "Sentenced to Death," grieves the pending death of a young man and at the same time celebrates the beauty of life and of a young body. Genet's narration of sex, filled with homosexual passions, opposes the interruption of life and challenges death and authority.

> Adore à deux genoux, comme un poteau sacré,
> Mon torse tatoué, adore jusqu'aux larmes
> Mon sexe qui se rompt, te frappe mieux qu'une arme,
> Adore mon bâton qui va te pénétrer.[66]

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[63] Joanna Richardson, *Verlaine* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971) 138.

[64] Richardson 137.

[65] Richardson 176.

[66] Worship my tattooed torso like a holy totempole,
Get down on both knees, worship my prick that breaks you
Better than a weapon, to the point of tears,
Worship what's about to penetrate you.
Genet 18-19.

The theme of love in prison writing contains two poles - the highly spiritual and the deeply erotic. It is also not uncommon for the two to overlap, as, for example, in Stus' case. The recurrence of each aspect of love is conditioned by a writer's culture. Thus, for example, Stus' poem "She is Lying..." is both typical and untypical for the generally reserved Ukrainian literature. On the one hand, it is very erotic, on the other hand, as if to counterbalance this effect, the woman in the poem emerges more as a symbol -- of womanhood and fertility -- rather than a concrete person. The poet's reference to her as "she" („вона") underscores an impersonal and detached stance that Stus chooses to assume. In contrast, Sade's erotic fantasy that dominates his writings is a reflection of the atmosphere in his society, since "...almost all the vices which he chronicled occurred in one form or another in the culture of his time."[67]

The platonic and erotic manifestations of love in prison writing, as different as they are, reflect two aspects of one entity bound by suffering. Threatened by death and separation, prison love is torturous and gratifying at the same time. It also aims at eternity, since there is nothing more lasting than doomed love.

Space

The deep psychological impact of a prison cell is reflected in the insistence with which confined writers turn to the theme of space. The image of the prison cell, however, seems to occur mostly

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[67] Thomas 11.

in the works of those writers whose conditions of incarceration are particularly harsh. While in Stus we find an almost obsessive portrayal of his cell, Verlaine and Chénier, for example, gave it little thought. Consider the following. On arrival to his place of confinement, Verlaine found his jail as "the prettiest possible thing. Outside, it is pale red brick -- almost pink; inside ... it is whitewashed and tarred, with sober architecture of iron and steel." Being allowed a whole library of his own and devoting his days to study and prayer, he would later look back at the months spent in confinement with a particular longing. Calling his prison a "magic castle" ("château magique"), Verlaine even wrote a poem in gratitude of incarceration.[68] Chénier's prison life was also hardly comparable to Stus'. According to F. Scarfe, "during the five months of Chénier's imprisonement the conditions in Saint-Lazare gradually became worse" for the following reasons: it was forbidden to receive newspapers, the collection of washing was undertaken by prison authorities, and prisoners with money could no longer have great banquets cooked for them and were forced to eat in a new dining-hall.[69]

Stus' prison life could stand no comparison. Being gravely ill, he was not provided with proper food and medicine, was not allowed to receive mail or parcels from home, or to meet with his family. He slept on a bunk bed in a cell 165 cm by 325 cm, with the metal bars of the bed piercing through the mattress and hurting his ribs.

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[68] Joanna Richardson, *Verlaine* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971) 129-130.

[69] Francis Scarfe, *André Chénier* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 323.

He was sent to an unheated solitary without proper clothing and without a blanket, a punishment that led to his untimely death.[70] The view from his window and his immediate environment were also quite different. Stus writes:

> Зима. Паркан. І чорний дріт
> на білому снігу.
> І ворон між окляклих віт
> гнеться в дугу.
> Дві похнюплені сосни
> смертну чують корч.
> Кругом мерці і їхні сни
> стримлять, як сосни, сторч.[71]

("Winter. A fence. And black wire / on the white snow. / And a raven among stiff branches / is arching his body. / Two gloomy pines / experience deathly spasms. / Around are the dead, and their dreams / stick out, like pines.")

It is not suprising that the harsh conditions of incarceration resulted in Stus' recurring references to a prisoner as a caged animal, a sentiment he shares with another Ukrainian poet, Bohdan Kravtsiv. In the poem "Iak zviri" (Like Animals), Kravtsiv writes:

> І нині нам, як звірам, кліті
> і хід, розміряний улад:
> чотири кроки, все чотири –
> туди й назад...туди й назад...[72]

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[70] Levko Lukianenko, "Vasyl Stus", *Ne vidliubyv svoiu tryvohu ranniu* (Kiev: Ukrayinskyi pys'mennyk, 1993) 342-347.

[71] Stus *Palimpsesty* 91.

[72] Bohdan Kravstiv, *Poezii* (L'viv: Feniks Ltd., 1993) 85.

(And now, we, like animals, [have] cages / and a well-measured pace: / four steps, always four --/ there and back... there and back...)

Those writers who choose to write about their cell generally emphasize the following aspects -- the cell's parameters and geometric configurations, the walls as a boundary between a prisoner and freedom, and the overpowering presence of death. Most revealing in this respect is Serge's description of his cell, inasmuch as it includes all of the above: the writer identifies his cell's length and width (revealing its square shape), compares it to a monk's cell and a tomb, and recognizes the presence of death:

> My cell is one of those whose perfect order and irreproachable maintenance are probably noted in official reports... Three or four yards in length, the same in width. It is not like a room; it is more like an oversized bathroom or a monk's cell. It's habitable, nonetheless. I came to understand this with time. For man needs but few things to live! Hardly more than the six feet of earth necessary for his rest when he has finished living. As in the monk's cell, the proximity of death can be felt here. It is also a tomb.[73]

The geometrical shape of the cell (a rectangle) is underscored in Wole Soyinka's "Live Burial" from the collection *Poems from Prison*. By counting his own steps in an attempt to determine the cell's size ("Sixteen paces / By twenty-three"), the poet creates an image of a prisoner pacing to and from in an enclosed space. The starkness of the poem "is symbolically reflective of the prisoner's deprived state," demonstrating how the narrow confinement

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[73] Serge 30-31.

constitutes a linguering assault against his sanity.[74] The title of the poem directly links the cell with death.

> Sixteen paces
> By twenty-three. They hold
> Siege against humanity
> And Truth
> Employing time to drill through to his sanity.[75]

The pacing of a prisoner in a square cell is portrayed in Franko's prison sonnet. The Ukrainian poet writes: „Шість кроків там і шість назад — досить" (Six steps there and six back -- enough).[76]

Walls are an important aspect in the description of the cell. In a poem, devoted to Tomasso Campanella, Stus identifies prison space by referring to the four walls: „Камера твоя в чотири мури / простору".[77] (Your cell is four walls of space). Calling his prison a "house of pain" and "a convent without God,"[78] Wilfrid Blunt notes the disheartening impact of the "walls of grief" around him and underscores their presence in the description of his cell: "Four gaunt walls / Shutting out all things but the upper heaven."[79] The

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[74] Eldred Durosimi Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (London, Heinemann: Portsmouth N.H.: James Currey, 1988) 193.

[75] Soyinka 60.

[76] Franko 155.

[77] Stus *Palimpsesty* 185.

[78] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *In Vinculis* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1889) 2, 5.

[79] Blunt 9.

enclosing power of prison walls that keep the sin in while shutting out God is noted by Wilde in "The Ballad of Reading Gaol":

> A prison wall was round us both,
> Two outcast men we were:
> The world had thrust us from its heart,
> And God from out his care:
> And the iron gin that waits for Sin
> Had caught us in its snare.[80]

The English writers' perception of prison is echoed by that of Ukrainian poets Franko and Svitlychnyi, thus pointing to the similarity in the psychological apprehension of incarceration. For example, Franko calls his prison "a house of tears" („дім плачу"),[81] while Svitlychnyi underscores in it the absence of God: „Я поміж нами ліг облогом / Забутий сферами і Богом / Облуплений тюремний мур" (And between us lay like siege / Forgotten by people and God / A chipped off prison wall).[82] The presence of prison walls also signals death, as is conveyed in prison writing of another Ukrainian, Ihor Kalynets', who speaks of the "wall of tears" („стіна плачу") which he equates with the "wall of death" („стіна смерті").[83]

Stus' approach to the theme of prison space shares a number of features with other writers. For example, much like Soyinka and Franko, he measures his cell counting steps along each wall: „Шість

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[80] Oscar Wilde, *The Portable* 672-673.

[81] Franko 151.

[82] Ivan Svitlychnyi, *U mene til'ky slovo.* (Kharkiv: Folio, 1994) 35.

[83] Ihor Kalynets', *Slovo tryvaiuche.* (Kharkiv: Folio, 1997) 234.

з половиною в один, / чотири кроки в другий.[84] (Six and half in one direction, / and four steps in the other). Its size, as it appears, explains one of the etymological sources of the parallel drawn between a cell and a tomb or a coffin. Another source is death. Stus often refers to his cell as "tomb" of a "casket," echoing his friend Ivan Svitlychnyi in identifying his own prison space („склеп" / "tomb" or a "casket");[85] Serge calls it a ("tomb")[86] and Wilde -- ("my numbered tomb").[87]

In contrast to other writers, Stus takes a step further, turning his cell into the symbol of prison existence. His image of the square functions as a grid in assessing reality even during the period of exile, thus pointing to the immense impact of confinement space. The world of Stus' poetry emerges as a place where prisoners with "square" hearts march in a "square" step under the "square" sun, and where troubles, loneliness, misfortunes and pain are defined by geometrical figures, whose presence often signals death.

Time

As Michel Foucault pointed out, prison "makes it possible to quantify the penalty exactly according to the variable of time."[88]

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[84] Stus *Palimpsesty* 128

[85] Svitlychnyi 31.

[86] Victor Serge, *Men in prison* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1977) 31.

[87] Wilde *The Portable* 675.

[88] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 232.

That is why the very concept of incarceration is almost synonymous with time, a recurring theme in prison writing. Oscar Wilde made the following insights concerning his time in prison in *De Profundis:*

> We think in eternity, but we move slowly through time; and how slowly time goes with us who lie in prison. I need not tell again, nor of the weariness and despair that creep back into one's cell, and into the cell of one's heart, with such strange insistence that one has, as it were, to garnish and sweep one's house for their coming, as for an unwelcome guest, or a bitter master, or a slave whose slave it is one's chance or choice to be.[89]

Wilde's psychological reaction to time reveals his perception of its slow progression. The writer's evaluation of time underscores the drudgery of the present and "weariness and despair" with which he has to face it. Present's slow movement is further emphasized in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol,* where Wilde speaks of minutes that "crawl" and compares their motion with a that of "a wheel of turning steel".

> The moaning wind went wandering round
> The weeping prison-wall:
> Till like a wheel of turning steel
> We felt the minutes crawl...[90]

The extension of short time-units and the encumbrance of the present are also characteristic of Serge's treatment of temporality. Identifying the problem of time as a major aspect of life in prison,

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[89] Wilde, *The First* 78-79.

[90] Wilde, *The Portable* 678.

he views it as wasted. For a prisoner, minutes, hours, and years spent in his cell are terrifying because they lack meaning and substance. Each time-unit is not different from the preceding one, because nothing new occurs. That is why Serge speaks of time's slow progression as "torturous" and of the present as "infinite":

> "Here I am back in a cell. Alone. Minutes, hours, days slip away with terrifying unsubstantiality. Months will pass away like this, and years. Life! The problem of time is everything. Nothing distinguishes one hour from the next: The minutes and hours fall slowly, torturously. Once past, they vanish into near nothingness. The present minute is infinite. But time does not exist.[91]

Serge's measurement reflects the following tendency: when two shorter time-units are used, e.g. hours and minutes, the longer one gets compressed while the shorter extended. Here the closeness to the present is crucial. As a result, he speaks of "very long seconds" and "swift hours." Much like Stus, Serge evaluates different time modalities. This evaluation is also far from positive. His present "is heavy with torpor," his past is "void," and future is "terrifying." This affects his perception of the direction of time and expectations. Identifying his cell as a "burial," Serge compares each hour with a shovel of earth falling on his grave:

> Future time is terrifying. The present is heavy with torpor. Each minute may be marvelously - or horribly - profound. That depends to a certain extent on yourself. There are swift hours and very long seconds. Past time is void. There is no chronology of events to mark it; external duration no longer exists.

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[91] Serge 30.

> You know that the days are piling up. You can feel the creeping numbness, the memory of life growing weak. Burial. Each hour is like a shovelful of earth falling noiselessly, softly, on this grave.[92]

Stus resembles both Wilde and Serge in revealing the psychological impact of time on his psyche -- he compresses and extends time-units, views the present as a burden, expresses lack of value regarding different time modalities, and speaks of death in relation to time. For Stus, however, time is also a philosophical category which he does not fail to explore. Here existentialism plays an important role. Stus reverses the direction of his time-arrow, makes his time "futural," and merges the past with the future. In this context, death emerges as a measure of authentic existence and his personal responsibility.

Davies wrote that for a revolutionary, prison becomes the ultimate test of the powers of resistance.[93] Serge, a seasoned revolutionary, describes his opposition to the impact of the prison thus:

> I do not want to carry away with me any defeat. The Mill has not worn me down. I am leaving it with my mind intact, stronger for having survived, tempered by thought. I have not lost the years it has taken from me.[94]

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[92] Serge 56-57.

[93] Davies 33.

[94] Serge 250.

Stus' own resistence to incarceration resulted in the creation of the works that "transcend time and place, and the brevity of mortal life."[95] It sharpened his thought and turned him into a mature writer whose poetry is another proof that "The narrow confines of the prison cell seem to suit the 'sonnet's scanty plot of ground,' and an unjust imprisonment for a noble cause strengthens as well as deepens the nature."[96] Poetry became his life, a tool to explore his inner world and to convey his doubts. Perhaps Stus' favourite poet Rilke was correct in defining what constitutes a memory of a great poet:

> Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Lasst die Rose
> nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Günsten blühn.
> Denn Orpheus ists.
>
> Set up no stone to his memory.
> Just let the rose bloom each year for his sake.
> For it is Orpheus.[97]

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[95] George Shevelov, "Potion and Poison," *Vasyl Stus. Selected Poems* (Munich: The Ukrainian Free University, 1987) xxix.

[96] Wilde *The Portable* 702.

[97] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* (New York: W. W. Norton &Company, Inc. 1942) 25.

Conclusion

The poetry of Vasyl' Stus reveals the profound impact of incarceration. Even though some of his themes and intellectual sources go back to the time before his first arrest (e.g., linking absence of freedom with death and incarceration, contempt for "mass man," support of Ukrainian intellectuals imprisoned for their ideas, interest in existentialism and Eastern philosophy), it is clear that confinement is instrumental in developing the particular apprehension of reality expressed in his works. His poetry's most characteristic feature perhaps is a unique blend of philosophy layered over each topic that he approaches, a trend which intensified over the years.

Death is the central theme of Stus' poetry and a unifying factor of his writing. It permeates every major subject that he explores and reveals his philosophical worldview. The poet's approach to death is manifest in his readiness to accept it and to become the poet of his own mortality. From among the different philosophical schools Stus favours existentialism and Buddhism. Existentialism gives him an opportunity to justify his life's choice and regard his imprisonment as a manifestation of freedom. Possessing an acute sense of mission, Stus looks at his destiny as an order from his heart. The emotional burden of his personal revolt translates into existential anguish and apprehension of existence as an eternal turmoil. Loneliness, which he views as part of being, creates around him a menacing space, referred to as a "lethal zone." However, Stus does not intend to surmount the boundaries which

hold him within. Instead he uses his inner world as a means of self-fulfillment and as a source of creativity. "Condemned to be free," he challenges slave morality and uses death as a measure of authentic existence.

A characteristic feature of Stus' writing is a singular mix of existentialism with determinism. This leads to the Biblical allusions and to identifying himself with the figures of Christ and Moses. In this context, the motif of the virtue of suffering is particularly strong. This theme also links Stus' poetry with Eastern philosophy. His works betray the latter's cognitive approach to life and death, view of struggle and suffering as an integral part of attaining enlightenment, and confidence in achieving spiritual harmony through viewing oneself as part of the universe.

Prison space has a strong impact on Stus. For him, the prison cell, with its precise geometrical configurations, stands not only as a symbol of incarceration, but also that of death. The square of the cell becomes a window through which the poet perceives reality. His vision, influenced by the lack of freedom, makes him view the whole of existence as incarcerated: his homeland, his beloved, the planet, the universe, and even his own emotions, described in geometric terms. Stus speaks of his thoughts and dreams being kept under lock. He finds himself "incarcerated" by his present and even by his heart (or, in other words, his beliefs).

The presence of boundaries is most prominent in Stus' poetry. He attempts to identify the degree of his separation from the life of freedom. Stus' concept of living between life and death has been created as a tool to describe the frontiers between both domains in

an attempt to establish the essence of existence. Often the borders are unsurmountable, as, for instance, between the poet and his past, or the poet and his love. To close the breach, Stus uses dreams and reminiscences. Dreams are his road home, as well as a meeting place with his beloved. Here the role of his memory in its various semantic expressions is to reconstruct the continuity of the self. The woman is often an agent of such reconstruction. She, however, is a creation of the poet's dreams and fantasies -- divine, distant and unreal, and because of that even more desirable.

Stus' poetry of exile becomes more abstract and philosophical. The poet's estrangement from his loved ones is reflected in the almost complete disappearance of the motif of dreams and reminiscences. The image of the beloved becomes less life-like, merging at times with that of his homeland. Stus is no longer preoccupied with time and space. Most importantly though, the approach to the theme of death shifts to the unequivocal acceptance of the latter. This gives rise to philosophical contemplations on the nature of mortality, joining the universe and being beyond the power of misfortune.

Considered in the context of prison writing, Stus' poetry, while revealing a unique approach, simultaneously betrays features common to other works written in confinement or influenced by it: themes (death, philosophy, love, space, and time), images ("living death," "death as a lover," "crypt"/"casket" in reference to the prison cell), psychological reaction to temporality (time measurement, the burden of the present), philosophical contemplations. What comes to the fore in comparing Stus with

other incarcerated writers is the intellectual nature of his poetry, which results in his endeavours to ascertain deeper layers of meaning. His existential yearning for spiritual self-sufficiency launches him on the road of self-discovery. Consequently, the themes of death, love, time and space emerge as tools for learning about oneself -- the origin of his own feelings, beliefs, doubts, and loyalties. Stus' self-exploration is behind the poems addressed to the Self. It accounts for the creation of a hermetic poetic world, where the same images recur in different contexts, revealing the poet's readiness to examine the same phenomenon from different angles in order to unlock its essence. His self-directed philosophical inquiry embraces such issues as choice and responsibility, loyalty and devotion, suffering and enlightenment, fate and existence, and, above all, righteous, authentic death.

At present Stus scholarship is still in its infancy. Even though there are numerous publications on the poet, these are almost exclusively popular narrations of his life and work. To my knowledge, the scholarly treatment of Stus is limited to five papers in the collection *Stus as Text* that focuses on the methodology of approaching his work; several papers by Bohdan Rubchak, George Shevelov and Mykhailyna Kotsiubyns'ka discussing some aspects of the poet's legacy; and a thesis by Dmytro Stus devoted to the chronology of Stus' works (see Bibliography for details). The current state of scholarship can be explained by the poet's relatively recent death, lack of a completed academic edition of his works. However, in my view, his death as a *political prisoner* has been the main impediment to the process of studying him as a

poet. It accounts for the technical problems one encounters (obtaining and collecting the works written in confinement), and perceptive -- Stus' present-day status as a martyr which clouds the perception of him as a poet.

Even though my analysis of Stus' poetry is not exhaustive or complete, I think that it contributes to the understanding of the poet in the following ways: it is the most systematic examination of the main themes of his poetry of incarceration and exile. Inasmuch as the themes discussed here have been either overlooked by critics or given little attention, this study offers a first attempt to explore their development. The main goal of my analysis is to present Stus as a poet whose interest in universal issues places him in the context of world literature. In examining the themes of his poetry in the context of literary influences, my guiding premise was to follow Stus' own references (primarily offered in his letters, but also those mentioned in reminiscences of his friends) to those writers and philosophers whom he considered important in his formation as a poet. Consequently, the names of Rilke, Heidegger, Sartre, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and the main concepts of Buddhism were evoked in my analysis. Even though it is only a narrow slice of possible literary and philosophical influences, such research has never been undertaken before in a systematic manner. The task of examining Stus' works in the context of prison poetry and of identifying the influence of confinement on his treatment of different themes and the formation of images has been undertaken in this thesis for the first time.

My work on this thesis revealed that Stus' poetic legacy is extremely rich and multifaceted. His poetry's multilayered meanings and associations present numerous challenges to scholars, among them the possibility of different readings of the same text, depending upon the focus of research. The eclectic nature of his poetry calls for more scholarly work. One of the contributions of this thesis is identifying some of the areas for future research.

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Appendix

Коли я був ще малим, мама купила дзеркало. З нього на мене вперше глянули мої очі, мій рот, мої губи. Дзеркало нагадувало покійника, і той, хто стояв у ньому, висолопивши язика, – теж нагадував покійника. Коли крізь нього пройде 1000 василів – я помру. Спочатку почну полишати на ньому свої губи. Якось я відійду від дзеркала уже без вух, хоч, глянувши на свій (В.С.) відбиток, того і не помічу.

Я став боятися дзеркала. Воно переінакшувало мене щоразу, старанно приховуючи при цьому втрати. Що залишиться від мене з роками, – думав я.

(When I was still small, my Mom bought a mirror. From it, for the first time, my eyes, my mouth, my lips looked at me. The mirror reminded of a deseased, and the one, who stood in it, with his tongue out, also reminded of a deseased. When 1000 Vasyl's go through it, I will die. At first I will leave in it my lips. I will step away from the mirror somehow without ears, although, taking a look at my own reflection, I will not notice that.

I became afraid of the mirror. It changed me every time, though it thoroughly concealed the losses. What will be left from me over the years, I thought.)