

# Circulation of Fictional Texts in the GULAG

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## Abstract

This dataset presents a list of literary texts circulating in the Soviet penitentiary system between 1917 and 1991. The data are extracted from texts of memoirs published between 1928 and 2016. The database includes poetic and prosaic texts, as well as the authors mentioned, taking into account the situation of the texts' recitation, the geography and the time frame of their occurrence.

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## General description of the data

The database presents a roster of literary texts from the Soviet penitentiary system between 1917 and 1991. Applied to this era, it is natural to speak of an intuitive political-social formation that imprinted not only on bodies, but also on the cultural practices of prisoners. The individual who entered the Gulag system was subjected not only to physical but also to psychological violence. Communities of prisoners, in turn, sometimes found ways to at least partially resist it, and recourse to cultural heritage (reciting poetry, retelling novels, singing songs, etc.) proved to be one such practice of resistance. Information about the use of texts was extracted from memoirs of prisoners of Gulag prisons and camps, exiles, and those undergoing forced psychiatric "treatment". The work was conducted with memoirs published between 1928 and 2016 and made publicly available on the Sakharov Center's website page "Memories of the Gulag and their authors" (<https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/>)<sup>1</sup>. The database included poetic and prose texts, as well as authors mentioned (in case a specific text is not named in the memoir).

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<sup>1</sup>By decision of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, it was recognized as a foreign agent.

## Chronological boundaries

The chronological boundaries of 1917—1991 — are conditioned by the history of Soviet Russia. As we know, repression of citizens began immediately after the revolution. In the early 1930s, the Gulag system began to unfold, through which several million people passed at various times. The repressive impact of the state continued into the post-Stalin period. With the end of the Soviet era the penitentiary system entered a new phase of its development, in part revising and “dismantling” Soviet practices.

## Project participants

Analysis of the content of memoirs and preparation of the database were conducted by D. A. Lugovskaya, A. V. Vdovin, P. F. Uspenskij, A. A. Ageeva, A. D. Dynina, M. S. Gremyakina, E. A. Grishechkina, M. S. Dryomov, D. M. Korotkova, A. V. Oleschuk. The research was carried out within the framework of the research group “From School Bench to Prison Cell: the Russian Literary Canon in the Mass Consciousness of the 20th century (Dictations, Dictionaries, Recollections of Gulag Prisoners)” (supervised by A.V. Vdovin and P.F. Uspenskij), as part of the HSE project “Literature and Society: Experience of Socio-Cultural Description”, 2021—2022.

The preliminary stage of the work (primary identification of evidence of the existence of the literary texts circulation in the memoirs of Soviet prisoners) was carried out by students of different educational programs of the Higher School of Economics in 2016-2019 as part of the university student projects. The following students participated in this work: M. Abdelhafez, E. Avdokhina, D. Alabina, D. Alekhina, D. Andreeva, D. Andryunkina, V. Anisimova, N. Anokhina, A. Afanasyeva, S. Bakhareva, N. Berseneva, T. Beskorkaya, A. Bessmertnaya, L. Bulanov, A. Burangulova, V. Buyanovskaya, P. Varfolomeeva, A. Vakhrusheva, K. Vakhrusheva, E. Vilks, E. Wolf, A. Gaidenko, E. Golovkina, O. Gordiychuk, M. Gorina, P. Gotmonova, M. Gremyakina, K. Grigorieva, K. Golovkina, Grigorieva, M. Grigorieva, N. Grin, E. Grishechkina, S. Gubanova, E. Gurtova, D. Gurtskaya, A. Dorzhihandaeva, E. Drozdova, A. Dudina, E. Ermishina, A. Ershova, E. Zhurenkova, V. Zakapko, E. Zakharova, D. Ignatiev, Y. Ilyazova, A. Kalinina, L. Kaloeva, D. Kaluzhin, A. Kitrrar, Z. Kotieva, K. Kostomarova, E. Koyuda, P. Kuleshova, A. Kupriyanova, N. Kurdoglo, M. Levina, A. Loginova, E. Luzakova, T. Lukashevsky, A. Lytkina, K. Mazerkina, A. Mazur, M. Makarov, E. Maksyuta, S. Malysheva, A. Matyushenko, A. A. Matyushkina, A. Melnikova, E. Minasyants, M. Mingazov, D. Mityakina, E. Muravyova, E. Murashko, M. Mytareva, A. Naumova, P. Negulyaeva, A. Novikova, E. Nurulina, E. E. Ovchinnikova, E. Orlova, I. Orlova, A. Oleschuk, D. Panova, A. Permyakova, A. Pintelina, A. Pismanik, J. Ponik, P. Porvina, Y. Pokhilko, A. Proshchina, L. Rodicheva, M. Rostovskaya, S. Savchenko, K. Sadchikova, K. Saydazova, M. Sayapina, Y. Svishcheva, A. Seletnikova, V. Semenov, E. Senatorova, S. Simanchuk, P. Sokolova, E. Solodovnikova, D. Sorokina, E. Stognieva, N. Talipova, E. Tarasova, P. Tarasova, A. Tebina, E. Topoleva, K. Khazeeva,

S. Khananashvili, I. Khublarov, Y. Chekanova, E. Chekushina, A. Chernova, D. Fadeeva, V. Fainberg, A. Firyulina, A. Folomeeva, E. Fomenko, V. Fomicheva, M. Khamitov, V. Shelkova, G. Shkumat, D. Shchepochkina, Sh. Yulchieva, K. Yagodinskaya, S. Yanikova.

### **Data completeness and sampling criteria**

From the bibliography presented on the Sakharov Center website, which takes into account the vast majority of published ego-documents about the Soviet penitentiary system, about 90% of sources were processed (some materials, not containing information about the texts circulation, were discarded at the first stage of work). In some cases, prisoners' memoirs, not posted in full-text form on the site, were viewed de visu in libraries (Russian State Library, State Historical Library, Russian National Library). Thus, this database is very representative, taking into account, however, the current state of research on the Gulag, as well as the fact that a number of memoirs remain unpublished. A total of 1,260 sources were processed.

Initial criteria for data selection:

- All texts that in one way or another could be called fictional were included in the database. Our catalog includes author's works of world literature (poetry, prose, drama), folklore texts (songs), as well as sacred texts (prayers, Old and New Testaments);
- nonfiction texts of popular science (texts about flora and fauna, nature, geography, science, ethnography, etc.) are not included;
- texts that existed solely in the memoirist's individual memory, but did not circulate among his fellow memoirists, were not included. Thus, for example, the base did not include cases in which the author of the memoirs compared himself to a literary character or quoted one or another text in his narrative to create a certain rhetorical effect, but included all cases indicating at least minimal circulation of the text: reading poetry from memory in the barracks, the collective singing of a song, retelling of a novel to prisoners, etc. (in particular, we should note that we also included in the dataset situations when the prisoner read the text to himself - by heart or from a book; such situations indirectly indicate the texts transmission). In other words, the principle of sifting sources was based on the idea of creating a database of texts that entered into cultural memory and testify to the transmission and transformation of the literary canon in the broad sense.

In compiling the database, the authors sought to maximize the completeness and accuracy of the data, but there are a number of reasons that led to partial incompleteness of the information due to the specificity of the sources. For example, some cells of the table (see below) could not be filled because the memoirist does not specify all the circumstances of the recitation of the text or

other information (the exact date of the events, the profession of the prisoner who recalls the text, etc.).

## Data format and structure

Data is presented in a file `gulag_literature.tsv` in a table format (tab separated values, TSV).

The data unit (corresponding row in the database) is the text of which the memoirist recalls, as well as the information associated with that text (see below).

Columns:

- **number** — row number.
- **text\_author** — normalized data about the author are given. For folklore texts the value is “Folklore”, for Old and New Testaments, prayers - “Sacred text”.
- **text** — the text’s title. If a text is recalled two or more times in the memoir, each mention is indexed in the dataset. In this case is indicated by the value **repetition** in the column **situation**.
- **title\_in\_memoir** is an occasional title for a text in memoir if it differs from the commonly used title. In cases where the author’s poetic text comes across as folklore, the column indicates “Folk Song”.
- **year\_of\_text** — the year of creation of the text, the circulation of which is recalled by the author of the memoir. The date of creation is the date the author finished working on the work, which often coincides with the date of publication. For example, for texts that were written over a long period, the latest date is taken — for War and Peace (1863—1869), 1869 is indicated. If the author recalls a sacred text, the date of its creation is not specified. If only the author is listed in the memoir, no date is given. If the memoir cites a folkloric text, no dating is given. If the text was created before our era, the dating is given with a minus sign.

In several cases it is difficult to date the text accurately — the time of its creation refers to a wide historical period. For such occurrences in the database the earliest date of the text’s creation is indicated (for example, for “Kashirskaya starina” by Ya. M. Gordina 1880—1900 is indicated as 1880; for “The Tales of Sherlock Holmes” by A. Conan Doyle the date of publication of the first story).

The list of such texts is limited — we give them below: “Letters” by J. J. Rousseau, “Vasily Shibanov” by A. K. Tolstoy, “Don’t Scourge Me, My Dear” by A. E. Razorenov, “Kashirskaya Starina” by Ya. M. Gordin, “The Tales of Sherlock Holmes” by A. Conan Doyle, “Grief, grief all around” by A. M. Fedorov, “Until the crossing” by Natsume Soseki, “Sing to me (canta

pe'me!)" L. Bovio, N. Seversky, D. Poor's "School of Red Commanders," "Pray, Kunak!" Vertinsky, "To wife Natasha," "To son," untitled text ("And there, in Geneva, peacemakers...") by A. Smirnov, "Murka" by A. Yadov, "To chi strings, chi ne strings, chi mozhe vystrega...", "Verlibras" by A. N. Antonich, "House by the River" by V. M. Mukhina-Petrinskaya, "Shadows at Sunset" by V. P. Sokolov, "When I was a Pithecanthropus..." E. A. Sokolov.

- **citation\_or\_paraphrase** — mode of citation. Possible values: **Cite** (if the text is reproduced verbatim: a poetic text or a fragment thereof is read by heart, a prose text is read from a book); **Retell** (if the text is reconstructed approximately, from memory, individual fragments of the story are reproduced).
- **kind\_of\_literature** — possible values: poetry, prose, song, opera, operetta, and ballet;
- **language** — the language of the text that appears in the memoir.
- **situation** — the situation of recitation. Types of situations are following:
  - singing for the blatnoys;
  - singing by the blatnoys;
  - singing among equals;
  - singing among equals and blatnoys;
  - singing among equals and internal officers;
  - singing by an internal officer;
  - storytelling for the blatnoys;
  - storytelling among equals;
  - storytelling among equals and blatnoys;
  - storytelling to the doctors;
  - storytelling by an internal officer to an prisoner;
  - storytelling for the internal officers;
  - staged in a theater;
  - reading a book (aloud/by oneself)

In each case, the place of transmission of the text is specified (in a camp, in a prison cell, in a settlement, at work, at a stage, in a psychiatric hospital, at a campfire, in a camp hospital, in exile, in a settlement). All cases in which a prisoner recollects a particular text, but his audience is not labeled in any way, are classified as "storytelling among equals".

- **performer** — performer, machine-readable column to specify information in the **situation** column. Performer types:
  - **prisoner** — someone who was imprisoned for political reasons;
  - **blatnoy** — one who was imprisoned for criminal reasons.
  - **internal officer**.

In the case of joint execution, the types of perpetrators are indicated with a comma (**prisoner**, **blatnoy**).

- **audience** — audience, machine-readable column to specify information in the **situation** column. The types of audience repeat the types performers listed above. Two unique to this column types:
  - **doctor**.
  - **no audience** — always corresponds to the situation of “reading the book by oneself”.

All values in the **performer** and **audience** columns are presented in singular form — this allows us to simplify classification of participants. This simplification is made because it is not always possible to understand the number of the audience listening to the text. Moreover, we can assume that under the conditions of camp, prison cell, psychiatric hospital there wasn't any privacy.

The **performer** column partially duplicates the **person\_who\_recollects** described below. Here it should be explained that the functions of these columns are different. The **performer** characterizes the person in terms of his participation in the situation of recitation, his position in the camp system. The **person\_who\_recollects** column describes the person, who recalled the text, in terms of **author** or **other prisoner**. In most cases, the column **person\_who\_recollects** allows us to specify the number of performers of the text.

- **place** — the place of text transmission (in a camp, in a prison cell, in a settlement, at work, at a stage, in a psychiatric hospital, at a campfire, camp hospital).
- **repeat** is **TRUE** if the text is repeatedly mentioned by the memoirist (second and subsequent mentions).
- **person\_who\_recollects** — who recalled the text (author of the memoir, prisoner(s)). The name of the prisoner who recollected this or that text was specified only in those cases where the memoirs referred to an iconic figure — for example, E. S. Ginzburg, V. T. Shalamov, A. I. Solzhenitsyn, etc.
- **memoirist** — the name of the memoirist.
- **edition** — the title of memoirs.
- **place\_of\_edition** — place of publication.
- **year\_of\_edition\_min** — year of edition, starting date.
- **year\_of\_edition\_max** — year of publication, final date. The initial and final publication dates of sources do not coincide if the memoirs were published over a period of time.

- `date_of_situation_min` — the year when the event recalled occurred (i.e., when the specified text was quoted).
- `date_of_situation_max` — the year the event occurred. If no exact date is given in the memoir, the time range when the event may have occurred is given (e.g., 1940–1949, 1951–1953, etc.). In these few cases, the date of situation min and date of situation max columns do not match.
- `place_camp` — the place where the prisoner was held. For the camp, it is the city / subject of the USSR and the place where the prisoner was held (e.g. “Yakutia, camp Bolshaya Markha”, “Petropavlovsk”, “Samara, a transit prison”). In the few cases where the text was recalled during an escort, and in this case it is not possible to specify the exact location of the prisoners, the case was described as **Etap**.
- `job_of_memoirist` — the profession of the person who recalled the text. If the occupation cannot be reconstructed, or if the text was recalled by a group of prisoners, then the cell remains empty.
- `link_to_publication` — a link to publication.