

Title: Shvarts, Inked: “The Girl with 148 Birthmarks”

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While Elena Shvarts’s reputation in the Leningrad underground and beyond was established by her poetry, works in prose bracket her writing life. In contrast to her seemingly inscrutable poetry, characterized by elaborate authorial masks, much of Shvarts’s prose eagerly reveals and constructs the “visible side,” as she referred to it, of the author’s life. A story found among Shvarts’s papers following her death suggests that this tendency began with her earliest prose writings. Composed when she was all of thirteen, “The Girl with One Hundred Forty-Eight Birthmarks” responds, as I will argue, to calls for sincerity in literature and other trends of the Thaw era. Comparing the work with Shvarts’s diary entries from the same period, this paper will consider the author’s efforts to achieve narrative authenticity even as she draws on contemporary models: Salinger’s “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor” and Aksyonov’s *Starry Ticket*, both of which serve as explicit subtexts for the story. Lastly, the paper will explore the relationship between this work of apparent juvenilia and later poetic works.