

Title: “Athenian Nights”: Poetry as a Physiological Drive
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In Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales* [KT] culture and literature, including the very narrative of the stories themselves, exist in a state of disintegration, decomposition and decay (as well as any other human construct and indeed human mind, human body and everything else that comes into contact with the prison camp reality). Within the fabric of the cycle their very obvious non-survival serves several purposes (as we have partially demonstrated in other works), for example:

- a) on one level, it demonstrates the all-pervasive destructive nature of the prison camps that even the impersonal collective memory is powerless to withstand – it proves to be even more fragile than human bodies;
- b) on the other, it is used as yet another way to portray (indirectly) the damage done by the prison camps to the culture’s human hardware and human-based protocols;
- c) on the third one, the collapse of every single cultural convention robs the reader of a chance to perceive the prison camp reality in a culturally sanctioned, automated way and—to a degree—forces him to deal with it as an experience rather than a narrative.

At the same time, it is the reappearance of culture in its most immediately impractical forms – e.g. poetry, Latin words, music – that signifies within the fabric of KT a return (albeit incomplete and easily reversible) to a human condition.

In this paper we would try to analyse the poetics and rhetorics of KT to reconstruct the angle at which Varlam Shalamov perceives and portrays culture.