

well as to Russian soldiers, who apparently “forgot” something “in [his] land” (43). While the author’s distress and frustration are clearly understandable, his philosophical and lyrical poems are much more compelling and stand a better chance of surviving the war.

Both the Ukrainian and English translations are masterful and generally do justice not only to Korotko’s emphatic messages but, even more importantly, to his peculiar soundscapes (marked by short, punctuated lines, often consisting of only one or two words). Naturally, Sheppard’s and Ilchuk’s approaches differ. Whereas Sheppard tries to stay “close” on the level of denotation and abandons rhyming in an attempt to capture the subtleties of meaning, Ilchuk (working with a cognate language) allows herself more poetic license in order to recreate Korotko’s rhymes and cadences. Despite occasional minor infelicities, both translations read well and are works of art in their own right. *War Poems* will be appreciated by anyone interested in contemporary Ukrainian literature and may also serve as an excellent educational resource for students of Slavic languages.

Stanislav Aseyev. *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street.*

Trans. Zenia Tompkins and Nina Murray. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2023; 281 pp. Illustrations. Photographs. \$39.95, hard bound.

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Stanislav Aseyev’s memoir denies us the luxury of thinking that concentration camps and the torture of prisoners are a matter of the past. Atrocities repeat, not as farce but again as atrocities.

In 2014 pro-Russian separatists proclaimed the independence of the districts of Donetsk and Luhansk, as People’s Republics. Aseyev, a Ukrainian journalist, stayed in his native Donetsk and sent reportage to the Ukrainian *Mirror Weekly* and Radio Liberty, under the pen name Stanislav Vasin. In June 2017 he was arrested, beaten at interrogation, kept for six weeks in a sickening basement of the State Security Office, tortured, and then transferred to a secret prison called *Izoliatsiia*, in the building of a defunct factory that used to produce isolation materials (after the factory closed, the building had housed an arts foundation, but in June 2014 it was taken over by separatist militants). This is the torture house of the title: Aseyev focuses on this makeshift penal colony reigned by terror, electric-shock torture, beatings, psychological abuse, semi-starvation, constant humiliations, and rape or sexual coercion of women prisoners. He was happy to be transferred to a regular bed-bug infested jail. In November 2019 he was liberated through a prisoner exchange. The book ends with some fictional and reflexive texts, confiscated but purchased back, that Aseyev had composed in captivity.

The memoir is divided into relatively brief thematic chapters, as if in an attempt to control the material. There are occasional blank spots: Aseyev is less concerned with his own ordeal than with the collective suffering. Minor self-contradictions in his account are probably associated with the nature of the institution—its combining solid personal entrapment with the general sense of fluidity. The first concentration camps in Russia (starting with 1918) were likewise in makeshift facilities and seemed temporary; ironically, their very cheapness granted them permanence. *Izoliatsiia* is cheap too; being secret, it probably fails to get sufficient funding, and the prisoners are held on a semi-starvation diet. This, however,

may be a lesson learned from Gulag history: starving people are easier to manage and terrorize. Large parts of the food from their relatives' care-packages is stolen by the guards; this too may be overdetermined. Yet if during the Stalinist terror, torture interrogators would introduce themselves to their victims by name, here the torturers are anonymous and wear balaclavas, as if unwilling to be eventually recognized in the streets. Other innovations are the electric-shock equipment, constant monitoring of the prisoners by cameras installed everywhere, as well as the bags—makeshift hoods—that the prisoners have to wear over their heads when anyone enters the cell or takes them out of it.

The confusion and fluidity can be read as signs of the temporary affiliation of the prison: there is a pretense that it is run by Russian separatists, but there are many such separatists (former militants) among the inmates. Indeed, in the fall of 2022, Russia annexed the Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics”—Aseyev’s taking one of these appellations in inverted commas had been the pretext for his indictment. As a reader, I wonder whether the true boss of the institution was not the FSB, in advance of the annexation. Meanwhile, the front man was a prison supervisor nicknamed Palych, a psychopathic sadist of the kind that surface at breakdowns of legality. His condition is also fluid: after a drunken excess, he is himself arrested and placed in a basement, though later seemingly put to use again. The translator’s preface notes that eventually this man was arrested in Kyiv.

The prisoners include veteran criminal convicts. One might expect their presence to cause the dominance of the “criminal code” described in Gulag literature (it devolved into unlimited moral chaos, the *bespredel*, after the so-called “bitch war” among criminal inmates of the camps in 1945–53; see Varlam Shalamov’s “Sketches of the Criminal World”). Yet the abnormality and fluidity of the prison conditions cause departures from the remnants of the code, which also becomes fluid.

Written soon after release, the memoir bears traces of trauma. Aseyev knows this and is consciously trying to recover. What troubles him most is the awareness that similar torture houses still exist, and, while one is enjoying the amenities of regular life, other people are being tortured. In 2022 it was known that *Izoliatsiia* was still a functioning concentration camp.

Coherent Digital. *Cold War Eastern Europe, 1947–1982*. 2022.

Accessible via Coherent Digital’s History Commons. <https://history-commons.net/modules/cold-war-eastern-europe-1947–1982/>

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Coherent Digital’s new *Cold War Eastern Europe, 1947–1982* database has a time-capsule feel for several reasons: one, because its heavily-marked-up documents from the era of typewriters and carbon copies evoke an earlier, John LeCarré-esque era; two, because history as a discipline has moved firmly away from these types of Anglocentric diplomatic/intelligence sources over the past several decades; and three, because this material has also already been available online for many years as part of Taylor & Francis’ Digital Primary Source archive, although it was previously in a much less convenient format. Coherent Digital’s conversion of these documents into a relatively functional full-text-searchable database is a major improvement over its predecessor. International Relations researchers and others interested