

Title: The Passion of Elena Shvarts
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Elena Shvarts' 1974 poem "Black Easter" ("Chernaja pasxa") retells the story of the Crucifixion, culminating in a resurrection without transcendence. In Shvarts's Petersburg, a city of Gogolian transmutations, in which the pavement watches us through fish eyes, old women become the blood of the city flowing through street-veins, tram cars swallow passengers in a Eucharistic rite, and Christ is a suicidal battered wife, resurrection can be only "from pain to pain." Shvarts depicts in "Black Easter" a type of mystical immanence. Suffering, the body, and the city are inescapable; eternal life exists, but outside of Paradise; and identity, while disturbingly physical, is forever in flux.

Through a close reading of "Black Easter," centered on Gospel allusions and imagery of cycles, this paper will show how the concept of resurrection without transcendence is central to the understanding of Shvarts as a contemporary Russian poet, as a Petersburg poet, and as a woman poet. Infusing the gospel narrative with a postmodern conception of immanence and repetition, Shvarts's rejection of transcendence is not merely a reflection of the endless unrest of Peter the Great's city, or of the miserable cycles of violence and alcoholism present in the poem. It is also triumphant, a recognition of a new geometry, of interconnectedness and unlimited possibility which offers a solution to the very problems it poses. Having established the poem's cycle of rebirth and transformation, I will use it to recontextualize earlier critical observations on the role of the body in Shvarts's religious investigations and to delineate her from those of her contemporaries who employ religious imagery in pursuit of the transcendent.

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