

SIDNEY MONAS

## Fourteen Years of Aleksandr Isaevich

While it is only fourteen years since Solzhenitsyn first appeared in print, his fame and authority are such that even a president of the United States seems morally diminished for not having invited him to the White House when he had the chance. What an extraordinary phenomenon his life and work have been! There seems something “fated” not only about his three miraculous journeys through the Valley of Death (war, gulag, cancer), but even his name, that figural baptism for his future role: first name, a Russian warrior-saint; patronymic, an Old Testament prophet; and a surname derived from *slog* (“word”; from the same ancient root that in English gives us “slogan”)—in short, a name to conjure with!

I have before me two interesting books that are collections of essays about Solzhenitsyn.<sup>1</sup> There is some overlapping, but not much. Both books contain essays that are critical of Solzhenitsyn, but neither has anything that is outright negative. The overall tone of both is appreciative, almost to the point of being worshipful. Both volumes contain scholarly introductions, chronological tables, and an adequate scaffolding of information and supplementary documentation.

The volume edited by John Dunlop and others is both more ample and more interesting. It contains what I think are the three best essays so far written about Solzhenitsyn—Alexander Schmemmann’s “On Solzhenitsyn,” Victor Erlich’s “The Writer as Witness,” and Czesław Miłosz’s “Questions”—as well as a number of other very interesting and useful essays, including Kathryn Feuer’s, Helen Muchnic’s, and John Dunlop’s own on a neglected aspect of Solzhenitsyn’s work, the patterning and thematics of his short prose sketches. Unfortunately, the book is quite expensive.

By comparison, the thin volume edited by Kathryn Feuer seems of lesser scope, yet is more readily accessible to the student’s pocketbook and more clearly designed for classroom use. It raises some problems, involving both Solzhenitsyn’s works and the way in which literature generally has come to be taught in the American university.

As one would expect, the primary emphasis of most of the essays in the Feuer volume (Roy Medvedev’s critique of *Gulag* is an exception) is on style, form, and structure. They are in this sense basically formalist in their approach. Yet most of the essays go counter to the formalist tradition in one important respect.

1. John B. Dunlop, Richard Haugh, Alexis Klimoff, eds., *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Co., 1973), 570 pp., \$22.50 (hereafter cited as Dunlop); and Kathryn Feuer, ed., *Solzhenitsyn: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 174 pp., \$2.95 (hereafter cited as Feuer).

The formalist tradition that by now prevails in most of our departments of literature emphasizes the study of literature as a professional enterprise. It calls *critical* an approach to literature that emphasizes the debunking of merely reactive enthusiasm while studying analytically the text as *object*, the perception of formal relations and verbal patterning. Its outlook is aesthetic rather than moral, and it usually is accompanied by a tendency to demythologize the author, to separate a study of the verbal patternings of the text from a study of the author's biography, to belittle the importance of a study of history and biography in the interpretation of literary texts.

It is striking that, in so many of the essays in these volumes, so many great names of the past are invoked: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Mann, Camus (so far, a certain appropriateness; but, then. . .), Walter Scott, Nietzsche, Eleanor Roosevelt. (Two I kept looking for never turned up: Maxim Gorky and Charles de Gaulle!) In some cases the comparisons seemed apt and insightful; nevertheless, I could not escape the feeling that these names were being invoked not only for the sake of comparison but to introduce an aura of Literature, with a capital L, to mythologize.

In this sense, Solzhenitsyn is not easily accommodated by our prevailing formalist mode of teaching literature, with its implicit amoral aestheticism and its demythologizing thrust. To be sure, there is enough irony in Solzhenitsyn to warm any New Critic's heart. There is a sufficiency of literary allusions and a solid structuring and patterning that a fair number of doctoral candidates might find it worth their while to unravel, although the unraveling reveals no great mystery, and the symbols tend to fold inward and turn into emblems rather than to exfoliate. He may or may not be the author of "polyphonic" novels. One thing is clear: the reader of a Solzhenitsyn fiction is invited to look upon the contingencies of the life-material from which the fiction was shaped and to issue a moral judgment upon it.

"What is this gift for?" Solzhenitsyn insists on asking of art. "What are we to do with it?" He speaks not of a "career" but of a *mission*:

To reach this chair from which the Nobel Lecture is delivered. . . I have mounted not three or four temporary steps but hundreds or even thousands, fixed, steep, covered with ice, out of the dark and the cold where I was fated to survive, but others, perhaps more talented, stronger than I, perished. . . . In agonizing moments in camp, in columns of prisoners at night, in the freezing darkness through which the little chains of lanterns shone, there often rose in our throats something we wanted to shout out to the whole world, if only the world could have heard one of us.<sup>2</sup>

He speaks with the voice of accumulated communal suffering, in the conviction that "beauty will save the world." Should not a reading of the fiction in the classroom be supplemented by assignment of its accompanying aesthetic in the Nobel Prize speech?

At the end of his essay on "Solzhenitsyn and Autonomy," in which he discusses the modern intellectual disease of "decidophobia," Walter Kaufman claims for Solzhenitsyn a certain reintegrative role:

2. A. Solzhenitsyn, "Nobel Lecture," trans. F. D. Reeve (New York, 1972), pp. 5 and 8-10.

In the early fifties Sartre and many others in France were arguing about two seemingly unrelated questions: whether it was permissible to admit that there were camps in the Soviet Union, and whether the novel was dead. At one blow, Solzhenitsyn made these debates ridiculous.<sup>3</sup>

But Solzhenitsyn's testimony about the camps, unlike that of previous witnesses, establishes not merely the existence of the camps and the suffering of the innocent. It says that Gulag is not a mistake of the Soviet system but its very essence; that it was not a product of Stalin's personality, but of the Bolshevik seizure of power; not a product of Russia's relative backwardness, but of the untruth of Marxism elevated to the position of official truth by force; Gulag is a product of "the lie," not "the lie" of the Gulag. Solzhenitsyn's advice to the "*Obrazovanshchina*" ("The Smatterers," as Max Hayward translates Solzhenitsyn's term for the new half-educated intelligentsia)—not to lie—is intended as a direct blow against the order of Gulag.<sup>4</sup> Yet behind this practical advice, with its immediacy and innocence, lies a vision of an alternative world; and the nature of that vision is to some degree disquieting.

It is "reactionary" only in the sense that it reacts against what is, that it is based on this impulse of reaction. As Czesław Miłosz has put it, "truth is always an escapee from the camp of the victors."<sup>5</sup> Whatever word I use, however, I cannot escape important aspects of this vision that make it somewhat retrograde and, if not in the popular political sense "reactionary," at the very least quite conservative.

In a recent exchange with Andrei Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn referred to an essay, "Personality and National Awareness," by a young man, Vadim Borisov, as expressing his own views on the national question.<sup>6</sup> It is a remarkable essay, to be sure, for it might have been written by Konstantin Aksakov or Ivan Kireevskii. It is written from somewhere beyond the great European divide of 1848 in the generous spirit of idealist Slavophilism, as if *Machtpolitik* and imperialism bore at most an accidental relationship to the popular growth of national awareness. Indeed, Borisov distinguishes sharply between "national awareness" and "nationalism," almost the way Marxists used to distinguish between "socialism" and "Stalinism." For Borisov, nationalism is a perversion of a sense of communal personality sanctified by the Bible and Christianity, as if what is referred to as "the peoples" or "the nations" in the New Testament were the same as what we mean by "nation" today.<sup>7</sup>

3. Feuer, p. 163. Kaufman's essay, "Solzhenitsyn and Autonomy," contrasts Solzhenitsyn's gift for "successful insubordination" (p. 161) with the contemporary intellectual's incapacity and dislike for making decisions.

4. A. Solzhenitsyn, et al., *From under the Rubble*, trans. A. M. Brock et al. (Boston: Little-Brown, 1975), pp. 229–79.

5. Dunlop, p. 455.

6. Vladimir Maximov, ed., *Kontinent* (American edition) (New York, 1976), p. 20; Solzhenitsyn, *From under the Rubble*, pp. 193–228.

7. The passage most emphatically cited by Borisov is from Rev. 21:24–26. Solzhenitsyn, *From under the Rubble*, p. 205. "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it [the City of God] and they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it." The Russian says "*narody*"; yet Borisov refers constantly to *natsiia* (*Is-pod glyb* [Paris: YMCA Press, 1974], p. 205). The Latin, *gens*, is not the

We are in the middle of a reaction against the cosmopolitanism and ferment of the 1960s and the unprincipled political manipulation of the early 1970s. The increase in Solzhenitsyn's influence among us is accompanied by and to some degree related to a reaction against the boundlessness and rootlessness of modern culture; the corrosion of traditional values and conventions that the Faustian striving of our civilization, the endless competitiveness of our economy, and the increasingly unlimited access of the critical intellect to all the forms and structures of human life have brought about. Solzhenitsyn stands equally against Gulag and the self-centeredness, the rootless, shallow, very nervous selfishness, of the Western world. What he offers against both of these is a Slavophile vision of a reborn Christian Russia, spiritualized, made an honest woman again, and repentant of her past follies, both Bolshevik and tsarist. He urges that *all* energies (including ours in the West) be concentrated toward this end. And with this end in view, he permits himself to be sponsored on occasion by dismally conservative forces, by the Spanish government, say, and casts a baleful eye on the left-leaning intellectuals of Europe and America.

Solzhenitsyn's conservatism, like his moral stature, emerges from the experience of Gulag. Ours, however, resembles more a failure of nerve. In our need for a moral hero who personifies and hallows a direction we seem anyway to be taking, we tend to overlook the authoritarianism of his stance, the degree to which it is in fact a response to Gulag and therefore in some sense still a part of Gulag. And while there is much appeal (even to non-Christians) in the Christian doctrine of redemption through suffering, the national form to which Solzhenitsyn seems ineluctably to attach that redemption certainly gives pause to a "rootless cosmopolitan" like myself and would seem to me rather dubious also from a Christian standpoint.

Perhaps we have been emancipated from too much of our past, to the degree that the very process of emancipation has come to seem a prison, and what Solzhenitsyn offers may be the most innocent form our new need for bondage can take. We hunger for belief, and any creedal system must of necessity be (in Phillip Rieff's terms) a system of interdicts and remissions, in which the remissions make sense only in relation to the interdicts.<sup>8</sup> My quarrel here is not so much with our need (though I *do* quarrel with it!) as with the peculiar system of belief that Solzhenitsyn seems to be offering us, and to which our response has been so "strong."

Kathryn Feuer has rightly called Solzhenitsyn "an aristocrat of the spirit,"<sup>9</sup> and his aristocracy composes itself out of an amalgam of bitter, deep memories (the only child of a passionate, bereft mother caught in a social upheaval), hard suffering (one recalls, from *Cancer Ward*, Kostoglotov's recognition—by their language, by how they carry themselves—of those who, like himself, have been "inmates," those who survived), and the reinforced pride of successful inner resistance to the physical and moral devastations of Gulag. He speaks *for* his fellow inmates from Gulag. Whom does he speak *to*?

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same as *natio*; the koine Greek, *ethnos*, on the other hand, is the same word used today for "nation."

8. Phillip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers* (New York, 1972).

9. Feuer, p. 15.

Certainly an elite. To whom are his "letters" addressed? The Writers' Union; the Patriarch of the Church; the Soviet leaders; the leaders of the American Federation of Labor; the leaders of Great Britain, and so forth. In other words, "the important people," the people on top, the people from whom, evidently, he expects change to flow. I speak here not of "his refusal to summon the Russian population to take up their pitchforks against their armed government"<sup>10</sup> (Kathryn Feuer's words), but of the direction of his address. He is not one who thinks that change comes from below.

One might contrast him in this respect with another, perhaps equally imperious figure—Father Ivan Illich of Cuernavaca. Both men are profoundly alienated from the prevailing societal modes of our time; both men strive for the preservation of communal values, values that support rather than undermine the sense of a communal personality, and both strive for a return to values and traditions that strengthen rather than corrode a religious sense of the universe and man's place in it. Both men are fond of the European Middle Ages for the support they feel medieval culture offered to what Solzhenitsyn would call *lichnost'* and Illich "conviviality."<sup>11</sup> Like Solzhenitsyn, Illich from time to time appears before august bodies of the rulers of this world and offers counsel and admonition. His manner is not less "aristocratic." Fundamentally, however, he addresses himself to change from below. His addressee, whether he reaches him or not, is Everyman.

Illich is mainly interested in societies where tribal or village-communal organization has either not completely disintegrated or can conceivably be restored. He is not much interested in the Soviet Union, and insofar as he is, only in relation to such societies. Solzhenitsyn is interested only in the Soviet Union. While there, his voice, audible throughout the world, was an effective instrument in restraining the organs of repression. Abroad, his effectiveness has diminished considerably. Abroad, his conservatism, like Illich's in many ways, but rooted in Russian nationalism, runs the risk of becoming a pawn to Western *Machtpolitik*.

In spite of his Tolstoyan name, Illich is not a novelist. Solzhenitsyn is—an artist, and not merely an arguer. Although he is a polemical writer of exceptional power, it is in his novels, stories, and poetic sketches that Solzhenitsyn's true stature emerges. Yet here too his tendency is conservative, quite opposite in direction to the thrust of modernism with its subversion of traditional morality. In passing, Solzhenitsyn has expressed admiration for the writing of Vladimir Nabokov, but one cannot help wondering if he has actually read *Ada* or *Pale Fire*, or even *Lolita*, or if he could avoid a distinct distaste for such indulgent, isolated narcissism when he does.

Roman Jakobson has noted that, after its classical flowering, the Russian novel divided into imitation of the classics on the one hand, and poetic "experiments" on the other (from Sologub and Belyi to Pasternak), in which the novelistic text came to resemble a poem. "Solzhenitsyn is the first *modern* Russian novelist," writes Jakobson (*italics his*), "original and great. His books, and among them especially *August, 1914*, exhibit the unprecedented creative alloy of a cosmic epopee with tragic catharsis and latent homily."<sup>12</sup> I am not sure what "unprecedented" means, and the precedents that spring to my mind—*Don Quixote* and *War and Peace*—in no way diminish the force of the statement.

10. Feuer, p. 5.

11. See especially Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York, 1973).

12. Dunlop, p. 326.

Yet the nineteenth-century novel flourished with its free and open nature as a literary form (R. P. Blackmur called it a “free institution”<sup>13</sup>) against a conception of society as “tight” and confining. A wide array of vivid and highly individualized characterizations sprang into being and moved through a richness of incident and situation nevertheless rather tightly held within a view (or views) of the world that saw the pursuit of self-fulfillment bounce against the walls of institutionalized greed and hereditary privilege. When critics in the twentieth century began to speak of the death of the novel, they referred to the receding sense (their own and their public’s) of where the walls actually were. The sense of confinement had by no means disappeared. It had grown, if anything, more acute; but the nexus of conflict became extremely problematic. What was society? What was the individual? And closely connected with both those questions: the role of language, and the authority of the unconscious. The individual seemed to become, in Norman O. Brown’s pun, an “in-divide-you-all.”<sup>14</sup>

Modern literature begins, not with the discovery of the unconscious, but with the opening of the question of its place and authority; not with a concern for language, but with an extreme and intense self-consciousness of the problematic in language. It is this special concern for language, and for the place and authority of the unconscious that turns modern novelists into poets and poets into novelists. The dissolution of boundaries and definitions in all spheres of life and culture has tended to break down the very conception of “character” and to turn characters in the “new novel,” in Miłosz’s phrase, into “nothing more than drifting receptacles of perceptions and reflexes.”<sup>15</sup>

Teachers of literature, characteristically, lag behind the practice of literature, but many of them do try to catch up. Practice in the college classroom has concentrated more and more on the novel as a verbal artifact, and a more or less systematic attempt has been made to separate it from the biography of its author, from the historical contingencies in the midst of which it came into being, and above all from the inherited or acquired values or prejudices of the students who read it. Well-trained literature students almost invariably ask about Solzhenitsyn, with considerable uneasiness, “But is he really a good writer?” And it is not the problem of awkward translation alone that is at the source of their unease.

I would like to touch briefly on some of the ways in which Solzhenitsyn strikes me as an old-fashioned, *not* a modern novelist. First of all, all his novels take place in closed or closed-in situations: the walls are clear. *Ivan Denisovich* takes place in a labor camp, a prison. The *sharashka* of *First Circle* is more complicated because, while it is still a prison, it is one that offers its inmates the illusion of the possibility of creative work. If even Ivan Denisovich feels some measure of self-fulfillment in working on the brick wall he knows to be useless, the highly trained intellectuals of the *sharashka*, given a relatively “protected” opportunity to exercise the skills with which they identify themselves, are even more deeply tempted. Nevertheless, the *sharashka* remains a prison, in which the jailers

13. The phrase, in one or another variant form, appears in a number of Blackmur’s essays. See especially his review of Ernest Simmons’s biography of Tolstoy, where he discusses the constraints that bear on certain Tolstoyan ideas in Tolstoy’s discursive prose, but which disappear from the more complex setting of the novels (R. P. Blackmur, “When there is a Tolstoy,” *The Nation*, January 25, 1947, pp. 103–4.

14. Norman O. Brown, *Love’s Body* (New York, 1966), p. 160.

15. Dunlop, p. 449.

are also prisoners, and in which the chief-jailer, Stalin, is the most captive of all, and the only ones who are free are those who have divested themselves of any feeling that they have anything to lose.

*Cancer Ward* takes place in a hospital, which is even a more complicated institution of confinement. The confiners are the doctors, whose purposes are benign, but whose "professionalism" is also a kind of confinement, a form of wall. It is clear that Solzhenitsyn greatly admires and deeply identifies with professional competence, and his doctors, with the exception of the one out-and-out careerist-*apparatchik* (Nizumatdin) are an admirable lot. But he does raise the question of abstraction from human suffering, of an intellectualized dehumanization motivated by professionalism. When Dr. Vera Gangart (Vega) prescribes unmanaging hormone therapy for Kostoglotov, he at first refuses, in spite of his wish to live. Life is not worth the condition imposed. But when Vega demonstrates a kind of maternal identity with him, a maternal love, he accepts. Not because she is a doctor, but because she is "Vega."

The most problematic of Solzhenitsyn's novels is *August, 1914*, partly because it is the "node" of an unfinished work, partly (some critics think) because it deals with historical events beyond the author's direct experience. But there are other reasons as well, and I think that they stem from a relative lack of confinement.

The army, of course, is as closed-in an institution as any. Whether the walls are visible or not, no soldier can doubt that they are there; and there is little uncertainty as to where they are located. It is the most "positive" of all the institutions of confinement Solzhenitsyn has dealt with, and almost all the men in the novel are clearly defined in terms of their attitude to it, for it is through the army that they express their "pity for Russia" or their lack of it, and it is in these terms that they are judged. The most memorable sequences in the novel take place within the army: the battle, its preparation and aftermath, the rout of Samsonov's army, Samsonov's suicide, Vorotyntsev's trek with a handful of survivors through the German lines back to the Russian forces, and his final confrontation with the Russian chief of staff. The civilian sequences seem vague and confused by comparison. Furthermore, the long inner monologues and didactic, seemingly public speeches, the musings on life and the meaning of history, and the problem of what "Russia" means and to whom, which seem somehow "right" in the context of battle and army life, have a slightly heavy, pompous, Gorky-like quality in, say, a Moscow beer hall or a girls' finishing school. The speeches of Obodovskii and Arkhangelskii in praise of "engineers" are ideologically interesting, but novelistically pallid in that they do little to indicate the web of family relations that is supposed to form the setting of the scene.

Along with physical confinement in space and regimen, the situation of Solzhenitsyn's novels is also characterized by a certain confinement and compression in time. Whether this has to do with the dramatic unities, as Wolfgang Kasack would have it, or an inner need for walls is beside the point.<sup>16</sup> The dramatic unities *do* represent an inner need for walls.

On one level, the time sequence of *August, 1914* is as compressed as *First Circle* or *Cancer Ward*. On another, one is constantly reminded of the fifty-five years between the events being described and the time of writing. In order to achieve what Jakobson has called "the ethos of lifelong temporal distance"<sup>17</sup> Sol-

16. Feuer, pp. 34–46.

17. Dunlop, p. 326.

zhenitsyn has resorted to a number of devices borrowed from writers of a more "modernist" tendency. His use of newspaper headlines, songs of the time, proverbs, official reports, all serve the effect of distancing in time for the reader events he has, in another sequence, been invited to join with as great an immediacy as possible. The events are thus "historicized." The most brilliantly conceived of these devices is that which Dos Passos called "The Camera Eye" and Solzhenitsyn "The Screen." Like a movie camera, this device focuses on detail with great immediacy of effect. But at the same time, by declaring itself to be "cinematic" and seemingly employing a technique that is quite up-to-date from our point of view and not at all available to the cinema of that time (then in its early infancy), it appears deliberately anachronistic and reminds the reader of the lifetime's distance, even while inviting him, as the cinema itself does, to participate closely.

Such, at any rate, I take to be the conception. Whether it actually works that way is another matter. Jakobson excoriates the "sluggish reader," yet it is striking that this technique of temporal distancing has not struck even highly sensitive and sympathetic readers of Solzhenitsyn as very effective. The expression of that "layered" sense of time, which has been one of the hallmarks of Joyce and Proust, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann, has, I think, eluded Solzhenitsyn.<sup>18</sup>

For all his artistic awareness of and insight into the unconscious, Solzhenitsyn holds it always on short leash, almost as though he were afraid of it. Even such an obvious device to mitigate the tightness of time and space as the depiction of a dream is used sparingly, and assumes a much lesser importance in his novels than conscious reminiscence or "flash-back." Much has been written about Solzhenitsyn's "vocabulary," his love of language, and his deliberate search for words and phrases, from Dal', from colloquial or *zek* usage. Yet in his style, as in his moral stance, there is something both apollonian and puritan. He does not dance to language, but rather tries to make it dance for him.

He is extremely suspicious of intoxication of any kind, and does not even like to describe it, except in what we might call its minor or less guilt-haunted forms: the sensual excitation of an apricot tree in bloom, or the taste, after long deprivation, of freshly broiled shashlik. There is not, in the whole great bulk of Solzhenitsyn's pages, a single sexual encounter, unless we include that "sexy" scene in which the author's surrogate Kostoglotov asks Zoia (a medical-student-nurse, whose name, we are told, means "Life") to remove her white coat, symbol of her profession, unbind her hair, and walk up and down the room for him.

In the *First Circle* and *Cancer Ward*, Solzhenitsyn's "positive" characters resist the walls of their confinement with an obdurateness that implies its own kind of confinement. Kostoglotov leaves the hospital and the memory of the camps for his hut at Ush-Terek, to share what remains of his life with the elderly couple who shared his experience, and to project his hopes onto the Issyk-Kul root, symbol of a native cure for a native disease, so that searching for the root becomes a kind of downward transcendence, like the beauty of national personality in the land of Gulag.

18. See, *inter alia*, Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time*, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore, 1956); Francis Bulhof, *Transpersonalismus und Synchronizität* (Groningen, 1966); J. T. Fraser, *The Voices of Time* (New York, 1966); Hans Meyerhoff, *Time in Literature* (Berkeley, 1955).



In *August, 1914*, Solzhenitsyn seeks out the last days of the Russia that was “ruined” by the Revolution, the Russia that seemed to promise a different kind of breakthrough into modernity than the one that gave rise to Gulag. The human possibilities that he finds most promising—the engineers, the *genshtabisty*, the doctors, the entrepreneurs (both urban and rural), the spiritualized intellectual, and the individualist-professor—all seem to foreshadow a better, different Russia to come. One should add to them the persistence of a noble, *blagoobraznyi* Russia of the past, as it manifests itself in the kenotic personality of General Samsonov or the earthy steadfastness and decency of Blagodarev. This great future promise of Russia, he tries to make us feel, was put at hazard by an incompetent regime that betrayed the national trust by irresponsibly entering a war for which it was unprepared and then conducting that war incompetently. Although Nicholas II never appears in the novel as Stalin did in *First Circle*, he is as much the villain of the piece. Solzhenitsyn is no defender of the tsar.

But he *is* a defender of the Russia the last tsar ruled. True, there are “black hundreds” and “red hundreds,” and perils everywhere; but this is the Russia to which imagination must return, like Kostoglotov to Ush-Terek to seek out the Issyk-Kul root. Why, one wonders, stop here? By the very logic that forces Solzhenitsyn to push beyond Stalin to Lenin, a logic that depends not on the magnitude, not on the scale of barbaric injustice, but on its “justification” by ideology, is he not obliged to seek the origins of totalitarianism even deeper than 1917 or 1914 in the Russian past? Was not even the *oprichnina* “justified” by Ivan the Terrible in terms of national power? For a generous, humane, and Christian concept of a Russia that has valid roots in the Russian past, which of the despotic acts of repression that stretch back to Ivan the Terrible proved fatal, irretrievable? Where did the enemies of promise win? Was it 1914? Perhaps things could still have been different then. But was that not also true in 1929?

A large number of the characters created by Solzhenitsyn in his novels will survive the questions that they pose, for he is after all a great novelist. Through some magic of art that no critical approach has yet satisfactorily explained, the situations that find verbal embodiment in his pages are more than themselves, more than the pressing contemporary problems that they nonetheless frame. Terrence Des Pres writes, concerning the significance of “the survivor” in the totalitarian concentration camp situation, that it is an affirmation of the heroic effort required to sustain the condition of humanity under circumstances that are so completely dehumanizing that merely habitual or instinctual motives, without some source of inspiration beyond mere instinct, habit, and energy, could not endure. He sees Solzhenitsyn as such a survivor.<sup>19</sup>

In teaching Solzhenitsyn’s novels, we cannot refuse their content. We must respect the questions he raises, and grapple with them in our own way. That must surely mean raising questions of our own. Perhaps beauty will save the world. But *how*? And *what* beauty?

19. Dunlop, pp. 45–62. See also Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor* (New York, 1976).