

THE ENDURING ACHIEVEMENT OF ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

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In an old joke from the Soviet era, a teacher asks the class, “Who was Leonid Brezhnev?” and a schoolgirl replies, “Wasn’t he some politician in the Age of Solzhenitsyn?” It didn’t take anywhere near a century for Brezhnev’s name to pass into oblivion. Trouble is, Solzhenitsyn’s name disappeared too. Here’s a conversation I frequently have. Someone asks what I am doing these days, in the leisure of my retirement. I reply, “Writing.” Other person: “What on?” I: “Solzhenitsyn.” Other person: “What?” Notice: not “Who (or Whom)?” but “What?” If the other person regards himself as well-educated, I then say, “The greatest living writer in the world today.” The other person changes the subject.

The name of Solzhenitsyn, though it has not entirely vanished, has fallen on hard times in the United States today. On a recent questionnaire given in two sections of a college World Literature course, only two of fifty-six students had read a single word by him. Ten more had heard of the gulag. But several confused gulag with goulash. Two gave recipes. One wrote, “If a person wants to eat goulash more than three times a day, he is considered a gulag.” I’m sure the poll results would differ at Ave Maria School of Law, which I think is the Lake Wobegon of the State of Michigan—you know, “where the women are strong, the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.”¹

What a difference three decades have made. In 1974, the London *Times* described Solzhenitsyn as “the man who is for the moment the

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1. Garrison Keillor uses this famous line to close each segment of “News from Lake Wobegon” on his weekly radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*. E.g., *A Prairie Home Companion* (American Public Media radio broadcast Feb. 2, 2008), available at <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/programs/2008/02/02/>.

most famous person in the western world."² In that little phrase "for the moment," the *Times* writer dropped a hint about how intellectual fashions work and how fleeting fame is when it's based on celebrity status, which is what Solzhenitsyn garnered when the Soviet leaders expelled him. Still, commentators back then expected Solzhenitsyn's fame to last, for surely he was more than a mere celebrity. Some of them made grand long-term predictions. Harrison Salisbury wrote:

Against the powerful state stands a single man The odds against Solzhenitsyn seem tremendous. Yet I know of no Russian writer who would not trade his soul for Solzhenitsyn's mantle, who does not know that one hundred years from now all the world . . . will bow to his name when most others have been forgotten.³

A hundred years happens to be Samuel Johnson's standard for declaring a literary work a classic.⁴ Exactly thirty-three years have passed since Salisbury's stirring prediction, a third of the way to the target date. So far, Salisbury's prophetic powers look shaky. And so you have prima facie reason to be suspicious of my title, "The Enduring Achievement of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn." What do you mean, "Enduring"?

Perhaps if I describe his achievement, you will get some sense of its prospects for enduring. I will lay out three aspects of Solzhenitsyn's achievement: his influence on history, the power of his thought in general, and his contribution as a mission-driven literary artist. Today I will begin by emphasizing point one, his influence on history. But first, for those who may need it, I will quickly sketch his life story.

I. SOLZHENITSYN'S BACKGROUND

Solzhenitsyn, a provincial boy with a religious rearing and a passion by age ten to be a writer, believed what his schoolteachers said and as a teenager became a committed Marxist-Leninist. He moved from the university to the army to the prison system, which

2. Dan van der Vat, *Solzhenitsyn Was Warned of Treason Charge*, *TIMES* (London), Feb. 15, 1974, at 1.

3. Harrison E. Salisbury, *Why the Kremlin Fears Solzhenitsyn: "A Great Writer Is a Second Government"*, *ATLANTIC*, Apr. 1974, at 41, 46.

4. See Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), reprinted in *THE GREAT CRITICS* 443, 445 (James Harry Smith & Edd Winfield Parks eds., 3d ed. rev. and enlarged 1951).

we now call the gulag because of him. There he lost his Marxist-Leninist faith and gradually reclaimed the faith of his extended family—cause enough for him to write, “Bless you, prison!”⁵ In prison he wrote and wrote, then memorized what he wrote and destroyed the evidence. Once out of prison, he wrote down all that he had memorized, stuffed it into a bottle, and buried it. When he was thirty-four, cancer brought him to death’s door. Then in 1962, at age forty-three, this unknown small-town schoolteacher of math and physics saw an opening and got a short novel entitled *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* into print,⁶ and overnight his name became a household word around the world, albeit one of the harder household words to pronounce. His window for publishing soon closed, and he became a writer underground, a writer on the run—yet with a prodigious output despite heavy harassment. The appearance in 1968 of two long novels, *The First Circle*⁷ and *Cancer Ward*,⁸ reinforced his standing as a fierce freedom fighter and a genius of a novelist. In 1970 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. The world press repeatedly gave him headliner treatment in his ceaseless conflicts with the Communist authorities, until in 1974 the regime kicked him out of his homeland. He’s a prickly fellow; let him be a burr under someone else’s saddle.

The immediate cause of his expulsion was the discovery by the secret police of his secretly written *Gulag Archipelago*.⁹ With a copy of this 1800-page history of the Soviet concentration camp system in KGB hands, Solzhenitsyn gave the word, and a copy that he had secretly sent to the West was published. When George Kennan, U.S. diplomat extraordinaire, read it, he too made a prediction: “It is too large for the craw of the Soviet propaganda machine. It will stick there, with increasing discomfort, until it has done its work. . . . It will shake the whole structure of Soviet power”¹⁰ Solzhenitsyn thought so, too. He said, “Oh, yes, *Gulag* was destined to affect the course of

5. ALEKSANDR I. SOLZHENITSYN, *THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO 1918–1956*, at 313 (Edward E. Ericson, Jr. ed., Thomas P. Whitney & Harry Willetts trans., Perennial Classics 2002) (1985).

6. ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN, *ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH* (Max Hayward & Ronald Hingley trans., Bantam Books mass market ed. 2005) (1962).

7. ALEKSANDR I. SOLZHENITSYN, *THE FIRST CIRCLE* (Thomas P. Whitney trans., 1968).

8. ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN, *CANCER WARD* (Nicholas Bethell & David Burg trans., Am. ed. 1969) (1968).

9. SOLZHENITSYN, *supra* note 5.

10. George F. Kennan, *Between Earth and Hell*, N.Y. REV. BOOKS, Mar. 21, 1974, at 3, 4.

history, I was sure of that”¹¹ And he was thrilled to read such Western reactions as this one: “The time may come when we date the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet system from the appearance of *Gulag*”¹²

As soon as Solzhenitsyn reached the West, everyone wanted to hear from him. Journalists sought interviews; invitations to speak poured in. What he said, however, in his new-found freedom to speak out, caused Western opinion shapers who had lionized him to have second thoughts. Why? Listen to this: “[H]e is not the ‘liberal’ we would like him to be.”¹³ Other journalists used eerily similar wording.¹⁴ One critic was sure that Solzhenitsyn would have voted for Nixon over McGovern.¹⁵ Some liberals who had once praised his literary writing, now, discerning his otherness, found his writing dull and ponderous. Can you say *non sequitur*? The West’s vaunted freedom of speech carried a high cost for Solzhenitsyn. And he never did get the hang of the West’s unspoken rule governing public speech, namely, self-censorship. I should add one other point to the bill of particulars against Solzhenitsyn—and not a small one. In 1972, with all hope lost of his ever being published again in the Soviet Union, he made public the fact that he was a religious believer, specifically, a Russian Orthodox Christian—how quaint. Following his 1978 commencement address at Harvard University, conventional wisdom crystallized into cliché: Solzhenitsyn was objectionable, wrongheaded, retrograde. Case over. Close the books.

Fast-forward to the 1990s, and not much has changed. A friendly observer lamented that “when [Solzhenitsyn’s] name comes up now it is more often than not as a freak, a monarchist, an anti-Semite, a crank, a has-been, and not as a hero.”¹⁶ An unfriendly one described the writer’s “descent from revered sage and prophet . . . to irrelevant

11. ALEKSANDR I. SOLZHENITSYN, *THE OAK AND THE CALF* 387 (Harry Willetts trans., Harper & Row 1980) (1975).

12. *Id.* at 389 (alteration in original) (internal quotation marks omitted).

13. EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR., *SOLZHENITSYN AND THE MODERN WORLD* 46 (1993) (internal quotation marks omitted).

14. *See, e.g., id.*; Jeri Laber, *The Real Solzhenitsyn*, *COMMENT. MAG.*, May 1974, at 32, 32.

15. Harry Schwartz, *Solzhenitsyn Without Stereotype*, *SATURDAY REV./WORLD*, Apr. 20, 1974, at 24.

16. David Remnick, *Profile: The Exile Returns*, *NEW YORKER*, Feb. 14, 1994, at 64, 70. For more information on how Solzhenitsyn has been perceived in modern Western Society, see generally Edward E. Ericson, Jr., *Solzhenitsyn’s Western Reception Since 1991*, 29 *TRANSACTIONS ASS’N RUSS.-AM. SCHOLARS U.S.A.* 183 (1998).

political dinosaur and target of jokes."¹⁷ Moscow critics, perhaps trying to one-up Manhattan critics, welcomed Solzhenitsyn back home by heating up the vitriol. One Moscow intellectual screeched that Solzhenitsyn, with his "Hollywood beard," is "a walking skeleton, a hatrack and a eunuch, castrated by his fame."¹⁸ Another spluttered with mixed metaphors: "Solzhenitsyn is a spiritual statue Let him stay in mothballs forever."¹⁹ Western critics, too, indulged their taste for invective. One called Solzhenitsyn "rather a comical figure in Moscow—a sort of The End is Nigh, sandwich-board old man."²⁰ Another found him "a sort of biblical apparition, a joke clinging fiercely to a world that no longer exists."²¹ A third announced, "Most of us were glad to see the back of him when he returned to Russia in 1994."²² Who is this "us," Kemo Sabe?

II. SOLZHENITSYN'S INFLUENCE ON HISTORY

Still, from the 1970s to the 1990s, a change in emphasis was detectable: whereas previously Solzhenitsyn had been castigated for supposed incorrectness, now he was pigeonholed as irrelevant. Why the change? Well, a little piece of history turned up: the Soviet Union died—in 1991, on December 25, an exquisite coincidence for symbolism hunters. Solzhenitsyn, along with precious few others, was not surprised by this world-historical event. By contrast, on its veritable eve, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this event was being declared impossible by the experts, that is, Western Sovietologists. This oversight was mildly embarrassing; some outsiders unkindly called it scandalous. If ever there was a time for a thorough, start-from-scratch reassessment of Solzhenitsyn, along with much else, this was the time. That did not happen. No, as regards

17. Michael Scammell, *The Solzhenitsyn Archipelago*, N.Y. REV. BOOKS, Dec. 3, 1998, at 36, 38 (book review).

18. Adi Ignatius, *Solzhenitsyn Returns from Exile; Russia Looks for Icon's Role*, WALL ST. J., May 27, 1994, at A1 (internal quotation marks omitted).

19. Steven Erlanger, *Solzhenitsyn Is Going Home to a Different Russia*, INT'L HERALD TRIB., May 21–22, 1994, at 1.

20. Norman Stone, *The Years of Living Less Dangerously*, SUNDAY TIMES (London), Feb. 15, 1998, Books, at 6 (book review).

21. Michael Specter, *Viewing Solzhenitsyn Through a Freudian Lens*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 13, 1998, at E44.

22. Orlando Figes, *From the Terror to the Talk Show*, TIMES (London), Feb. 5, 1998, at 39 (book review).

Solzhenitsyn, the more things changed, the more they remained the same.

Yet there was that one minor change. Reluctant concessions started popping up, for it seems that Solzhenitsyn not only had predicted the Soviet Union's collapse, but also had a hand in bringing it about. Thus, the mocker of the "sandwich-board old man" allowed that *The Gulag Archipelago* "must stand as *the* book of the 20th century, if you have to choose one."²³ Another critic, in a column entitled *Shut Up, Solzhenitsyn*, paused long enough to acknowledge that *The Gulag Archipelago* was the book that "toll[ed] the death knell for the Stalinist security state, and consequently for the Cold War"—then did his best to deflate the praise: "To paraphrase [Abraham Lincoln's] famous appreciation of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Solzhenitsyn is the little man who ended the big war."²⁴

What these critics offer as a concession is really a contradiction that renders their position incoherent, for the concession (that Solzhenitsyn triumphed) overshadows the thesis (that he is irrelevant). Such a position cannot stand for long. One sees the superficial logic: if the Soviet Union belongs to the past, whoever did it in also belongs to the past. But one also sees the perversity of this approach: the Civil War is over, so Lincoln is irrelevant? Give me a break. A person who significantly influenced a significant historical event cannot be belittled into insignificance. Such a person belongs not to the past, but to the ages. Real influence will affect one's future reputation in ways that are neither trivial nor transient. Besides, as we will soon see, Solzhenitsyn's interests always transcended the immediate Soviet context.

We should not forget the contributions to finishing off the Soviet Union that were made by others, starting with Pope John Paul II and Ronald Reagan. But my subject is Solzhenitsyn, and his influence was crucial, for it came from within the belly of the beast. Not only that, but it had to do directly with ideas. The USSR was a state entity informed primarily by an idea, rather than by ethnic identity, and the state structure collapsed primarily because no one, not even the leaders, any longer believed in the utopian idea. The New Soviet Man never got created. The classless society never materialized. Government was certainly not withering away. Democratic centralism was

23. Stone, *supra* note 20, at 6.

24. Alex Beam, *Shut Up, Solzhenitsyn*, BOSTON GLOBE, Feb. 10, 1993, at 11.

all centralism. The dictatorship of the proletariat was all dictatorship. What the Soviet system produced, after three generations of trying, was a self-perpetuating, sclerotic regime hanging on to power for power's and comfort's sake. Someone needed to articulate compellingly what everyone knew deep down. Someone needed to say the emperor had no clothes. Solzhenitsyn, more than anyone else, delegitimized the Soviet experiment at home and discredited it abroad. And he hammered home his case through the concreteness that literary art is singularly suited to provide. It helped to have people pushing against the tottering tower from the outside, but external pressures are of less consequence than demolition charges ignited from the inside.

The influence that the naysayers grudgingly accorded to Solzhenitsyn, others asserted unequivocally. David Remnick, a genuinely fair-minded liberal, reflected that "to some extent, you have to credit the literary works of [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn with helping to bring down the last empire on Earth."²⁵ Joseph Epstein marveled, "One man alone, without aid of weapons, a party, or even a movement behind him, took on the most systematically brutal regime the modern world has known and, without even benefit of support in the realm of public opinion, brought it to its knees."²⁶ In these statements are the makings of a new—and positive—consensus about Solzhenitsyn, which takes its bearings from identifiable historical influence.

Nevertheless, the received opinion on Solzhenitsyn hammered out decades ago has proven strongly resistant to correction. A month ago, in a review of *The Solzhenitsyn Reader* for the London *Times Literary Supplement*, Zinovy Zinik opened with a by-now-ritualistic bow in the direction of *The Gulag Archipelago*, conceding that this work "undermined any hope of having faith in the good intentions of the totalitarian monster."²⁷ Yet most of the rest could have been written thirty years ago. *The Solzhenitsyn Reader* puts nearly 650

25. *Morning Edition: Solzhenitsyn Returns to Russia After 18 Years in Exile* (National Public Radio broadcast May 27, 1994) (transcript on file with the Ave Maria Law Review).

26. Joseph Epstein, *Why Solzhenitsyn Will Not Go Away*, COMMENT. MAG., Nov. 1996, at 46, 48.

27. Zinovy Zinik, *Blue-Collar Solzhenitsyn*, TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT (London), Mar. 7, 2007, <http://tls.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25341-2617318,00.html> (reviewing ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN, *THE SOLZHENITSYN READER* (Edward E. Ericson, Jr. & Daniel J. Mahoney eds., 2006) [hereinafter THE SOLZHENITSYN READER]).

pages of Solzhenitsyn before readers so that they can judge for themselves. How many of his words does this alleged review cite? Not a single one. No wonder Solzhenitsyn once complained, "No one ever gives any quotes."²⁸ Zinik aligns himself with the "Western liberal point of view," and after working to cut Solzhenitsyn down to size, he gets to the heart of the problem: "Solzhenitsyn insists on religion as the foundation of morality, of the social fabric of life, and repudiates the predominance of the rational over the spiritual approaches in modern thinking"²⁹

Zinik is correct in that last statement, and it's a good bridge to the second of my three points, Solzhenitsyn's thought in general.

III. SOLZHENITSYN'S THOUGHT IN GENERAL

What lies at the heart of Solzhenitsyn's thought in general? It would seem safe to describe him as the world's foremost anti-Communist. But an objection immediately comes from an unexpected quarter: Solzhenitsyn himself. *Anti-Communism* is a political term, and his focus is moral, not political. For him, "[t]he primary, the eternal concept is humanity, and Communism is anti-humanity. Whoever says 'anti-Communism' is saying, in effect, anti-anti-humanity."³⁰ Thus, rejecting Communism "is more than a political act. It is a protest of our souls against those who would have us forget the concepts of good and evil."³¹ Human beings, souls, good and evil—these moral terms are central in his vocabulary.

Solzhenitsyn's thought in general, then, is engaged in nothing less than "reassessing the fundamental definitions of human life and human society."³² So he takes dead aim at "the mistake" that he says lies "at the root, at the very foundation of thought in modern times," which was established in the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment, of which Communism is just one outgrowth.³³ The world-

28. Paul Gray, *Russia's Prophet in Exile*, TIME, July 24, 1989, at 56, 60.

29. Zinik, *supra* note 27.

30. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Address at the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations' Luncheon in New York City (July 9, 1975), in WARNING TO THE WEST 51, 59 (Alexis Klimoff ed., Harris L. Coulter & Nataly Martin trans., The Bodley Head 1976) (1975).

31. *Id.*

32. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Harvard Commencement Address (June 8, 1971), in THE SOLZHENITSYN READER, *supra* note 27, at 561, 575.

33. *Id.* at 572.

view that was launched then and came to prevail in the West he describes as “rationalistic humanism or humanistic autonomy: the proclaimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him.”³⁴ Or, in a word (a big word), “anthropocentricity.”³⁵ This position, he declares, denied “the existence of intrinsic evil in man” and “started modern Western civilization on the dangerous trend of worshiping man and his material needs.”³⁶

But Solzhenitsyn also offers his alternative to the Enlightenment. He asks, “Is it true that man is above everything? Is there no Superior Spirit above him?”³⁷ And he challenges the Enlightenment’s “total emancipation . . . from the moral heritage of Christian centuries with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice.”³⁸ Far from being anti-Western, as some have alleged, he is drawing on the rich wellsprings of Western culture that antedated by millennia the birth of modernity. In no way is Solzhenitsyn wishing to return to the past, however. His Harvard address concludes by envisioning that we have “reached a major watershed in history” which will require us “to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life, where our physical nature will not be cursed, as in the Middle Ages, but even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon, as in the Modern Era.”³⁹ Likening this ascent to “climbing onto the next anthropological stage,” he beckons, with his typical concluding note of hope, “No one on earth has any other way left but—upward.”⁴⁰

In short, Solzhenitsyn proposes to replace one grand narrative of the modern world with another. That’s big. I would call his position postmodern, except that that term has been preempted to describe the hypermodernism, or late modernism in decay, that shares with Solzhenitsyn’s position only a sense that the Enlightenment project is nearing exhaustion. Before we leave Harvard, let the picture sink in. The brightest and best are gathered in celebration at the intellectual bastion of modern secular thought, and the speaker up front is diagnosing their ills and proposing religious remedies. It’s a scene to relish.

34. *Id.*

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.* at 573.

37. *Id.* at 575.

38. *Id.* at 573.

39. *Id.* at 575.

40. *Id.*

The moral vision with which Solzhenitsyn counters Enlightenment thought needs a bit of fleshing out. Morality is not created out of nothing. It is part and parcel of an all-encompassing worldview—a view of all of reality. And his worldview is pointedly Christian. In the central statement of his Christian commitment, the *Templeton Lecture*, he tells us that, as a child, he heard adults explain “the great disasters that had befallen Russia” in these simple terms: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”⁴¹ Those words, he says, precisely describe “the principal trait of the *entire* twentieth century.”⁴² Every calamity of the modern world as a whole stems from “the flaw of a consciousness lacking all divine dimension.”⁴³

Even before Solzhenitsyn publicly identified himself as a Christian, those with eyes to see could discern that his fiction operated within what we may call the moral universe, which, in turn, seemed to posit a religious worldview. In 1970, Father Alexander Schmemmann described Solzhenitsyn as “a Christian writer” because his writings exhibit “a deep and all-embracing . . . perception of the world, man, and life, which, historically, was born and grew from Biblical and Christian revelation, and only from it.”⁴⁴ Schmemmann described the essence of this perception as “the *triune intuition of creation, fall, and redemption*.”⁴⁵

The term “the moral universe” signifies that human life is carried on against the panorama of a universe ordered by moral principles. Such a universe functions according to two axioms. One, actions carry their consequences within themselves. Think of the sins and punishments laid out in Dante’s *Inferno*, and you will understand.⁴⁶ Two, actions are to be evaluated according to the traditional standards of good and evil. Good and evil are not socially constructed or culturally conditioned; rather, they are simply part of the nature of things and, in Christian teaching, derive from creation and the fall. Conscience is the built-in umpire, and the arena where the

41. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Templeton Lecture at Guildhall in London* (May 10, 1973), in *THE SOLZHENITSYN READER*, *supra* note 27, at 576, 577 (internal quotation marks omitted).

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.* at 577–78.

44. Alexander Schmemmann, *On Solzhenitsyn*, in *ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN: CRITICAL ESSAYS AND DOCUMENTARY MATERIALS* 28, 39 (John B. Dunlop et al. eds., 2d ed. 1975).

45. *Id.*

46. *See generally* DANTE ALIGHIERI, *INFERNO* (Matthew Pearl ed., Henry Wadsworth Longfellow trans., 2003).

game is played is the heart, every human heart; that is where, in one of his best-known passages, Solzhenitsyn locates the line dividing good and evil.⁴⁷ The concept of the moral universe comprises such familiar principles as truth, justice, freedom, repentance, and hope.

IV. SOLZHENITSYN'S LITERARY ART

Solzhenitsyn's moral vision imbues all his literary works, so we are ready for the third of the lecture's three parts, which deals with Solzhenitsyn's literary art. In his *Nobel Lecture*, he describes two kinds of artists: one kind starts with subjective experience and thus judges human behavior according to rules of the author's devising.⁴⁸ He "imagines himself the creator of an autonomous spiritual world,"⁴⁹ an approach that has its roots in the Enlightenment concept of the autonomous self. This approach is common among contemporary authors. The fixation on subjectivity typically ignores those perennial, universal concepts that tie all of humanity together and flouts the moral laws governing the real world of human experience; in short, it tends to divorce literature from life. Such literature may be able to entertain us, but it abandons the age-old definition of literature as a fusion of delight and instruction that we have received from both the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian lines of our Western heritage.

The other kind of artist—and Solzhenitsyn places himself here—views the artist's task as that of "a humble apprentice under God's heaven."⁵⁰ He seeks no autonomy of the self from the higher power above him, for he knows that "it was not he who created this world, nor does he control it; there can be no doubts about its foundations."⁵¹ An artist of this sort understands that his task is "to sense more keenly than others the harmony of the world, the beauty and ugliness of man's role in it—and to vividly communicate this to mankind."⁵² I'll unpack that last sentence a bit, though many of you could do it on your own. "Harmony" refers to the orderly goodness of God's original creation. The words "beauty" and "ugliness" refer to the

47. SOLZHENITSYN, *supra* note 5, at 312.

48. See Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture (1972), in THE SOLZHENITSYN READER, *supra* note 27, at 512, 513.

49. *Id.*

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.*

good and the bad human actions in this world since the fall. And communicating from author to reader is possible precisely because we all share a common human nature, which is ours by virtue of creation. With these grounds established, the *Nobel Lecture* then proceeds to describe how literature can communicate across the boundaries of space and time, from nation to nation and generation to generation, transcending all cultural divides.

Solzhenitsyn holds that literary art is at its core a spiritual enterprise. Try to imagine the disconnect when, in an effort to get his novel *Cancer Ward* published at home, he spoke about literature in a spiritual vocabulary to an audience of the supreme politicizers of literature: the members of the Soviet Writers' Union.⁵³ The writer's task, he explained to them, is not "to defend or criticize one or another mode of distributing the social product" (that's economics) nor "to defend or criticize one or another form of government organization" (that's politics).⁵⁴ Rather, the writer's task

is to select more universal and eternal questions, [such as] the secrets of the human heart and conscience, the confrontation between life and death, the triumph over spiritual sorrow, the laws in the history of mankind that were born in the depths of time immemorial and that will cease to exist only when the sun ceases to shine.⁵⁵

If you can imagine the incomprehension with which that audience listened to those words, it will take no great leap to imagine the disconnect between him and the West's literary establishment.

Although historical influence alone is enough to ensure that Solzhenitsyn's good name will endure, his main mission in life has always been literary. If Salisbury's prediction peering a century out is to come true—and, for that matter, if Solzhenitsyn parceled out his life's energies wisely—his literature must last. Will it? Among Russians, who have always been his primary intended audience, he already seems to have secured a place as a major author. Last year, a Russian television network serialized his great novel *The First Circle* in

53. Secretariat Meeting with Solzhenitsyn (Sept. 22, 1967), in SOLZHENITSYN: A DOCUMENTARY RECORD 128, 128–29, 147 (Leopold Labedz ed., Penguin Books 1972) (1970).

54. *Id.* at 147.

55. *Id.* (alteration in original).

ten installments.⁵⁶ Solzhenitsyn's visage smiled down from advertising billboards.⁵⁷ Each installment attracted an audience of at least fifteen million.⁵⁸ The company that this adaptation keeps is particularly noteworthy. It is part of a larger enterprise of TV versions of the top classics in the dazzling repertoire of Russian fiction:⁵⁹ Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*⁶⁰ and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*⁶¹ preceded it, and scheduled for future release were Tolstoy's *War and Peace*,⁶² Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*,⁶³ and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.⁶⁴ In the past decade numerous scholarly articles and monographs on Solzhenitsyn appeared in Russia. In 2003, Moscow hosted a major international conference on him, after which many of the conference papers were published. All this is not surprising in a society that requires its schoolchildren to read his stories *Matryona's Home*⁶⁵ and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.⁶⁶

The future in the West for Solzhenitsyn's literature has not clarified; but as the odometer of the generations turns, the squalls of yore are fading, and favorable auguries are starting to fill the widening void. *The Solzhenitsyn Reader* has put before the public the widest range yet of his writings in one volume, and already a West Coast state university is using it as the basic text for a full course on him.⁶⁷ Currently in progress in the United States are two books

56. Steven Lee Myers, *Toast of the TV in Russian Eyes: It's Solzhenitsyn*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 9, 2006, at A1.

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*; Steven Lee Myers, *Time to Come Home, Zhivago*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 12, 2006, § 4, at 16.

60. FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, *THE IDIOT* (Constance Garnett trans., Dell Publishing 1962) (1868).

61. MIKHAIL BULGAKOV, *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA* (Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky trans., Penguin Books 1997) (1967).

62. LEO TOLSTOY, *WAR AND PEACE* (Louise Maude & Aylmer Maude trans., Oxford Univ. Press 1991) (1869).

63. FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* (Constance Garnett trans., Random House 1996) (1880).

64. BORIS PASTERNAK, *DOCTOR ZHIVAGO* (Max Hayward & Mayna Harari trans., Ballantine Books 1981) (1957).

65. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Matryona's Home* (1963), *reprinted in* RUSSIAN SHORT STORIES 349 (H.T. Willetts trans., 1997).

66. SOLZHENITSYN, *supra* note 6.

67. See UC DAVIS, UNIV. OF CAL., 2006–2008 GENERAL CATALOG 438 (2006), *available at* <http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/ucdwebcatalog/PDF/RUS.pdf> (detailing that the class Russian

about him, one for general readers and one for scholars.⁶⁸ The conduit is now open to publish in English some works of his that are only awaiting translators. And—try to take this in—a good half of the gargantuan stack of pages he has written have yet to reach English. The appearance of new works is the surest way to ignite fresh interest in an established writer. Last June, the University of Illinois hosted a conference on Solzhenitsyn; the author's wife was the keynote speaker, and Russian scholars joined American scholars as presenters.⁶⁹ The top journal in Slavic studies has scheduled a special issue on Solzhenitsyn drawing on some of the conference papers.⁷⁰ This is virtually a re-launch of Solzhenitsyn among members of the Slavist guild, which, lacking immunity from intellectual fashions, has taken its cue from the unscholarly public prints, and he will come into his own only when his literature is given the primacy that he has assigned to it.

CONCLUSION

I will close with words from Malcolm Muggeridge, in his Foreword to a book of mine: "I cannot think of any more worthwhile study for any student on any campus today than to go carefully through all the writings and discourses of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn available in English translation . . ." ⁷¹ It far exceeds my wildest hope that a lecture of mine will inspire anyone to do what Muggeridge wishes upon you, but I would be pretty pleased if this event led one of you to read one book by Solzhenitsyn.

143 is entirely devoted to examining the literary and political writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn) (last visited Mar. 5, 2008).

68. EDWARD ERICSON, JR. & ALEXIS KLIMOFF, *THE SOUL AND BARBED WIRE* (forthcoming 2008); E-mail from Chris Michalski, Sales and Marketing Director, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, to Patsy Holmes, Publication Manager, *Ave Maria Law Review* (Oct. 8, 2007) (on file with the *Ave Maria Law Review*).

69. The conference was held on June 14–16, 2007 and sponsored by the 2007 Ralph and Ruth Fisher Forum. Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, International Conference on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as Writer, Myth-Maker and Public Figure, <http://www.reec.uiuc.edu/events/fisher.html> (last visited Mar. 7, 2008).

70. *SLAVIC REV.* (forthcoming) (volume number and date not yet available); E-mail from Mark D. Steinberg, Editor, *Slavic Review*, to Stephen Klein, Associate Editor, *Ave Maria Law Review* (Feb. 13, 2008) (on file with the *Ave Maria Law Review*).

71. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Foreword* to EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR., *SOLZHENITSYN: THE MORAL VISION*, at xiii, xiii (1980).

