

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and *Time, Forward!*:
Solzhenitsyn's Response to Kataev and Formalism

Symposium on Formalism
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My remarks today have their origin in my work on my dissertation and in its current incarnation they constitute a part of a section of a book on the construction of literary genealogy in late Soviet literature. However, the argument that forms the focus of this talk comes from a piece I was asked to write on the one-day novel in literature. As often happens, when challenged to look at the Soviet literary tradition from an eccentric point of view, I discovered something rather unexpected, that is, that there are only two substantial works of fiction in Soviet literature the narratives of which are restricted within a one-day frame: Valentin Kataev's *Time, Forward!* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. I will try to lay out where this discovery took me in a rather abbreviated form (from a much longer manuscript), but hopefully in a way that in the end will bring me back to the topic of our symposium here today.

The first one-day novel in Russian fiction¹ and the only extended one-day narrative to appear in Soviet literature before *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Valentin Kataev's *Time, Forward!* (*Vremya, vpered*) is certainly the most artful and eccentric of the production novels written to glorify the achievements of the first Soviet five-year plan. Kataev's "chronicle," as he himself termed it, was first published in 1932 in issues I-X of the journal *Krasnaya nov'*. Kataev took the title of his work from Mayakovsky's poem *The March of Time* (*Marsh vremeni*), which underscores the

significance of time as a thematic and structural element and the association of Kataev's novel with the early Soviet avant-garde, both issues that are central to Solzhenitsyn's response to the work and to my argument today. Of course, Kataev's novel was part of a larger trend in the political forging of Soviet literature of the time. In the early 1930s, as the still relatively young Soviet government was finally consolidating its control over the literary process, writers were exhorted to travel to the far reaches of the Soviet Union to observe, write about, even participate in the building of the new Soviet society. Kataev, ever sensitive to changes in the political climate, was quick to comply, and *Time, Forward!* was the product of his 1931 expedition to the construction site of the mammoth new metallurgical plant being built at Magnitogorsk in the Urals. Responding to the "social command" issued to writers, in the spring of 1931 Kataev set out with Demyan Bedny for Magnitogorsk. Bedny remained there for only a few days, but, as Kataev later told an interviewer: "At Magnitostroi I immediately saw so much that was amazing, stunning, that I realized I had to stay."² After a brief trip back to Moscow to put his affairs in order, Kataev returned to Magnitogorsk and remained there for almost a year, from May 1931 to the spring of 1932 as a representative of *The Workers' News (Rabochaya gazeta)*.

The plot of *Time, Forward!*--constructed around a successful attempt by a brigade of shock laborers to set a world record for the number of mixtures of concrete poured during a shift³--is based on an actual event. Early in Kataev's stay in at the construction site, on May 29, 1931, Magnitogorsk workers entered into "socialist competition" with workers from Kuznetsk and the Kharkov tractor plant to see which brigade could produce the largest number of mixtures of concrete in a work shift. The Kuznetsk workers were

the first to set a record, producing 324 mixtures in ten hours. The Magnitostroi workers followed close on their heels: a brigade under a certain Comrade Sagadeev turned out 429 mixtures in seven hours and fifty minutes. The report of the world record set by Sagadeev's brigade that appeared in *The Magnitogorsk Worker* on May 31 was signed by A. Smolyan, A. Kazakov, and V. Kataev. The Magnitogorsk record did not, however, hold for long. On June 10, a brigade of 37 workers produced 501 mixtures of concrete in seven hours and thirty-five minutes at Kharkov. Kostya Ishchenko, the fictional leader of Kataev's brigade of Magnitostroi shock laborers, is modeled on Sagadeev, while the depiction of David Margulies, the mastermind of the Magnitogorsk victory and the "positive hero" of *Time, Forward!*, is based on the engineer M.A. Tumarkin, who was responsible for the reorganization of brigade labor at Magnitogorsk. Kataev exploits this central situation in order to explore the controversy over increasing tempos of production and, in a broader sense, the question of how humanity's relationship to time--and to the forces of nature in general--might be redefined by technology. Viktor Shklovsky, in his less than enthusiastic review of *Time, Forward!*, thus recognized "the basic collision of the novel" as "the struggle for speed and the arguments against speed, against the outdistancing of time."⁴

Kataev explicitly identifies *Time, Forward!* as an illustration of the conception of time--time measured not by clocks, but by tempos and production levels--that constituted the underlying logic of the five-year plan as articulated by Stalin. Set in motion, albeit retroactively, on October 1, 1928, the first Soviet plan was originally scheduled to be completed exactly five years later, on September 30, 1933. In 1930, however, Stalin called for a stepping up of production with the aim of achieving the goals of the plan in four years

instead of five, and the plan was officially declared at an end on December 31, 1932. The slogan "five in four" was emblematic of the times, expressing a seemingly unbounded faith that human beings, if they pushed themselves (or were pushed) hard enough, could mold time--and therefore the entire natural world--to their own ends. If time was quantifiable, and therefore relative, anything was possible, even the "overnight" transformation of "backward," agrarian Russia into a technologically advanced socialist society called for in Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" speech, which the dictator delivered to industrial managers on February 4, 1931 and which Kataev cites in *Time, Forward!*.

In *Time, Forward!* this notion of time is most fully embodied in the figure of David Margulies, the novel's central character and the engineer who, as the primary representative of the positive forces struggling to "outdistance time," makes the decision to go ahead with the record-breaking experiment. For Margulies, who does not possess a watch,

Time was the number of turns of the drum and the pulley, the hoisting of the scoop, the end or the beginning of a shift, the durability of the concrete, the whistle of the mechanism, the opening door of the cafeteria, the knitted brow of the timekeeper, the shadow of the plant moving from east to west and already reaching the railroad track...

There was no essential difference between him and time.

(174/219-220)

Margulies, as we see here, equates time with the events that take place in it; it is for him not a metaphysical condition, but rather a medium of production.

Margulies finds his rival and antagonist in Nalbandov, a talented but conservative engineer who opposes Margulies's race against time with the slogan "construction is not a stunt" (postroika ne frantsuzskaya bor'ba). Outwardly a dedicated Bolshevik, Nalbandov is in reality an opportunist who enjoys the company of decadent American capitalists and deplures Margulies' striving to "get ahead of time" (187/235), the promethean desire to master the forces of the physical world.

Time as a structural element in Kataev's twentieth-century "chronicle" becomes the driving force of events and language, which the human characters must race, conquer, bend to their will: "Time is concentrated. It flies. It interferes. It must be torn away from, leapt out of. It must be outdistanced" (54/69). The "author" lays bare the device of his own restricted time frame by stepping outside of it and speaking in his own voice. The issue of the contest between Margulies and Nalbandov, between their two perceptions of the tempo of production, can only be ascertained seven days after the fact, when samples of the concrete poured during the record-breaking shift have been analyzed for quality in a laboratory. In order to reveal the results of the tests without breaching the restricted time frame of his narrative, Kataev temporarily discards his omniscient narrator and, speaking in his own name, discloses the information in a first chapter cum dedication placed not at the beginning of Time, Forward!, but rather in the penultimate division of the text:

The denouement depends on the quality of the concrete.

The quality of the concrete can be determined in no less than seven days.

The time of the action of my chronicle is twenty-four hours.

Thus, the composition would be violated.

I would have to jump seven days ahead.

Can this difficulty be solved?

But there is a way out. I include the denouement in the dedication and I place the dedication not at the beginning, but before the last chapter.

Under the banner of a dedication I put the denouement in its place and at the same time release myself from the responsibility of violating the structure. (268/336-337)

The concrete cubes stand up under sufficient pressure, and Margulies is vindicated. The author leaps outside and ahead of time, using his own "technology" to manipulate the temporal structure of his narrative to his own ends. Just as the work brigades in Magnitogorsk beat time by increasing the amount of concrete they can produce within a strictly defined time period--only to see their records bested immediately by workers at Kuznetsk and the Chelyaba tractor plant--so the writer "beats" the time structure of his own narrative. The denouement thus becomes a formal vindication of the "5 in 4" slogan.

To cite only the most obvious correspondences between *Time, Forward!* and *Ivan Denisovich*: both focus on the activities of a work brigade locked in competition with other brigades laboring on the site of a "socialist city" in an outlying region of the Soviet Union; in both the characters' struggle against the forces of nature is a central issue; and in both characters are defined primarily in terms of their relationship to time. Moreover, a vituperative, if indirect allusion to *Time, Forward!* in part V of *The Gulag Archipelago* further suggests that Solzhenitsyn may have envisioned *Ivan Denisovich* as a response to Socialist Realism in general and Kataev's novel in particular. In the latter section of *Gulag* Solzhenitsyn reserves some of his most trenchant ire for Soviet writers who, capitulating to

the exigencies of the Stalinist cultural establishment, painted a Potemkin facade over Soviet literature, masking the horrors of the labor camps. In one passage, after having described the nightmarish journey of a group of wives of "kulaks" into exile, Solzhenitsyn concludes: "This transport was driven to the great Magnitogorsk building operation. Their husbands were brought to join them. Dig away, house yourselves! From Magnitogorsk on, our bards have done their duty and *reflected...reality?*"⁵ Thus, according to Solzhenitsyn's testimony,⁶ the construction site at Magnitogorsk was in fact an "island" in the Gulag Archipelago and Kataev's larger-than-life depiction of enthusiastic Soviet shock laborers--a blatant falsification of historical fact. In this sense, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as the first and most scathing expose of the labor camps to be published in the Soviet Union before the glasnost period, appears as a historical counterbalance to *Time, Forward!* and other works that "varnished" Soviet reality. Yet, more than that, Solzhenitsyn in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* seems to be polemicizing against the very basis of the conception of time Kataev's novel promotes, against the blind faith in progress that forced *homo sovieticus* into a pointless and enslaving race with time, and, as we shall see, this polemic possesses a profound metaliterary dimension as well.

The time frame of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* spans roughly seventeen hours, from 5 A.M. to approximately 10 P.M. the same night. Within these temporal boundaries, Solzhenitsyn recounts the events of one day in a Soviet labor camp from the point of view of the Russian peasant Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, who is serving the eighth year of his ten-year sentence. For Shukhov this is one of many days, a day like and yet unlike the 3,652 other days in his sentence, and he must muster all the canniness and experience acquired through his years of incarceration to meet its particular challenges.

Of all the resonances between Kataev's and Solzhenitsyn's works, I will focus here on the interconnection between food and time, which is certainly loaded, as Solzhenitsyn's narrative makes clear in its description of the system of distribution of rations in relation to work performed. For five days of work the zeks are allotted increased rations based on work performed. For five days of work the zeks are allotted increased rations based on work performed. For five days of work the zeks are allotted increased rations based on work performed. For five days of work the zeks are allotted increased rations based on work performed. For five days of work the zeks are allotted increased rations based on work performed. On the fifth day everyone's ration is equal: "'Got a good deal' meant that now for five days the bread ration would be good. Five, supposedly, but not five, but only four: of the five days the bosses confiscate [*zakhaltyrivaet*] one..." (60). It is not difficult to discern in this passage a satirical reference to the slogan "five in four."

Thus, a compelling relationship is established between food and time in the narrative of *Ivan Denisovich*: food is the most urgent necessity for physical survival, and time is a means of acquiring it. Thus, after returning to camp in the evening, Shukhov literally "sells" time to Caesar, a "well-off" member of his work gang, agreeing to stand in the package line for him and tacitly expecting to receive Caesar's evening ration in return for his time or to profit by selling the time to someone else:

"I'll wait ten minutes...."

(Shukhov himself was thinking: if not Caesar, then maybe someone else would turn up to whom he could sell his place in line.) (88)

If, in what becomes almost a comic motif in *Time, Forward!* Margulies never seems to get a chance to eat because he is always interrupted by the necessity of racing time, Shukhov never seems to have enough time in his desperate race to acquire enough food to survive; he is always racing around trying to "earn something on the side." Although Shukhov well realizes the zek's need to conserve movement, to move slowly, the pressure of time forces him to break this tenet, just as, although he knows that "rushing, food isn't food,"

still the desire for an extra serving gets the better of him at lunch: "This minute he should focus all his attention on his food and, taking the thin layer of kasha from the bottom, carefully lift it to his mouth, and there roll it around with his tongue. *But he had to hurry* so that Pavlo would see that he had finished and offer him another kasha" (56, my emphasis--C.T.N.). This food eaten in haste does not, however, sate Ivan Denisovich's hunger: "Shukhov finished the kasha. Because he had immediately opened his stomach for two--one didn't satisfy him as oatmeal always did" (56).

Nekogda, not having enough time, recurs as a leitmotif running throughout Solzhenitsyn's narrative of how Shukhov negotiates the challenges and opportunities presented him by the day. It constitutes the ruling force of his relationship with time, and the pressure of time colors his whole perception of life in the camp.

Throughout *Ivan Denisovich*, Shukhov's bunkmate, Aleshka the Baptist, stands in marked contrast to Shukhov and his enslavement by time. We first meet Aleshka, whispering his prayers, in the opening scene, and, as Shukhov rushes through his day, Aleshka remains always in the background, praying or reading the Gospels. Throughout the course of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* we see Aleshka only through Shukhov's eyes, through a narrative voice that generally adopts the title character's point of view,⁷ and therefore implicitly judged by Shukhov's standards.⁸ Not until the end of the day, as the prisoners are lying in their bunks shortly before lights out, does Aleshka speak for himself, and only in this concluding scene, when juxtaposed to a different perspective on reality, are Shukhov's standards called into doubt. I will direct your attention to one moment in that scene in particular.

Shukhov, as we learn in the course of the scene, is a literalist then who refers all of existence to the everyday, earthly reality of the camps, while Aleshka communicates and views the world in terms of metaphors of faith.. Thus, toward the end of their conversation, Aleshka chides Shukhov for precisely this utilitarian attitude toward prayer, for praying for the wrong things, and Shukhov, in his answer, again translates Aleshka's figurative language into the terms of the camp:

"Out of everything earthly and perishable, the Lord told us to pray only for our daily bread: "Give us this day our daily bread!"

"The ration, you mean?" asked Shukhov....

"Ivan Denysich!" That's not what you should pray for, that they send you a package or that you get an extra portion of gruel. What is important to people is nothing before God! You have to pray for you soul [Molit'sya nado o dukhovnom]: for the Lord to take evil from our hearts... (116)

Here Aleshka comes to the crux of the difference between his vision of reality and Shukhov's: "What is important to people is nothing before God!" Shukhov is constantly rushing around, racing against time in order to feed himself, to get something over the camp ration.

In the final analysis, however, Aleshka's approach to life is beyond Shukhov's understanding. He cannot comprehend how someone who lives only on his ration can smile at the sunrise: "For them [the Baptists] the camp rolled like water off a duck's back" (33). Aleshka is not concerned with what "is nothing before God." He prays for his daily bread, for the sustenance provided by God, lives on his ration or whatever happens to fall to his lot,

and, apparently, occupies his time with concern about his soul, rather than about his body.

He is content, at peace, but Shukhov can only pity him:

Aleshka came back. He was helpless, he pleased everyone, but couldn't earn anything.

"Hey, Aleshka!" and he gave him a cookie.

Aleshka smiled.

"Thank you! But you don't have much yourself!"

"Eat!"

We don't have much, but we can always earn something. Chewed it with his teeth! Teeth! Smell of meat! And juice of meat, real meat. There, into his stomach.

And--the sausage was gone. (119)

Aleshka does not worry where his next meal is coming from--God will provide, while he himself is left free to devote himself to the concerns of the spirit. Ivan Denisovich, on the other hand, spends all his time worrying about sustaining his body and has no time for anything else. The narrative makes it clear through its emphasis on the transience of the enjoyment the sausage affords Ivan Denisovich that food and the pleasure and benefit derived from it are ephemeral: "nothing before God."

At its conclusion, the conversation between Aleshka and Ivan Denisovich comes full circle, back to the question of time:

"In general," he [Shukhov] decided, "no matter how much you pray, they won't take anything off your sentence. All the same you'll sit it out from bell to bell."

"But you shouldn't pray for that!" Aleshka was horrified. "What do you want with freedom? In freedom your last faith will be choked by thorns! Be glad you're in prison! *Here you have time to think about your soul!*" (117-118, my emphasis--C.T.N.)

Shukhov is in truth imprisoned less by his physical confinement in the camp than by his own preoccupation with his material needs and, therefore, by his consequent subjugation by time. He makes clear what is important to him in his enumeration of all the good things that have happened to him on this day as the narrative draws to its close:

Shukhov fell asleep completely satisfied. He'd had a lot of luck today: they hadn't put him in the cooler, they hadn't driven the work gang out to the socialist city, he'd finagled an extra kasha at lunch, the foreman had gotten good rates, he'd enjoyed laying the wall, they hadn't caught him with the saw blade during the search, he'd gotten something off Caesar in the evening and had bought tobacco. And he hadn't gotten sick, he'd recovered. (120)

Thus, the circle of time, Shukhov's prison, is closed:

There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three such days in his sentence from bell to bell.

The three extra were because of leap years... (120)

Placed side by side, the parallels between Ivan Denisovich's race against time in Solzhenitsyn's novella and Margulies's race against time in Time, Forward! appear obvious. In simple terms, what separates them is the plus or minus sign that their respective authors place before the efforts of their protagonists to "outdistance" time. While Kataev's novel

constitutes an apologia for the Stalin Revolution based on the conviction that the new Soviet order will free humanity from the "decadent materialism" of the West by achieving a degree of technological advancement that will place time and the forces of nature under human control, Solzhenitsyn casts the race with time as a virtual apotheosis of materialism, the enslavement of human beings by the needs of their bodies. Time, the gauge of mortality, marks the final limit of human life and human science. Human strivings to overstep this threshold, to lay at the very least implicit claims to immortality, can only lead to an existential imprisonment in the material substance of the world. They are attempts to replace "God's truth" with relative and intrinsically bounded human truths.

In the final analysis, however, Solzhenitsyn's apparent choice of *Time, Forward!* as the target of his assault on Socialist Realism would seem to have interesting metaliterary implications, to be as much about form as content. As we noted at the outset, Kataev's "chronicle" is far from a representative work of Stalinist official prose. Rather it enjoyed a distinctly ambiguous status in the socialist realist canon. Kataev, who initially earned his literary reputation as a "fellow traveller" in the 1920s, makes ample use of modernist devices in his narrative, drawing attention to the linguistic medium, to the formal properties of his work, to an extent that was already becoming unacceptable in official Soviet literature at the time of the writing of Time, Forward!. In directing his polemic at Kataev's novel, then, Solzhenitsyn implicitly suggests a line of continuity connecting the early twentieth-century avant-garde with Socialist Realism.⁹

By confining his narrative perspective to the point of view of a barely literate peasant, Solzhenitsyn allows himself little opportunity to incorporate sophisticated discussions of art and literature in his novella. Yet Ivan Denisovich does overhear two

conversations between intellectuals which would seem to support this association of Socialist Realism with modernism in the various guises it adopted in Russia. Caesar--who, by his ability to finagle for himself a relatively comfortable existence and to set himself apart from the common lot of the majority of prisoners, himself stands as a condemnation of the artistic intelligentsia--participates in both exchanges, and both concern Sergei Eisenstein, one of the most formally innovative artists to espouse Bolshevik ideology and to continue to create under the Stalin regime. The second conversation, which concerns Eisenstein's 1925 film The Battleship Potemkin, takes place between the former cameraman Caesar and the former naval officer Buinovsky while the brigade, held up from the evening march back to camp, is waiting out in the cold for the convoy guards to find the missing Moldavian:

Caesar was trying to convince the captain:

"For example, the pince-nez hung on the ship's rigging, remember?"

"Ye-e-es...," the captain was smoking tobacco.

"Or the carriage on the steps--rolling and rolling."

"Yes... But naval life is farcical there."

"You see, we are spoiled by the contemporary technology of film shooting..."

"All of the officers down to the last one are swine..."

"That's exactly how it was historically!"

"And then who led them into battle?... Then the larvae on the meat crawl like earthworms. Can they really have been like that?"

"But you can't show anything smaller with the resources of the cinema!"

"I think that if they were to bring that meat to us in the camp now instead of our shitty little fish, without washing it, without scraping it off, if they dropped it into a cauldron, we would..."

Buinovsky is cut off by a cry from the zeks heralding the discovery of the missing prisoner, but the conclusion to his sentence is clear: "we would eat the meat." As Gary Kern points out: "[A] tendentious point is made: the zeks are in worse condition than the sailors who refused to eat the meat, mutinied and heralded the 1905 Revolution; they are more debased than those under the czars."¹⁰ Aside from affirming again the superiority of life under the old regime here, the text suggests a direct connection between the technology of artistic creation and falsification, truth sacrificed to technique. Art's responsibility to reflect life is, moreover, clearly suggested in this confrontation between artist-technician and seaman by the challenge the latter poses to the veracity of formal device based on lived experience.

This second conversation about Eisenstein must, moreover, be read within the context of the first, which Shukhov overhears when he takes Caesar his lunch ration. While the later conversation concerns a film produced during the relatively relaxed cultural conditions of NEP, the earlier one focuses on Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible, which was produced under Stalin¹¹:

Caesar was smoking a pipe, lounging by his table. His back was to Shukhov, he didn't see him.

And across from him sat X-123, a prisoner with a twenty-year sentence, a convict by sentence, a sinewy old man. He was eating kasha.

"No, old fellow," mildly, said Caesar. "Objectivity requires the recognition that Eisenstein was a genius. Is Ivan the Terrible not a work of

genius? The dance of the oprichnikovs with torches! The scene in the cathedral!"

"Affectation [Krivlyan'e]!" X-123 said angrily, suspending his spoon in front of his mouth. "There's so much art that it's not art anymore. Pepper and poppy seeds instead of daily bread! And then the vilest political idea--the justification of individual tyranny. A mockery of three generations of the Russian intelligentsia! (He was eating the kasha with an insensible mouth, it was doing him no good.)

"But what other interpretation would have gotten through?..."

"Oh, would have gotten through? Then don't talk about genius. Say a toady who filled a beastly order. Geniuses do not adjust their interpretations to the taste of tyrants!"

"Um, um," Shukhov cleared his throat, hesitant to interrupt this learned conversation. Well and there was also no reason for him to stand there to no purpose.

Caesar turned, stretched out his hand for the kasha, didn't even look at Shukhov, as if the kasha had arrived of itself through the air--and went back to his business:

"But listen, art is not what, but how."

X-123 struck the heel of his palm against the table, against the table:

"No already, the devil take your 'how,' if it doesn't arouse good feelings in me [esli ono dobrykh chuvstv vo mne ne probudit]!" (59, Solzhenitsyn's emphasis)

First of all, we should note that, as elsewhere in Ivan Denisovich, Solzhenitsyn's "stage directions" clearly prompt the reader to take sides in this argument, most obviously his insistence on Caesar's complete disregard of Shukhov, which indicates the intelligent's blindness and insensitivity to others (implicitly here the narod) and to the reality that surrounds him. Thus, discrediting Caesar's contention that aesthetic value derives purely from the formal properties of a work of art, Solzhenitsyn nudges the reader toward accepting X-123's counterargument. That argument, moreover, is endowed with a recognizable and unimpeachable literary pedigree, tracing its roots back to the two writers James Curtis, adopting Harold Bloom's terminology, has rightly identified as the two most formidable "precursors" in the Russian literary tradition: Pushkin and Tolstoy.¹² X-123's concluding words in fact constitute a thinly veiled allusion to Pushkin's 1936 "Monument" poem ("Ya pamyatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi...") and to the lyric's third stanza in particular:

And long will I be beloved of the people,

That I aroused good feelings with my lyre,

That in my cruel time I praised Freedom

And called for mercy for the fallen.

[I dolgo budu tem lyubezen ya narodu,

Chto chuvstva dobrye ya liroi probuzhdal,

Chto v moi zhestokii vek vosslavil ya Svobodu

I milost' k padshim prizyval.]¹³

X-123's paraphrase of Pushkin, moreover, also constitutes an allusion to Tolstoy's contention in What is Art (Chto takoe iskusstvo) that all true art is "infectious," that is, arouses ethically appropriate emotions in the reader. The writer's and his text's claims to

worth rest not on formal virtuosity, but rather on their ability to move the reader. Ironically, Solzhenitsyn views the writer as being no less of an "engineer of human souls" than did Stalin. He simply claims to possess a higher truth, gleaned through bitter experience, and seeks to remake the reader in his own image, to "infect" him or her with the power of his message.

In his most recent major statement on literature, an address to the National Arts Club in New York in 1993 entitled "The Relentless Cult of Novelty and How It Wrecked the Century",¹⁴ Solzhenitsyn levels an uncompromising attack at what he views as the forces that have threatened the literary past in the twentieth century in both Russia and the West. He opens his remarks with a forceful statement of the artist's relationship to tradition:

There is a long accepted truth about art that "style is the man" ("le style est l'homme"). This means that every work of a skilled musician, artist or writer is shaped by an absolutely unique combination of personality traits, creative abilities and individual, as well as national, experience. And since such a combination can never be repeated, art (but I shall here speak primarily of literature) possesses infinite variety across the ages and among different people. The divine plan is such that there is no limit to the appearance of ever new and dazzling creative talents, none of whom, however, negate in any way the works of their outstanding predecessors, even though they may be 500 or 2,000 years removed. The unending quest for what is new and fresh is never closed to us, but this does not deprive our grateful memory of all that came before.

No new work of art comes into existence (whether consciously or unconsciously) without an organic link to what was created earlier.¹⁵

Here Solzhenitsyn neatly negotiates the problem of the "anxiety of influence" by identifying the uniqueness of the individual, and of that individual's intersection with the national experience, as both the essence of the work of art and part of a "divine plan." Having thereby cleared space for the appearance of new artists who can stand on a par with their "strong" predecessors, he goes on to refine his understanding of the "organic link" between literary past and present: "But it is equally true that a healthy conservatism must be flexible both in terms of creation and perception, remaining equally sensitive to the old and to the new, to venerable and worthy traditions, and to the freedom to explore, without which no future can ever be born. At the same time the artist must not forget that creative freedom can be dangerous, for the fewer artistic limitations he imposes on his own work, the less chance he has for artistic success. The loss of a responsible organizing force weakens or even ruins the structure, the meaning and the ultimate value of the work of art" (3). The restraints imposed on the writer by the past, the "organic link" with tradition, thus become the source of both meaning and value.

Having professed his belief in the importance of cultural continuity, Solzhenitsyn directs his attention to the central focus of his article:

But in the 20th century the necessary equilibrium between tradition and the search for the new has been repeatedly upset by a falsely understood "avant-gardism"--a raucous, impatient "avant-gardism" at any cost. Dating from before World War I, this movement undertook to destroy all commonly accepted art--its forms, language, features and properties--in its drive to build

a kind of "superart," which would then supposedly spawn the New Life itself. It was suggested that literature should start anew "on a blank sheet of paper." (Indeed, some never went much beyond this stage.)¹⁶ Destruction, thus, became the apotheosis of this belligerent avant-gardism, it aimed to tear down the entire centuries-long cultural tradition, to break and disrupt the natural flow of artistic development by a sudden leap forward. This goal was to be achieved through an empty pursuit of novel forms as an end in itself, all the while lowering the standards of craftsmanship for oneself to the point of slovenliness and artistic crudity, at times combined with a meaning so obscured as to shade into unintelligibility. (3)

Thus what Solzhenitsyn will term later in the article "the relentless cult of novelty," a symptom of the "crisis" in culture experienced throughout the world in this "century of spiritual illness" (17), takes its root cause from the renunciation of the past and manifests itself in the privileging of form over meaning.

While Solzhenitsyn views the West as undergoing an "erosion and obscuring of moral and ethical ideals" implicitly because of "an unprecedented rise in the material benefits of civilization and ever-improving standards of living" (17), he suggests that Russia has paid the highest price for this artistic trend, stopping just short of blaming the Revolution and its aftermath on the Russian avant-garde:

In Russia this impulse and its manifestations preceded and foretold the most physically destructive revolution of the 20th century. Before erupting on the streets of Petrograd, this cataclysmic revolution erupted on the pages of the artistic and literary journals of the capital's bohemian circles. It is there that

we first heard scathing imprecations against the entire Russian and European way of life, the calls to sweep away all religions or ethical codes, to tear down, overthrow, and trample all existing traditional culture, along with the self-extolment of the desperate innovators themselves, innovators who never did succeed in producing anything of worth. Some of these appeals literally called for the destruction of the Racines, the Murillos and the Raphaels, "so that bullets would bounce off museum walls." As for the classics of Russian literature, they were to be "thrown overboard from the ship of modernity."¹⁷ Cultural history would have to begin anew. The cry was "Forward, forward!"¹⁸--its authors already called themselves 'futurists,' as though they had now stepped over and beyond the present, and were bestowing upon us what was undoubtedly the genuine art of the future. (3, Solzhenitsyn's emphasis)

Having implied that avant-garde artists in some sense prepared the way for the Revolution, Solzhenitsyn goes on to condemn the Futurists for their support of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s--which, according to him, made it "clear that the earlier outbursts of this 'avant-gardism' were no mere literary froth, but had very real embodiment in life. Beyond their intent to overturn the entire culture, they aimed to uproot life itself" (3)--finding support for his linkage between the artistic avant-garde and the Bolshevik ruling elite in the fact that "when the Communists gained unlimited power (their own battle cry called for tearing the existing world 'down to its foundations,' so as to build a new Unknown Beautiful World in its stead, with equally unlimited brutality) they not only opened wide the gates of publicity

and popularity to this horde of so-called 'avant-gardists,' but even gave some of them, as to faithful allies, power to administrate over culture" (3).

While acknowledging that the avant-garde's role in Soviet culture was short-lived, Solzhenitsyn--working by innuendo, as he does throughout the article--implies that the rejection of the cultural past by the radical artists of the early part of the twentieth-century paved the way for the "general coma of culture" that was Socialist Realism. Viewing Socialist Realism itself as a "pseudoculture" of "ceremonial forms," the writer places it "outside the bounds of art altogether," claiming that "the style of 'socialist realism' never existed" (3). Having denied Socialist Realism a "style," he further denies it a genealogy, attacking those who have maintained after the fact that "the lifeless and servile 'socialist realism' had in fact been an organic continuation of full-blooded Russian literature" (3).¹⁹

This brief historical survey of the disastrous effects of the break with tradition in Russian literature brings Solzhenitsyn to the present-day situation of the Russian writer, whom he finds ill-equipped to take appropriate advantage of the new artistic freedom made possible by the end of censorship: "The artistic perception of the younger generation finds itself in shock, humiliation, amnesia" (3). Suffering from "amnesia," "Unable to find in themselves the strength fully to withstand and refute Soviet dogma in the past" (3), this younger generation is reduced to "pessimistic relativism" and "uninhibited self-expression" (3). Because they lack the desire "to strive for some higher meaning," contemporary writers can do nothing but "express the personality of the author, whether it is significant or not; to express it with no sense of responsibility toward the morals of the public" (3). Art becomes "play," "not the Mozartian playfulness of a Universe overflowing with joy, but a forced playing upon the strings of emptiness, where an author need have no responsibility to

anyone" (17). Having succumbed to relativism, then, all the writer is left with is "clever strategems" (17).

Afflicted with the "amnesia" that began in the avant-garde's repudiation of the past and culminated in the Russian Revolution and its dismal aftermath, the contemporary Russian writer, according to Solzhenitsyn, is doomed to repeat the same disastrous mistake, to fall prey to cultural nihilism: once again "Denigrating the past is deemed to be the key to progress" (3). The resultant cultural relativism, clearly akin to the political pluralism attacked by Solzhenitsyn in the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter, renders writers "helpless" to respond to the "crisis" in culture:

Nothing worthy can be built on a neglect of higher meanings and on a relativistic view of concepts and culture as a whole. Indeed, something greater than a phenomenon confined to art can be discerned shimmering here beneath the surface--shimmering not with light but with an ominous crimson glow.

Looking intently, we can see that behind these ubiquitous and seemingly innocent experiments of rejecting "antiquated" tradition there lies a deep-seated hostility toward any spirituality. This relentless cult of novelty, with its assertion that art need not be good or pure, just so long as it is new, newer, and newer still, conceals an unyielding and long-sustained attempt to undermine, ridicule and uproot all moral precepts. There is no God, there is no truth, the universe is chaotic, all is relative, "the world as text," a text any post-modernist is willing to compose. How clamorous it all is, but also--how helpless. (17)

As the apocalyptic image Solzhenitsyn employs here underscores, Solzhenitsyn's central argument lies in the implication that if the early twentieth-century avant-garde is implicated in the horrors of twentieth-century Russian history, then the current artistic huit clos threatens to lead to analogous political and social disaster. He articulates this fear in no uncertain terms as he brings his remarks to their close: "If we, the creators of art, will obediently submit to this downward slide, if we cease to hold dear the great cultural tradition of the foregoing centuries together with the spiritual foundations from which it grew--we will be contributing to a highly dangerous fall of the human spirit on earth, to a degeneration of mankind into some kind of lower state, closer to the animal world" (17).

I have recapitulated Solzhenitsyn's argument here at some length, first of all, because it demonstrates the continuity in his artistic stance from his earliest works, articulating what was generally left implicit in his fictional writings. Most important here is Solzhenitsyn's identification of the rupture in the "organic" development of the Russian cultural tradition not with the imposition of the Socialist Realism, where it is located by the majority of the writers considered in this book, but rather with the end of the dominance of Realism in Russian literary and the emergence of modernism. Thus, while other writers seek to trace their literary genealogies back to various trends in early twentieth-century Russian experimental prose, Solzhenitsyn understandably adheres to a realist aesthetic that harks back to the nineteenth century, to a time before the break. In terms of the intertexts I have suggested as a context for One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, then, he claims Aksakov as a legitimate forebear, while rejecting Kataev--along with the repudiation of the past and the consequent striving for progress in life and art through technology and technique he implicitly imputes to him.

More important, Solzhenitsyn's diatribe against the "relentless cult of novelty" helps us to see what is at stake in his dogged adherence to the traditional role of the Russian writer as more than writer and the consequent limitations of a Bloomian reading of the Russian tradition. Bloom's narrative of the modern Western poetic tradition as an Oedipal struggle between, "strong poets," sons and fathers rests on viewing what Bloom terms "priority"--and what we might call "originality," which is implicitly a function of formal innovation in Bloom's argument--as the primary gauge of aesthetic merit. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, by refocusing the source of literary value from "priority" to experience and from "how" to "what" essentially solves the problem the problem posed by Bloom. In his putative Oedipal struggle with Tolstoy, for instance, Solzhenitsyn automatically wins simply by virtue of having lived through the horrors of the twentieth-century.²⁰ More to the point, however, Solzhenitsyn's ambitions are arguably much farther-ranging than those of his Western counterparts. If Bloom's ephebe seeks merely to become a strong poet, merely to stand on a level with the likes of Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, Solzhenitsyn lays claims to speak God's word, to be a prophet of the truth and the voice of his nation. It is precisely the achievements of his literary ancestors, coupled with a nineteenth-century belief in the referentiality of language and the writer's ability to shape his reader, that can serve to validate the legitimacy of his claim. In short, Solzhenitsyn's status as a writer, as he understands it, is placed in jeopardy less by those who have come before than by the threat of the reduction of the status of literature itself in the society. If literature becomes nothing more than "obscure" formal innovation, self-expression, and--worst of all--"play," not only the writer, but the profession of literature per se is threatened with marginalization. As we shall see in the latter chapters of this book, the change in the institutional structure of

Russian culture in the wake of the collapse of censorship and Soviet system is already realizing the worst fears implicit in Solzhenitsyn's impassioned defense of tradition. The increasing commercialization of Russian culture has arguably already rendered Solzhenitsyn himself a cultural anachronism whose books increasingly lie unbought and unread, passed over by the Russian readership for badly translated Western thrillers and a newly emerging home-grown Russian popular

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1. mention Petersburg
 2. (Skorino, 228).
 - 3.
 4. Viktor Shklovskii, "Syuzhet i obraz," Literaturnaya gazeta (17 August 1932), 2.
 5. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Arhipelag GULag, in idem. Sobranie sochinenii (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1980), VII, 36. Here I have used the existing English translation: Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, translated by Harry Willetts (New York: Perennial Library-Harper & Row, 1976), 360.
 6. Scott, Kotkin
 7. Ref to critics on narrative.
 8. Critics who have been misled by this into accepting Shukhov unquestioningly as an exemplary figure.
 9. Ironically, in this Solzhenitsyn dovetails with the arguments of the art historian Boris Groys.
 10. Kern, 8.
 11. Give details. Was the part of the film discussed actually shown before Stalin's death? Ref to current controversy.
 12. Ref to Curtis, give synopsis of his argument, include quote from First Circle.
 13. A.S. Pushkin, Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1968), III: 332.
 14. The address was read by Solzhenitsyn's son Ignat on the occasion of the awarding to Solzhenitsyn of the National Arts Club's medal of honor for literature. The Russian text was published in

Solzhenitsyn's homeland shortly after the English translation, by Solzhenitsyn's sons Ignat and Stephen, appeared in The New York Times Book Review: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Otvetnoe slovo na prisuzhdenie literaturnoi nagrody amerikanskogo natsional'nogo kluba iskusstv, N'yu-Iork, 19 yanvarya 1993," Novyi mir, no. 4 (1993): 3-6.

15. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "The Relentless Cult of Novelty And How It Wrecked the Century," The New York Times Book Review, 7 February 1993, 3. Henceforth page numbers from this translation will be given in parentheses in the text.

16. Ref to Khlebnikov?

17. Ref to "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste"

18. Echo of Time, Forward! of both Kataev and Mayakovsky.

19. Note that this helps to justify his realist style, but denying it to sr.

20. Ref to Curtis.