From Poverty to Prominence: The Life, Literature, and Legacy of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

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Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Alexander Solzhenitsyn. It was through his visionary, deeply moving writing that the world came to appreciate, embrace, and finally love him. He spoke out for a whole nation. In speaking out, he acknowledged those courageous individuals who perished in the gulag. I too echo Solzhenitsyn’s sentiments. Due to the efforts of Solzhenitsyn and others, the stories, memories, and histories of those who perished in the gulag will never be forgotten.

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Abstract/Thesis

Alexander Solzhenitsyn\(^1\) is undoubtedly one of the most influential and well-respected figures of all time. His life story is sad yet joyful, troubled but also filled with hope. The circumstances which influenced Solzhenitsyn throughout his life had a deep, lasting impact on him. Although he was actively involved in World War II and was a prisoner of the gulag it is his writing which made him a household name in both Russia and America.

Indeed, he was a writer who wrote not for his own self-glorification, but rather for the people – his people – the Russian people. Solzhenitsyn wrote because he felt that it was important that the Russian people know and understand the history of their country, specifically the gulag. The passion and enthusiasm which Solzhenitsyn embodied clearly manifests itself in the author’s very personal, deeply intuitive, and distinctly Russian style of writing.

This paper will focus specifically on Alexander Solzhenitsyn, his life, his works, and why he is still important today. The primary sources utilized, the *New York Times* and the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, will serve to give a balanced account of Solzhenitsyn’s treatment both at home and abroad.

An important distinction must be made at the start. The *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* was not published in the Soviet Union, but rather in the United States. The articles in the Digest were selected by the Soviet government and published in various newspapers all across the Soviet Union in Russian. The *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* contains the English translations of the original articles published in the Soviet Union. Thus, the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* is indeed a viable and very useful primary source.

How exactly was he portrayed in the *New York Times*? How was he portrayed in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*? Was the *New York Times* generally sympathetic to Solzhenitsyn? Were some writers of the Soviet press sympathetic to him?

These questions will be answered throughout this paper in the hopes of bringing a better, more accurate understanding of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to historians. This paper also addresses the above mentioned issues and presents the information in a new and interesting perspective which will allow both Westerners and Russians a chance to better understand and appreciate each other’s respective cultures.


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\(^1\) I have chosen to use the English version of Solzhenitsyn’s first name, “Alexander” which is a more familiar spelling to American readers than the Russian variant “Aleksandr”. However when citing the author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, I will use the Russian variant for proper citation purposes. When writing out Solzhenitsyn’s full name (first, middle, last), I will of course use the Russian variant “Aleksandr”.

I will write about the despondent
Who stayed behind on the shore.
Of those sentenced to be silent
I will write.
And then I’ll make a fire.
O, how these lines will soar up,
The pages fall back to ash
Under the savage slap
Of a long-lapsed emptiness!
With what an arrogant gesture
I will be outstripped by the flame!
And the foam of ashes will quiver
But nothing will be born from them.

~Irina Ratushinskaya

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Introduction

Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn – dissident writer, husband, father, political activist, historian, etc., - is considered by many to be one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century. Edward E. Ericson Jr., in his book, The Soul and Barbed Wire: An Introduction to Solzhenitsyn, perfectly sums up one of the many reasons why Solzhenitsyn is unique. Ericson writes that, “it is rare for a writer to identify with his nation as closely and as fully as Solzhenitsyn has done. His people’s story is what he mainly writes about; it is also his story.”3 Indeed, Solzhenitsyn was one of the few extraordinary individuals who, through his writing, bravely and unashamedly spoke the truth for an entire country.

Solzhenitsyn himself spoke of this phenomenon. In his 1972 Noble Lecture on Literature, he ardently advocated the worth and legitimacy of writers who write for their nation:

Friends! If we are worth anything, let us try to help! In our own countries, torn asunder by the discord of parties, movements, castes, and groups, who is it who has from the earliest ages been a force not for disunity but for unity? This in essence is the position of the writers: the spokesmen for their national language – the principle tie binding together a nation, binding together the very Earth occupied by a people, and in fortunate cases their national soul also.4

He continues, mentioning the wonders of being able to communicate between two countries something which has greatly affected one country, but which the second country knows little about:

We have been given this miraculous faculty: to be able to communicate despite differences in languages, customs, and social structures the life-experience of one whole nation – to communicate a difficult national experience many decades long which the second nation has

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never experienced at all. And in the most favorable case this may save a whole nation from a path which is unnecessary, or mistaken, or even fatal.\(^5\)

Thus, Solzhenitsyn acted not only as the moral conscious, but also the voice of the Russian people – his people.\(^6\) Solzhenitsyn’s love of Russia and the Russian people was an unmistakable and deeply personal part of his identity. In a letter to President Ronald Reagan printed in the *Washington Post* in 1982, Solzhenitsyn addressed the accusation of him being a Russian nationalist with the statement that, “I am not at all a ‘nationalist.’ I am a patriot. This means that I love my country and therefore well understand other people’s love for theirs.”\(^7\)

In addition to his love of country and people, Solzhenitsyn was, “an unshakable optimist” who believed in “a sort of stupid faith in victory.”\(^8\) In his book, *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile*, Joseph Pearce recalls an interview he had with Solzhenitsyn. The chapter titled “Solzhenitsyn at Eighty: Pessimistic Optimist” contains a passage which is a wonderful example of the mirth and sense of humor which the author, at eighty, still possessed:

“I must tell you that, on the contrary, I am by nature an ineradicable optimist. I’ve always been an optimist. When I was dying of cancer I was always an optimist. When I was exiled abroad nobody believed that I would return but I was convinced that I would return. So no, it’s not full of dark and gloom. There’s always a ray of light. But of course,’ he added with a broad grin, ‘there may not be enough optimism to last a full eighty years!’”\(^9\)

Upon his return to Russia in 1994, Solzhenitsyn elicited varying responses from people as to what they thought of the returning son of Russia. Some people thought that Solzhenitsyn was

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\(^5\) Solzhenitsyn, 20.
\(^6\) Ericson
\(^8\) Ibid., 65.
irrelevant and that time had passed him by. One such person was Grigory Amelin, who in an article published about the dissident writer, posed the question, “who needs him?” and replied, “no one.” This harsh rhetorical question gained a rebuttal from an admirer of the writer who retorted, “Who needs him? I need him, I I. We all need him, in conditions of freedom as much as in conditions of lack of freedom.”

Others however were much more positive and hailed Solzhenitsyn’s return with great joy and excitement. A native of Moscow proclaimed that, “When I first read Solzhenitsyn, I was on my knees. He helped me stand on my feet as a citizen.” A schoolteacher accurately concluded that Solzhenitsyn’s return was good for Russia. She states, “he wants to help Russia. I’m sure he will speak his mind again. That’s good for us. There are too few wise people these days.” All of the above statements from supporters of Solzhenitsyn reflect the growing sense of ease, optimism, and renewed fervor which the author’s return to Russia had brought about.

The attitude toward Solzhenitsyn shared by many Russians, especially the older generation, is expertly summarized by Tatyana Tolstaya:

Solzhenitsyn is not entirely alone, of course. He has his own, unique support group consisting largely – to his credit – of extremely worthy people. As a rule, these are older, decent, conscientious citizens who are concerned with moral issues and are deeply troubled by the political and cultural crisis that Russia is now living through. At one time or another all of them took to heart Solzhenitsyn’s moral imperative ‘to not live by lies.’ They have tried hard to follow it.

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10 Ericson, 232.
11 Ibid., 231.
12 Ibid., 231.
13 Ibid., 232.
14 Ibid., 232.
15 Ibid., 232.
16 Ibid., 232.
Solzhenitsyn’s ever present optimism and patriotism were coupled with his strong belief in hope. Ericson discusses Solzhenitsyn’s strongly held beliefs and notes that, “along with faith and love, hope is one of the classic Christian values, and Solzhenitsyn’s hope is an integral aspect of his religious worldview, in which humanity stands poised on the intersection between time and eternity.”17 It is because of Solzhenitsyn’s patriotism, optimism, hope, poignant narrative, and genuine desire to educate people that he has come to be viewed by both Russians and non-Russians as one of the most influential people of the twentieth century.

Victims of the gulag

Although it is not the main focus of this paper, the author would like to briefly mention the victims of one of the worst genocides in human history. The “other genocide” of the twentieth century (the first being the Holocaust) is known as the gulag. Gulag is an acronym for the system of labor camps which were spread across the vast Soviet empire.18 In the camps, millions of zeks19 worked long hours often in unbearable conditions. The zeks built railway lines, dug canals, mined precious minerals, cleared forest areas, and so much more.

The purpose of the labor camps was to produce profit from the zeks’ labor which in turn would expand the Soviet economy. In order to be the best, brightest, and most successful, the Soviet Union fervently believed that all its citizens needed to be productive contributors to the “great Socialist Motherland”. Today the many railways, canals, and other public works projects in Russia completed by the zeks’ hands stand as a testimony to the physical hardships, as well as the strength and endurance of the millions of victims of Stalin’s labor camps.

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17 Ericson, 65.
19 Ibid., 658. An abbreviated form of the word zaklyuchennyi – prisoner.
How many died in the gulag?

While the resources available to historians of Russia today present much more complete information than was the case twenty years ago, there still is no clear answer to the question, “But how many died in the gulag.” There are, however, estimates of the number of victims of the gulag. In her book, *Gulag: A History*, Anne Applebaum mentions the fact that for many years, the number of victims was unknown due to the inaccessibility to the archives. The numbers she gives match the numbers given by the NKVD; however, there are some disparities.

Applebaum cites that in the year 1930, 179,000 prisoners were in the colonies and gulag. This figure matches with what the NKVD recorded for 1930 as well. The figures for the years 1931 – 1934 also correspond, however, from 1935 – 1941, the numbers do not match up. For example, Khlevniuk states that in the year 1938, 996,367 prisoners were in the gulag. Applebaum states that in 1938, 1,881,570 prisoners were in the gulag. The difference between the two figures, 885,203, is quite substantial. Even comparing a year where the figures are more similar – 1939 – leaves the researcher unsatisfied with the results.

Russian historians have had to deal with this frustrating aspect of Soviet history, namely not having concrete numbers, for many years. Estimates as to the number of victims range from mere “thousands” to seven million, and much higher. If one were to add up all of the numbers for Applebaum concerning prisoners of the gulag from 1930 – 1953, the total number of

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20 Ibid., 579.
22 Ibid., 307.
23 According to Applebaum, in 1939, 1,672,438 prisoners were part of the gulag. According to Khlevniuk, 1, 317, 195 prisoners were part of the gulag in the same year. The difference – 355,243, while not staggering compared to 1938, is still frustrating to the historian, for obvious reasons.
24 Applebaum, 578.
victims is overwhelming: 36,048,755. And these numbers only reflect twenty three years of victims of the camps. This author personally believes that the total number of victims of the gulag ranges roughly from 40 to 80 million people.

The importance of memory

The memory of a nation is key to the nation’s survival. Without memory, what does a nation have of its history? A nation such as Russia does indeed have a memory. The memory of the past is part of the narod – the people. Young and old, rich and poor, believers and non-believers are all united by a common collective memory. It is hard for Americans to understand this concept, due to the fact that compared to many other nations, America is still quite young and inexperienced in many matters. In Russia, the people have such strong ties to the land – the zemlya and the past, that for them, history is not “something that happened two hundred years ago”, but rather something which affects their everyday lives. In essence, history is living, history is relevant, history is now.

To this affect, the preservation of memory is a vital part of Russian culture and identity. During the years of Gorbachev’s glasnost and perestroika, a group of dedicated individuals gathered together and formed Memorial, a society dedicated to “the awakening and preservation of the societal memory of the severe political persecution in the recent past in the Soviet Union.” Memorial works because it is not based on a common ideology, but rather on shared fundamental principles, namely “unconditional respect of human individuality, human life, and freedoms of fundamental human values” and “the preservation of history as an

25 Ibid., 578.
26 Ibid., 579.
unbroken whole of the past, the present, and the future.” Memorial’s work includes collecting oral histories, written documents, artwork . . . in short, finding out as much about the victims of the repressions as possible, and making sure that the memory of the victims is never forgotten.

One final anecdote must be stated which recalls the responsibility which the living have - making sure that the memory of the dead is never forgotten.

Author Lev Razgon was permitted access to his file in 1990. His file contained his arrest as well as his wife Oksana’s arrest. His memory of that day nineteen years ago is strong in its purity and sincerity:

I have long since stopped turning the pages of the file and they have lain next to me for more than an hour or two, growing cold with their thoughts. My guardian [the KGB archivist] is already beginning to cough suggestively and look at his watch. It’s time to go. I have nothing more to do here. I hand over the files and they are negligently dropped again into the shopping bag. I go downstairs, along the empty corridors, past the sentries who do not even ask to see my papers, and step out into Lubyanka Square.

It’s only 5 p.m., but it is already almost dark and a fine, quiet rain falls uninterruptedly. The building remains beside me and I stand on the pavement outside, wondering what to do next. How terrible that I do not believe in God and cannot go into some quiet little church, stand in the warmth of the candles, gaze into the eyes of Christ on the Cross and say and do those things that make life easier to bear for the believer . . .

I take off my fur hat, and drops of rain or tears trickle down my face. I am eighty-two and here I stand, living through it all again . . . I hear the voices of Oksana and her mother . . . I can remember and recall them, each one. And if I remained alive, then it is my duty to do so . . .

If the reader learns nothing else from this paper, I implore them to remember this: the memory of a nation is not just the memory of the state, but of an entire people. Preservation of memory for current and future generations is something which many people, including Solzhenitsyn dedicated their entire lives to. It was through their selfless commitment, their

29 Ibid.
30 Applebaum, 586. The italics are mine for emphasis.
hunger for knowledge, and their need to present the truth that the true memory and history of Russia was at long last allowed to breathe.

Chapter 1: Alexander Solzhenitsyn: his life and works, 1918 – 1956

Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn was born on December 11, 1918 in Kislovodsk, Russia. Kislovodsk (English: “sour water”), located in the northern Caucasus region, was and still is known as a resort city famous for its soothing mineral waters.31 Solzhenitsyn’s unique surname derives from the word solod (English: “malt”). This signifies that during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, some of Solzhenitsyn’s ancestors brewed beer. A notable ancestor of Solzhenitsyn, Filip Solzhenitsyn, was exiled to Voronezh by Peter the Great (r. 1682 – 1725) for the offense of having lived on and tilled the Tsar’s lands near Moscow without authorization.32 Author David Berg writes of this incident and Filip’s character: “This was but one manifestation of his initiative, independence, and, to a degree, rebelliousness.”33 The same fierce independence and rebellious spirit characteristic of Filip carried on through the centuries, and indeed formed an integral part of Solzhenitsyn’s being.

Both Solzhenitsyn’s parents, although of peasant origin, received an education at the university level. Solzhenitsyn’s father Isaaki was killed in a hunting accident six months prior to his son’s birth. Isaaki, along with a friend, were hunting when “at one point Isaaki stood up in the stationary cart to disembowel a freshly shot hare, and in a movement of carelessness leaned his cocked shotgun against the cart’s side. The horse started, as if bitten by a fly. The cart gave

33 Ibid., 13.
a jerk, and the shotgun fell and exploded, peppering Isaaki’s chest and abdomen with shot.”

Isaaki was twenty seven years old at the time of his death.

Solzhenitsyn’s mother, nee Taissia Zakharovna Shcherbak, then twenty three years old, was without a husband and soon expecting a child. The daughter of a poor yet successful Ukrainian farmer, Taissia was raised in the Orthodox faith and received a good education. Solzhenitsyn’s Ukrainian ancestry was both an essential part of his life and also a source of pride: “Ukrainian and Russian are intermingled in my blood, in my heart, and in my thoughts.” The young Alexander was raised by his mother and various family members who often took care of him while his mother worked.

One of the most influential family members on young Alexander was his Aunt Irina. Irina instilled in Solzhenitsyn a deep - seated respect and awe for the Russian Orthodox faith, the importance of Russian history, and love of country. Due to Taissia’s position as the daughter of a well-to-do landowning peasant, she was viewed by the Soviet government as a hostile element in Soviet society. Michael Scammell further explains that the official policy was to avoid hiring such people in the first place; however, if such people were indeed hired, to place them in the least secure, lowest-paid, most undesirable jobs possible. Eventually, she got a job as a shorthand typist, but this did not last for long. Unfortunately, Taissia was never able to keep her job for long due to the discriminatory policy against so called “social aliens” such as herself.

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36 Scammell, 43.
37 Ibid., 55.
38 Ibid., 47.
Despite societal discrimination and the burdens of being a single parent, Taissia and her son Alexander managed to survive on what little they had. Together, she and young Sanya 39 lived in “a broken-down little hut” in Rostov, before they received “better housing” in the form of a reconstructed stable. Solzhenitsyn on his living conditions: “I was always cold. There was a draft. The coal we used for heat was hard to get. Water had to be carried from afar.” 40 In addition to helping his mother with household chores, Solzhenitsyn was also responsible for finding food for the both of them. “Ration card in hand, the ten-year-old-boy took his place in the line at permanently beleaguered food shops. The waiting consumed many hours, and demanded real physical endurance”41. The lessons and experiences which Solzhenitsyn acquired during his childhood profoundly shaped his character in the years to come.

In 1937, the eighteen year old Solzhenitsyn enrolled in Rostov University in the city of Rostov-on-Don. His ambition ever since childhood was to become a writer; however the time was not right to seriously begin this pursuit. Because of his mother’s failing health, Solzhenitsyn enrolled in the local university rather than Moscow University where he secretly wanted to go. At Rostov University Solzhenitsyn majored in math and physics; at the time there was no department of literature. Reflection of his years spent at the university: “I never intended to devote myself to mathematics. Literature was the greatest attraction, but I soon realized that mathematics would at least provide me with bread and butter.”42 In 1941, Solzhenitsyn graduated from the university with a degree in math and physics. Fresh out of college, recently

39 Burg, 20. In Russia, all Russians have a “nickname” in lieu of their full name. The nick name for Alexander is Sasha, however, Solzhenitsyn’s mother referred to her son as Sanya.
40 Burg, 21.
41 Ibid., 21.
married (in 1940, he married Natalya Reshetovskaya) the young writer-at-heart had no real clear-cut plans for his future.

Solzhenitsyn did not have much time to relax. On October 16, 1941, all available reserves were mobilized by order of the Soviet government. Solzhenitsyn’s own thoughts upon his entry into the war, as described to his wife Natalya: “How difficult it was to leave home that day . . . but it was only that day that my life began.” The war and the events after forever altered Solzhenitsyn’s faith in Communism, the Soviet system, and humanity. In 1945, having served four years with the Soviet Red Army, Solzhenitsyn was abruptly and unexpectedly arrested. His correspondence with longtime friend Nikolai Vitkevich and the content of their letters prompted the authorities to arrest both Solzhenitsyn and Vitkevich. In their letters the two men openly discussed their dislike for “mustachio” (Stalin) as well as plans for a new political party based solely on Leninist ideology. Solzhenitsyn was charged with “malicious slander”, and establishing a “hostile organization”. He was sentenced to eight years in the labor camps after which he would be transferred to exile somewhere far from European Russia.

In 1946, a year after his arrest, Solzhenitsyn was relocated to Marfino, a suburb of Moscow to work in a sharashka. Solzhenitsyn’s background in math and physics greatly benefited him, and indeed saved him from the truly horrible, back-breaking work characteristic of the camps. Solzhenitsyn worked in Marfino from 1946 to 1950. In 1950 Solzhenitsyn was again transferred, this time to Kazakhstan where he labored at Ekibastuz, a “special camp” designated specifically for

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43 Scammell, 111.
44 Ibid., 111.
45 Ericson, 10.
46 Ibid., 10.
47 Ibid., 14, a sharashka was a special research facility staffed by prisoners who conducted research for the Soviet state.
political prisoners. Solzhenitsyn and his fellow zeks worked as brick layers, foundry men, and miners. On March 5, 1953 Solzhenitsyn was released from Ekibastuz and immediately thereafter went into forced exile, having been assigned to the village of Kok-Terek in the southern part of Kazakhstan.

Soon after arriving in Kok-Terek, Solzhenitsyn secured a teaching position at Kirov High School in Berlik. As a teacher of astronomy, physics, and math, Solzhenitsyn was well liked by both students and faculty, who remembered fondly the creativity and enthusiasm which he brought to the classroom. Solzhenitsyn enjoyed this quiet but rewarding lifestyle, enthusiastically detailed in The Gulag Archipelago:

Shall I describe the happiness it gave me to go into the class-room and pick up the chalk? . . . When I was in Ekibastuz, our column was often marched past the local school. I would look at it as at some inaccessible paradise, at the children running about the yard, at the teachers in bright dresses, and the tinkle of the bell from the front steps cut me to the heart . . . It seemed to me the supreme, heartbreaking happiness to enter a class-room carrying a register as the bell rang, and start a lesson with the mysterious air of one about to unfold wonders.

While in Kok-Terek, having complained of pains in his stomach, groin, and abdomen, Solzhenitsyn was diagnosed with cancer. He was sent to Tashkent, Uzbekistan which had better medical facilities than the local hospitals. In mid-March of 1954, Solzhenitsyn was released, but had to return again in June to complete his radiation treatment. Luckily, the treatment had eradicated all of the cancer cells from Solzhenitsyn’s body. His experience in Tashkent formed

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48 Ibid., 14.
50 Ericson, 14.
51 Ibid., 15.
52 Scammell, 321.
the basis for his novel *Cancer Ward* which later became one of the author’s most well-known works.\(^55\)

In April of 1956, Solzhenitsyn was officially rehabilitated by the Soviet government. With his sentenced annulled and his exile lifted, Solzhenitsyn left Kazakhstan as quickly as possible, eager to return to the “coolness and greenery” of central Russia – a part of Russia which held fond, happy memories of happier, less troublesome times.\(^56\) Solzhenitsyn’s sojourn from the dry, dusty steppes of Central Asia to the lush green countryside of his native Russia was a truly momentous occasion in his life.

Overcome with emotions, during the train ride Solzhenitsyn “went along the corridor to a platform where the upper half of the door was open, and stood there for what seemed an eternity, gazing out at the Russian countryside. The wind rushed into his face and the tears streamed from his eyes.”\(^57\) For now, all was well. Alexander Solzhenitsyn – student, soldier, former zek, husband, teacher, cancer survivor and writer - one of Mother Russia’s many sons – was finally coming home.

**One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich**

Frequently, Solzhenitsyn was hailed as being “the next Dostoevsky” or compared in other favorable ways to his famous Russian counterpart. It is therefore interesting to note that in 1962, one hundred years after the publication of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the House of the Dead* – a descriptive novel chronicling his time spent in a Siberian labor camp, Solzhenitsyn made his own

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 339, 344.  
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 354.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 355.
literary debut with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.\(^{58}\) Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day* tells the story of the a prisoner, Ivan Denisovich Shukov, also known as number S 8554, and the various things he does on a typical day in the camp.\(^{59}\) Ivan is neither special nor unique, just average. Solzhenitsyn purposefully chose to endow Ivan with a very ordinary personality. To put it bluntly, he simply wants to get through the day. This simpleness and honesty of Ivan and his situation is very real to many people who, in the character of Ivan, also see themselves.

Ivan Denisovich is the prime example of the *malenky chelovek* or “small man”\(^ {60}\) so inextricably tied to Soviet culture. Knowing full well that he/she is one small insignificant, yet essential part of the Soviet system and having accepted their fate and place in society, these individuals are viewed as underdogs; perhaps the true heroes of Soviet Russia.\(^ {61}\) Christopher Moody’s description of Ivan is both eloquent and accurate: “The portrait which emerges of Ivan Shukov, is of an unexceptional little man, wielding the practical guile native to the Russian peasant, simple but not innocent, sly but not dishonest, insulted but not a weakling, and submissive but not degraded.”\(^ {62}\) The very last page of the book perfectly echoes Moody’s and also serves as a good summation of the novel:

Shukov went to sleep fully content. He’d had many strokes of luck that day: they hadn’t put him in the cells; they hadn’t sent his squad to the settlement; he’d swiped a bowl of kasha\(^ {63}\) at dinner, the squad leader had fixed the rates well; he’d built a wall and enjoyed doing it; he’d smuggled that bit of hacksaw blade through; he’d earned a favor from Tsezar that evening; he’d bought that tobacco. And he hadn’t fallen ill. He’d got over it.

A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day.

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\(^{58}\) Moody, 37.

\(^{59}\) Rothberg, 19.

\(^{60}\) Smith, Hedrick, *The Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 351, referencing a word used by Gogol.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 351.

\(^{62}\) Moody, 48.

\(^{63}\) Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Signet Classic, 1963), 139, *kasha* is a type of porridge, similar to oatmeal.
There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that in his stretch. From the first clang of the rail to the last clang of the rail.

Three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days.

The three extra days were for leap years.\(^{64}\)

Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day* was first printed in *Novy Mir* (English: “New World”) in 1962 through permission granted by Nikita Khrushchev himself.\(^{65}\) The publication of *One Day* came only a few years after Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the Twentieth Party Congress where he openly decried both Stalin and the terror implemented during the Stalinist regime.\(^{66}\) In addition to his speech, Khrushchev was looking for a way to publically denounce the atrocities and repressions committed under Stalin. Allowing *One Day* to be published was important because it provided both the perfect opportunity to “cleanly” break with Stalin and Stalinist ideology, and also served as written evidence of the horrors and sufferings of Stalin’s labor camps.

*The First Circle*

Following the success of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn believed that the Soviet government’s “changed” attitude and leniency of censorship would allow him to publish *The First Circle*. Solzhenitsyn began writing *The First Circle* in 1955 while still an exile in Kazakhstan, and completed the first draft four years later, in 1958.\(^{67}\) In 1964, Solzhenitsyn sent *Novy Mir* a manuscript of his work.\(^{68}\) This eighty-seven chapter version was purposefully censored by Solzhenitsyn himself who hoped that his future works would still be allowed

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\(^{64}\) Ibid., 139.

\(^{65}\) Rothberg, xiv.


\(^{67}\) Moody, 104.

\(^{68}\) Moody, 104.
publication in the Soviet Union. It would be a decade before the novel was finally published, in 1968\textsuperscript{69}, and even longer before the ninety six chapter version was available in English.\textsuperscript{70}

*The First Circle* is described by Solzhenitsyn as being “polyphonic”, meaning that at various times throughout the novel, the story is told from the viewpoint of a specific character. When the focus is shifted to a particular individual, they in essence temporarily become the main character.\textsuperscript{71} Christopher Moody’s explanation of the novel’s structure is clear and well articulated: “the result is a kind of literary mosaic, given cohesion by consistent themes binding the varied parts into a syncretic whole.”\textsuperscript{72} Like *One Day*, as well as most of his other works, Solzhenitsyn keeps the events within a very short time frame;\textsuperscript{73} however, unlike *One Day*, the characters and setting of *The First Circle* are not boxed in by constraints of place as are the characters used by Solzhenitsyn in *One Day*.\textsuperscript{74}

*The First Circle* derives its title from Dante’s *Inferno*, and the various circles of hell. A superb example of Solzhenitsyn’s use of the first circle is described in the following passage where a prisoner, Lev Grigorich, is amazed at the freedom he has in the *sharashka*:

Where have I landed? They won’t be driving me out into icy water tomorrow! An ounce and a half of butter! Black bread – *out on the table*! They don’t forbid books! You can shave yourself! The guards don’t beat the zeks. . . Perhaps I’m in heaven.

No, dear sir, said Rubin, you are just as you were previously, in hell. But you have risen to its best and highest circle – the first circle.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{70} In 2005, Harry Willetts completed the English translation of the more complete, ninety six chapter version of *The First Circle*.
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Moody, 106.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 106.
  \item \textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 107.
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Kodjak, Andrej, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978), 75.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} *The First Circle*, 8.
\end{itemize}
The setting of *The First Circle* is a *sharashka* on the outskirts of Moscow, in a district called Mavrino. The events in *The First Circle* take place in three days, December 24 – 27, 1951. The main character, Gleb Nerzhin, described by Edward Ericson as being, “the author’s alter-ego” is a sentiment echoed by many who knew Solzhenitsyn personally, who describe Nerzhin as being, “an extraordinarily truthful and accurate picture” of Solzhenitsyn during his time spent at Mavrino. The plot of the novel revolves around prisoners doing “work of special importance”, also known as experiments for the Soviet state. Through the eyes of the characters, Solzhenitsyn aptly yet powerfully conveys the moral struggle between the individual and the regime, and ultimately the *spiritual* triumph of the individual over an oppressive, despotic regime.

**The Gulag Archipelago**

While it is true that all of Solzhenitsyn’s works are important, his 1973 literary masterpiece, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918 – 1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* is arguably his signature piece. At a time when it was unsafe to speak out against the Soviet government, Solzhenitsyn was busy writing the work which, in his own words was destined to affect the course of history. So popular was *Gulag* internationally that by the mid-1980s, it had

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77 Ericson, 83, Marfino in Russian.

78 Ibid., 83.

79 Ibid., 84.

80 Ibid., 84.

81 Hosking, 103.

82 Kodjak, 103, the italics are mine.

83 Ericson, 107.
been translated into some thirty five languages and sold more than thirty million copies.\textsuperscript{84} While 
\textit{Gulag}’s marketability was significant, also important was the role it played in exposing the 
horrors of Communism and the truth behind the repressive Soviet government, which thus 
helped to hasten the complete and utter collapse of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{85} The age-old saying, “the 
pen is mightier than the sword” is very appropriate when describing the novel which, quite 
literally, took the world by storm.\textsuperscript{86}

Solzhenitsyn began writing \textit{The Gulag Archipelago} is 1958. Most of the book was 
written during two winters spent in Estonia, 1965-66 and 1966-67, where he wrote in peace and 
protection.\textsuperscript{87} Due to security reasons, never once was the entire manuscript of \textit{Gulag} in 
Solzhenitsyn’s hands at any given time.\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Gulag} was completed in 1968, exactly ten years after 
he began writing it.\textsuperscript{89} After many months spent brooding over what to do about the book, 
Solzhenitsyn gave orders to his contacts in the West that it be published on January 7, the 
Orthodox Christmas; however, the book was ultimately published in Paris by the Y.M.C.A. Press 
on December 28, 1973.\textsuperscript{90}

\textit{The Gulag Archipelago} chronicles the history of the penal system in Russia from its 
inception in 1918 to Solzhenitsyn’s release in 1956.\textsuperscript{91} Many different aspects of camp life are 
covered in the three volumes. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of \textit{Gulag} is its moral message. 
True, Solzhenitsyn wrote \textit{Gulag} to expose the world of the labor camps to outsiders, but he also

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 107. 
\textsuperscript{85} Ericson, Edward E. Jr., and Daniel J. Mahoney, \textit{The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947 – 
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The Soul and Barbed Wire}, 107. 
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{The Solzhenitsyn Reader}, 210. 
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{The Solzhenitsyn Reader}, 210. 
\textsuperscript{89} Moody, 186. 
\textsuperscript{90} Scammell, 823-824. 
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{The Solzhenitsyn Reader}, 211.
wrote it as a reflection on the human condition; a morality tale of sorts. When asked why he wrote *Gulag*, Solzhenitsyn responded that, “we just don’t know our history. . .”\(^92\) Thanks to Alexander Solzhenitsyn who, through his writing, acknowledged the pain and suffering of millions, the whole world knows and remembers this dark and shameful part of Russia’s past.

**Chapter 2: Solzhenitsyn and the American Press**

The events of late 1973 through mid-February 1974 covered by the *New York Times* concerning Solzhenitsyn presented Americans with a detailed picture of the persecution of the dissident writer by the Soviet government. One of the journalists who closely followed the Solzhenitsyn story was Hedrick Smith. Smith, along with his wife and children, lived in Moscow from 1971 to 1974.\(^93\) In 1974, Smith received the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of events in Russia and Eastern Europe.\(^94\) It was through journalists such as Hedrick Smith that America was made aware of the depth and seriousness of the issue involving Solzhenitsyn and the Soviet government.

**December 31, 1973 – January 5, 1974**

On December 31, 1974, three days after the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918 – 1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, Vol. 1* in Paris, Solzhenitsyn wrote an article, titled “Solzhenitsyn on His Own Imprisonment” printed in the *New York Times*. The article provides a detailed description of the writer’s arrest as well as time spent in prison. While serving at the front in World War II (1945), Solzhenitsyn was arrested, taken to Moscow and

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incarcerated in Lubyanka prison. Solzhenitsyn recalls his forceful arrest: “suddenly . . . two counter-intelligence men stepped forward . . . and with four hands simultaneously grabbed at the star on my cap, my shoulder boards, my officer’s belt, my map case, and shouted theatrically: ‘You are under arrest!’” After his arrest, Solzhenitsyn led the Smersh\(^95\) counter-intelligence men to the Lubyanka, because the Smersh men did not know the way. Because of his navigational service, the Smersh men put Solzhenitsyn not in a regular cell, but rather in a punishment cell. Solzhenitsyn describes the punishment cell: “It was the length of one human body and there was width enough for three to lie packed in tightly. A fourth person was too much. As it happened, I was the fourth, pushed in after midnight. We lay on the crushed straw floor. They slept and I burned.”\(^96\)

Also mentioned in the article is Solzhenitsyn’s friendship with Suzy, an Estonian prisoner, who opened his eyes to new and interesting things. Solzhenitsyn fondly recalls walks with Suzy and the discussions they had: “Now he was telling me, with fascination, about everything that was his. About Estonia and democracy . . . I listened to the principles of the Estonian Constitution . . . And it was not clear why, but I began to like it all and all of it began to be stored away in my experience.”\(^97\) The tone of the article and the author’s experiences of arrest and incarceration provide the reader with an accurate, first-hand account of one of the many prisoners of the gulag.

Hedrick Smith’s article, “Solzhenitsyn and Soviet’s Risks” also published December 31, 1974 points out the uncomfortable position of Moscow (the Kremlin). What should they do

\(^95\) Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, “Solzhenitsyn on His Own Imprisonment,” *New York Times*, December 13, 1973. As described by Solzhenitsyn, Smersh is an acronym formed from the first syllables of “death to spies.” He adds that the Smersh people thought that their name “served to frighten.”

\(^96\) Ibid.

\(^97\) Ibid. The italics are Solzhenitsyn’s.
about Solzhenitsyn? With the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* the horrors and mass repressions that occurred during Stalin’s leadership were now fully exposed; however, Soviet citizens were still demanding action. Smith recognizes two groups; the first consists of the victims of Stalin’s repressions who want retribution; the second group consists of the people who helped in the repressions that are fearful of reopening the past. As to Solzhenitsyn, any move to arrest him would inevitably lead to world-wide outcry against the Soviet Union. Harrison E. Salisbury’s quote about the Kremlin is excellent: “They are afraid of him. He is the voice from there [the land of the slave labor camps]. When he speaks they hear the voices of the millions who perished there. And they are afraid.” For now, the Kremlin wisely decided not to take any action against Solzhenitsyn.

On January 3, 1974, the *New York Times* ran an article titled “Statement on Solzhenitsyn.” The article was the English translation of a message from Tess, the official press agency of the Soviet Union, concerning the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s newest work, *The Gulag Archipelago*. Throughout the article the anger, sarcasm, and acidic mockery of the West and American culture are quite conspicuous. Among other things, Tess accuses readers of *The Gulag Archipelago* of attempting to, “poison the atmosphere of détente, to sow mistrust in relations between peoples, to blacken the Soviet Union, its people, its policies.”

Solzhenitsyn is openly attacked as being an anti-Soviet, with the belief that he hates everything about the Soviet Union, the Soviet people, the October Revolution, etc. Tess’s sharp, biting tongue also singled out American journalist Harrison E. Salisbury, stating that, “for

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101 Ibid.
the anti-Soviet types like H. Salisbury of the New York Times, reading the new work by Solzhenitsyn was, of course, a celebration much bigger than sitting under the Christmas tree.” 102

The article ends with the accusation that Solzhenitsyn wrote *The Gulag Archipelago* for the sole purpose of gaining personal fame and recognition.

Two days later, on January 5, 1974, Nan Robertson’s article, “Solzhenitsyn Quotes as Saying He Expects Arrest Over Book” was published in the *New York Times*. The article recounts Solzhenitsyn’s meeting in his apartment with two Paris-based lawyers. The lawyers, representatives of the International Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Man, whispered in German, English, and Russian with Solzhenitsyn and his wife Natalya. Questions were also written on slips of paper which were carefully burned by Solzhenitsyn after the hour-long interview had ended. 103 During the course of the interview, Solzhenitsyn expressed his feelings of impending arrest and trial for publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*. Although under pressure from the authorities, Solzhenitsyn calmly stated that, “I’ve lived a lot. I was in prison. I will carry on.” 104

**January 10 – 22, 1974**

On January 15, 1974, Christopher Wren, fellow *New York Times* journalist and colleague of Hedrick Smith, published an article describing an article written in *Pravda* (English: “truth”) newspaper the previous day. In his article, titled “Soviet Assails Book By Solzhenitsyn; Calls Him ‘Traitor’” Wren notes that the Kremlin accused *The Gulag Archipelago* of being, “stuffed with cynical falsifications, concocted to serve the forces of imperialist reaction.” Solzhenitsyn

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102 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
was described as being, a “thoroughly immoral” traitor and defector,” as well as a “renegade,” “reactionary,” “provocateur,” “supporter of the landlord-capitalist regime,” and a “profoundly immoral man.”

While Solzhenitsyn and all of his works were mercilessly slandered, Pravda’s main argument dealt with Solzhenitsyn’s resolve to provide evidence that suppression of the truth was a result of the nature of Socialism, and not a deviation from Socialist norms. Pravda quickly retorted by saying that it was absolutely ridiculous that Solzhenitsyn’s books were not allowed to be published in the Soviet Union, their argument being that anyone could publish their works whenever they wanted. The article also scornfully refers to the Stalinist repressions as having been “illegal.” As stated in the article: “the newspaper [Pravda] denounced as a ‘vicious fabrication’ the contention in the West that Mr. Solzhenitsyn’s book could not be published in his homeland because he had written the truth about ‘certain dramatic moments’ in Soviet history, specifically the ‘illegal repressions’ under Stalin.”

The degree of the attacks against the writer and his book effectively convey to Americans the extent which fear and xenophobia (especially of the West) was an ingrained part of life in the Soviet Union. So far, no official statement urging Solzhenitsyn to leave the Soviet Union had been issued. However, that was soon to change.

The very next day, January 16, Hedrick Smith’s article “Soviet Aide Bids Solzhenitsyn Go” made clear to everyone the Kremlin’s intentions. The person who suggested that Solzhenitsyn leave the county was “chairman of the board of the Writers Union for the Russian

106 Ibid.
Republic,” 107 Sergei V. Mikhalkov. The proposal was the first official call from the Kremlin for action against Solzhenitsyn since the publication of the first volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in December of 1973. 108 Although the official call for the author’s exile abroad had been issued, “it was not immediately clear whether Mr. Mikhalkov was advocating that moral pressure be brought to bear on Solzhenitsyn to persuade him to leave or that he literally be expelled . . .” 109

What was clear was Solzhenitsyn’s determination not to be intimidated by the authorities, but to stay in Russia with his family and continue writing.

Also mentioned in Smith’s article was Lidia Chukovskaya, a dissident writer. 110 On the subject of his colleague, Solzhenitsyn boldly proclaimed that, “for the time being, there are honest, fearless people such as Lidia Chukovskaya, my long-time friend, who have no fear before the pack of wolves and the whining of newspapers.” 111 In addition to written harassment from the press, Solzhenitsyn’s family was the victim of “crank phone calls,” “vague threats in the wake of a full-scale attack in Pravda yesterday morning declaring that he ‘merited the fate of a traitor’ for his books”, and increased police surveillance of their street and house. 112

On January 22, the persecuted writer urgently called on all Russians to “reject the lie.” The article begins with a statement by Solzhenitsyn to Soviet citizens to closely examine the past and denounce the current state of the country, which would lead to better conditions in general. Solzhenitsyn states that “If we openly admit our terror-filled past and severely condemn it – not just in empty words – then that will only strengthen trust in our country throughout the whole

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
world.” Solzhenitsyn continues in the same vein that, “it is not those who talk about crimes that have been committed who harm peace and good relations between people and nations, but those who committed or are committing them.”

It is true that Solzhenitsyn’s statements are directed towards everyone; however it is the younger generation which he targets as being especially useful to Soviet society. He proclaims that, “and if our youth, once it has learned everything and understood everything, does not support us, then that would be because of lack of courage . . . And then both it and we will have deserved out sad fate, and we will not be able to complain about anyone, only about our internal slavery.”

To elaborate, the lie is something which has been perpetuated by the government and Soviet society for many years. Solzhenitsyn insists that the lie is so much a part of Soviet life that breaking with the lie would be a moral act, instead of a political one.

This act, unlike a political act, could not be reprimanded according to the law but would have an instantaneous change in the climate of the country. The last quote in the article by Solzhenitsyn fittingly sums up his feelings about his work and the involvement of the Kremlin: “The truth about all this was doomed to perish . . . They stifled it, drowned it, burned it and ground it to powder. But here it is whole again – living and in print. And no one can ever wipe it out again.” Despite the harassment of him and his family by the KGB, the open denouncement of him in the soviet press, and the inevitable exile which awaited him, Solzhenitsyn’s relative calm and optimism in the midst of the storm was truly remarkable.

February 4 – 15, 1974

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113 Ibid.
114 Ibid. The italics are mine.
115 Ibid.
The tranquility which had descended upon the writer was short lived. On February 12, Solzhenitsyn was forcibly arrested in his home. At 5pm, the doorbell rang and Natalya Svetlova, Solzhenitsyn’s wife, went to the door. Natalya inquired as to how many men were there, heard the one man answer “two.” The KGB agents (seven in all) swiftly and brutally forced their way into the apartment, and broke a lock on the door, all the while waving an authorization paper for Solzhenitsyn’s arrest. During the chaos the agents tried to look at various rooms of the Solzhenitsyn’s apartment, but did not have a search warrant. Solzhenitsyn was permitted to wear “heavy winter overclothes” as he was lead by five men, and taken in for interrogation. The whole ordeal lasted roughly half an hour.¹¹⁶

The circumstances immediately following Solzhenitsyn’s arrest are just as important as the actual arrest. After the writer was taken away, two men remained at the home for approximately twenty minutes, presumably to make sure that no outgoing calls were made or incoming calls were received. When the men finally left, Solzhenitsyn’s wife attempted to contact overseas correspondents to tell them of the incident, but the telephone did not work. Mrs. Solzhenitsyn’s mother then tried to make an outgoing call from a pay phone. She was able to reach some news reporters and managed to tell them a few details of the arrest before the call was disconnected.¹¹⁷ Later that evening, in a show of support for Solzhenitsyn and his family, a crowd of around twenty Moscow dissidents gathered at the Solzhenitsyn home on Gorky Street. The phone rang with encouraging calls of strength and support from around the world.¹¹⁸

Solzhenitsyn’s arrest had not been without warning. On February 8, a legal summons calling for Solzhenitsyn to appear in court was delivered to the Solzhenitsyn apartment. Mrs.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
Solzhenitsyn answered the door, but did not accept the summons, stating that there were no charges or reason for inquiry, and also noting that the document was poorly written.\textsuperscript{119} The man presenting the summons arrived at 12:30 pm and was wearing civilian clothes. Solzhenitsyn was not at home at the time of the summons delivery.\textsuperscript{120} Despite not being permitted to live in Moscow, Solzhenitsyn stayed at his wife’s apartment, undetected until now.\textsuperscript{121} Although this first summons was rejected, the Soviet authorities did not give up easily.

Three days later, on February 11, a second summon was presented to Solzhenitsyn. This time, the writer received it in person. Boldly and without restraint, Solzhenitsyn gave his reply: “In circumstances of insurmountable general lawlessness reigning in our country for many years – and an eight-year campaign of slander and persecution toward me personally – I refuse to recognize the legality of your summons and I am not going to appear for interrogation at any state institution.”\textsuperscript{122} He carried on, railing against the Soviet government: “Free the innocent from detention. Punish those guilty of mass extermination and false accusers. Punish the administrators and special units that carried out genocide (the exile of entire peoples).”\textsuperscript{123} Although not specifically stated in either summons, the reason for the summons was undoubtedly the recent publication of \textit{The Gulag Archipelago} which was not assessed by the newly established Soviet copyright agency, therefore making the publication illegal.\textsuperscript{124}

On February 13, 1974, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was officially exiled from his beloved Russia. Along with exile, Solzhenitsyn was stripped of his Soviet citizenship due to “performing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., “Soviet residence laws forbid a nonresident to stay in the city for more than three days without registering with the police.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
systematically actions that are incompatible with being a citizen.”

Solzhenitsyn was the first Soviet citizen exiled from the Soviet Union since the expulsion of Leon Trotsky in 1929. In a statement of strength and solidarity, Mrs. Solzhenitsyn stated that “We intend to follow him, certainly, but where, when – we just don’t know.”

After the writer’s twenty four hour incarceration and interrogation at Lefortovo prison, he was whisked away on an Aeroflot TU-154, accompanied by eight Soviet officials. The destination was West Germany. Upon arrival in Frankfurt, Solzhenitsyn was quickly taken to the home of friend Heinrich Böll, near Cologne. Solzhenitsyn’s arrival in the West was met with relief from some of his friends. Fellow dissident writer Vladimir Maksimov spoke of his and others’ vigil who were greatly worried about Solzhenitsyn; however, Natalya Svetlova was “disappointed” upon hearing the news of her husband’s exile. With the loss of Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet Union was quickly becoming depleted of dissidents. One of the few dissidents still remaining in the country, Andrei Sakharov decided to stay in the Soviet Union as opposed to emigrating to the West.

On February 15, Hedrick Smith’s article “Soviet Formally Accused Solzhenitsyn of Treason” was printed on the front page of the New York Times. According to family friends, Solzhenitsyn was given no choice in accepting the order calling for his immediate exile. He did not even know where in West Germany he was being sent until he glanced out the window and

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126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., “We” refers to Mrs. Solzhenitsyn and her three sons.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
saw the “Frankfurt-am-Main” sign at the airport. The same evening Solzhenitsyn was arrested (February 12), he was taken to Lefortovo prison, strip searched, and made to wear prisoner attire. He was then read the formal treason charge against him, namely “violation of Article 64 of the Criminal Code, which carries 10 to 15 years in prison or a death sentence.” Solzhenitsyn did not acknowledge the charge or sign the document, nor did he eat during his brief stay in Lefortovo.

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132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
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Igor Shafarevich appropriately sums up many dissidents’ feelings: “A great writer who was given to Russia by a miracle has been torn out of the body of Russia.” Undeniably, the physical separation of Solzhenitsyn from his homeland was a wound which would take many years to heal. The exiled writer knew in his heart that despite all obstacles, he would eventually return, with renewed strength and vigor, to the land of his birth, life, and death – Russia.

Chapter 3: Solzhenitsyn and the Soviet Press

For many years, the situation in the Soviet Union for dissidents was difficult to say the least. Writers, scientists, artists, musicians, and so forth were victims of the censorship and oppression which was (and still is – to an extent) part of the Soviet (now Russian) way of life. The treatment of Solzhenitsyn by the Soviet press was nothing less than abominable. The extent to which the authorities pursued and harassed Solzhenitsyn, his friends, and his family perfectly illustrates the fear and paranoia which hung like a poisonous cloud over the Soviet Union during the early 1970s. With the publication of One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962) in Novy Mir, the Soviet press latched on to Solzhenitsyn like a leech, forever an inextricable part of the writer and his life. Although initially, reception of Solzhenitsyn’s works was tolerated, as time

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
progressed the Soviet press grew increasingly irritated with the dissident writer who, much to their disappointment, would not go away.

*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962)*

In an article published in *Pravda* on May 12, 1963, various issues are discussed, including the legacy of Russian literature and censorship. Editor-in-Chief of *Novy Mir*, A.T. Tvardovksy speaks favorably of Solzhenitsyn’s book, describing it as “one of those phenomena after whose appearance it is impossible to talk about any literary problem or literary fact without measuring it against this phenomenon.”

Tvardovsky also mentions the impact and importance of Russian literature on Soviet history: “Since the days of Radischev and Pushkin our literature has always had a special historical quality: Imbued with the spirit of emancipating ideas and kinship with the people, it has been a powerful factor in the development of progressive public consciousness.”

Returning to *Ivan Denisovich*, Tvardovsky again stresses the importance of this work noting that *Ivan Denisovich* is significant due to two factors.

The first factor deals with the sources used for the writing of the book, i.e. the “specific materials” which were in fact Solzhenitsyn’s own personal experiences of working in the gulag. Also part of the first factor were the consequences of following the cult of the individual, i.e. Stalin or for that matter any other person who was raised on a pedestal and worshipped by the masses.

The second factor of the book’s importance deals with what Tvardovsky calls “the tradition of truth in art”. The structure of *Ivan Denisovich* “confirms the unchanging meaning of the tradition of truth in art and decisively counters false innovationism of the formalist,”

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141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
modernist sort.” The first part of the quote is fairly self-explanatory. The “false innovationsim of the formalist, modernist sort” could in fact refer to the traditional structure of novels. It could also refer to “bourgeois” (Western) novels.

While Tvardovsky’s appreciation of the book is quite obvious, the credibility of his article is completely dissolved when he speaks about the censorship of the Soviet press. Tvardovsky condescendingly states that “if it were necessary to demonstrate the breath of views of our party’s Central Committee concerning literature and art, the sole fact that it approved this story by A. Solzhenitsyn would be more than sufficient.” The fact that this obviousness is not initially apparent to the reader strikes Tvardovsky as being odd. He continues saying that “incidentally, this once again irrefutably proves the complete baselessness of the hostile talk of the ‘restrictions’ and ‘regimentation’ that according to certain people characterize Soviet literature.” To sum up the quote in its entirety: Tvardovsky believes that since the Party allowed Ivan Denisovich to be published, it shows the Party to be “just and benevolent”. Anyone who believes that Soviet writers are oppressed and victimized is ignorant and stupid. The divisive issue of censorship was repeatedly brought up in Soviet society.

In “Congress Discussion of Brezhnev’s Report” published in Pravda on April 3, 1966, censorship and its ability to shape a nation is explicitly discussed. As written in the report concerning censorship: “Every artist in our country, as is known, has the right to create freely, to write whatever he likes, without the slightest limitation. But by the same token our party, our

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145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 “1964 Lenin Prize in Science, Technology and the Arts,” Current Digest of the Soviet Press, May 13, 1964. It is interesting to note that One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich was considered for the Lenin Prize of 1964. Although the positive aspects of the book were discussed, in the end, the negative qualities cancelled out the positive qualities and the book was not selected for the prize.
government agencies enjoy the right of free selection of what is to be printed.”149 The importance of the literature being published and distributed rests largely on the dissemination of Leninist ideology and the “growth of a communist consciousness in the masses.”150

The fact that some literature directly went against Leninist/Communist principles was seen as a direct threat to the Soviet system. This literature damages all of Soviet society and “directly distort our realities, preaching pessimism, skepticism, and defeatism, tendentiously distorting various stages in the life of the Soviet people – as is done, for instance, in the story ‘A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich’.151 The “damaging literature” so vehemently decried by Soviet authorities was in fact, the truth; a truth which the Kremlin was not willing to admit to themselves or the world.

While there were undoubtedly more opponents to Ivan Denisovich than proponents, a few critics who liked the book did contribute articles to the Soviet press. One such critic was Grigory Baklanov. Initially published in Literaturnaya gazeta (English: “literary newspaper”) on November 22, 1962, Baklanov’s article showers praise on Solzhenitsyn’s debut work. Baklanov, like Tvardovsky, stresses the magnitude of Ivan Denisovich stating that although Solzhenitsyn was relatively unknown, “we are confident however, that this man will have much to tell people . . . The time has come to try to understand what happened.”152

On Ivan Denisovich Baklanov notes the maturity and thoughtfulness of Solzhenitsyn’s writing mentioning that “the tale is calmly written, with restraint and even humor; and the

150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
everyday simplicity of manner carries even more forceful effect.” Baklanov’s view of the *zeks* is both humble and touching; referring to them as “amazing persons” He continues his thoughts about the *zeks* and rightly concludes that “these people who had experienced everything retained a stern kindness, a respect for man, a surprising fact and a dignity rare in those conditions of life.”

In addition to *Ivan Denisovich* Baklanov writes of erasing the cult of the individual. The task of completely erasing the cult of the individual from society will be both long and difficult; however, the literature of a nation carries enormous weight in bringing the nation back from catastrophe into the light. Although the whole article speaks positively about *Ivan Denisovich* it is the book’s message and consequences which are most prominent. To those who believe that old wounds need not be reopened, Baklanov lucidly and effortlessly writes the counter-argument: “But need we reopen old wounds? Is this necessary now? Old, healed wounds do not pain. But a wound that still bleeds must be healed and not cravenly hidden from sight. And there is only one cure – truth.” Without a doubt, the antidote for the toxic cloud hanging ominously over the U.S.S.R. was now more than ever desperately needed.

**Continued provocation of Solzhenitsyn (1968)**

Surprisingly, the publication of *The First Circle* (1968) did not elicit the same frenzied response from the press which ushered in the arrival of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* six years previously. For the year 1968, only one mention of *The First Circle* was made. In the

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153 Ibid.
154 prisoners of the gulag
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
article “Literaturnaya Warns Solzhenitsyn to Repudiate His Works” published on July 17, 1968 in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, the author expresses their disappointment in Solzhenitsyn’s lack of concern and outspokenness concerning his works being published abroad by “enemy provocateurs”, i.e. American and Western European press.\(^{159}\)

The author’s sentiments are forcefully articulated: . . . “a number of foreign publishing houses, continuing to inflame anti-Soviet passions, recently announced that they were preparing to publish another of A. Solzhenitsyn’s works, ‘In the First Circle,’ containing malicious slander of our social system.”\(^{160}\) The fact that more is not written about *The First Circle* is indicative of the Soviet system’s picking and choosing which pieces of literature to praise, which pieces to slander, and which pieces to completely ignore. However, Solzhenitsyn was far from forgotten by the Soviet press who incessantly put unnecessary and harmful pressure on him.

In December 1969, the decision was officially made to expel Solzhenitsyn from the U.S.S.R. Writers’ Union. At a meeting of the Ryazan Writers organization, of which Solzhenitsyn was a member, the group discussed the recent flurry of activity involving Solzhenitsyn and the negative atmosphere this controversy had caused in the Soviet Union.\(^{161}\) A critical issue of the meeting was the responsibility of Soviet writers to uphold the ideologies of the communist party and to combat “the exacerbated ideological struggle in the world today.”\(^{162}\) The article states clearly the members’ feelings toward Solzhenitsyn: “The meeting noted unanimously that A. Solzhenitsyn’s conduct has been antisocial in nature and is fundamentally at variance with the principles and tasks formulated in the Charter of the U.S.S.R. Writers’

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\(^{160}\) Ibid.


\(^{162}\) Ibid.
The voices of the literary elite had spoken: Solzhenitsyn was unfit for membership in the U.S.S.R. Writers’ Union. The outcome, while devastating, is hardly shocking.

Only a week later, on December 17, 1969 the very same union of writers who had expelled Solzhenitsyn now urged him to leave his homeland and emigrate elsewhere. The article, titled “Writers’ Union Hints Solzhenitsyn Should Emigrate” originally published in Literaturnaya gazeta, basically reiterates the same anti-Solzhenitsyn hate speech. Solzhenitsyn as the “leader of the political opposition in the U.S.S.R.” and “a prophet of things to come” – both hailed by the Western press – are, understandably, mentioned only briefly. The fact that Solzhenitsyn “arrogantly ignored the just criticism of the literary public” and “has never opposed the use of his name and his works by bourgeois propaganda for slander campaigns against our country” was more of the Soviet Union’s bitter and relentless rhetoric against the dissident writer.

**Nobel Prize (1970)**

In 1970, Solzhenitsyn was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature “for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature.” The Nobel lecture first appeared in written form in 1972; it was not until 1974 that Solzhenitsyn traveled to Sweden to receive the award. The speech deals significantly with literature, specifically the role which literature plays in the world. Solzhenitsyn viewed literature as being

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163 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
an agent of change which could profoundly alter humanity. This conviction stemmed from the belief that literature could act as a fulcrum of sorts against which good and evil could be evaluated. This is best echoed in Solzhenitsyn’s faith in world literature as “one great heart which beats for the cares and woes of our world.”

While the news of Solzhenitsyn’s receipt of the award was lauded by critics in the West, at home in the Soviet Union the reception was considerably less warm. Die-hard Communists vehemently opposed to the declaration of Solzhenitsyn as the winner of the Nobel Prize viewed the actions of the Nobel Committee as politically hostile to the Soviet Union. The Soviet press had relatively little to say about the Nobel Prize, preferring instead to minimalize the coverage, so as to forget about it altogether.

In an article titled “Unseemly Game” originally printed in Pravda on October 10, 1970, the response of the Soviet government was typical of the hard-line anti-Western views which were pervasive throughout much of the Party and the Kremlin. On the subject of the Nobel committee’s selection of Solzhenitsyn, Party leaders had this to say: “It must be regretted that the Nobel committee has allowed itself to be drawn into an unseemly game, one which was by no means undertaken in the interests of the development of the spiritual values and traditions of literature but was directed by speculative political considerations.” The intent of this statement could not be more obvious.

Similarly, in another article originally published in Komsomolskaya Pravda (English: “young communist truth”) the Soviet press laments the Nobel committee’s decision to award the prize to Solzhenitsyn decrying that “in casting their ballots for Solzhenitsyn, the members of the Nobel

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168 Ibid., 116.
169 Ibid., 114.
Committee gave no thought to the fact that they were desecrating this prize.”

Thus, by giving the prize to an outcast dissident, who in actual fact truly was deserving of such a prestigious honor, the award itself was tarnished, the value considerably lessened.

An article titled “The Nobel Prize and the Cold War” published October 21, 1970 in Pravda perfectly sums up the mood and sentiments of the majority of Soviet officials concerning the Nobel Prize:

By its choice, the Swedish Academy deliberately wished to harm relations between Sweden and the Soviet Union and to play into the hands of the interests of U.S. imperialism. The Academy has also damaged the activity of the Nobel Foundation; as a result of what happened, confidence in the Foundation has been shaken, both on a national and on an international scale.

Fear of the West, especially Western imperialism as well as growing distrust between the Soviet Union and other countries added more fuel to the already massive fire which was quickly burning out of control.

The Gulag Archipelago (1974)

Whereas the Nobel Prize incident was dealt with swiftly and painlessly, with the publication of the first volume of his epic saga of the labor camps, Solzhenitsyn could no longer be ignored. In a frenzy of activity, the Soviet press was quick to denounce and defile every aspect of the writer, leaving virtually nothing unscathed. The events which unfolded in the following weeks and months defy logical explanation. The Soviet presses’ attacks against Solzhenitsyn unsettle the reader due to the viciousness and low-handedness which the Soviet

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172 Ibid.
government allowed themselves to be drawn into. The following excerpts are from articles printed in Soviet newspapers concerning the Solzhenitsyn question and what should be done to fix the problem.

On January 30, 1974, “The First Attacks on Solzhenitsyn” was published in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*. The tone of this article is particularly acidic, and does not miss an opportunity to refer to Solzhenitsyn as being a “slanderer of his socialist fatherland”.174 Dripping with sarcasm, it describes Solzhenitsyn as being “worth his weight in gold to anti-Soviet and anti-communist circles in the West.” The article continues, stating that Solzhenitsyn’s actions are not those of a Christian and humanist. A reference is made to *The Gulag Archipelago* as being “a New Year’s present, so to speak” to Solzhenitsyn’s beloved motherland.175

Another article titled “Dealers in Rotten Fruit” describe various “bourgeois” newspapers, among the newspapers mentioned, not surprisingly - the *New York Times*.176 The author of the article boldly states that “bourgeois propaganda can no longer openly oppose the idea of peaceful coexistence, so it is employing the services of slanderers.”177 The mere suggestion that Solzhenitsyn and other dissidents like him were directly hired to purposefully attack détente is absolutely ludicrous. The “rotten fruit” referred to in the title of the article is explained to the reader as being *The Gulag Archipelago* which is rudely being “palmed off on the world public”, with no hope of truly being effective.178

175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
“Solzhenitsyn Assailed as ‘Traitor’” graced the front page of the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* on February 6, 1974. Most important in the article was the statement about *The Gulag Archipelago*: “The book ‘The Gulag Archipelago’ is clearly designed to deceive and cheat gullible people by presenting all kinds of fabrications about the Soviet Union.”179 In an article published in *Pravda* on January 19, 1979, a Bulgarian writer states “what an ungrateful person one must be, what a filthy soul one must have, to use the good things produced by one’s own people, eat their bread, be brought up by their labor, and then slander that people’s power!”180

By now there was no turning back. The fire which had been growing, gathering energy and enthusiasm for years had erupted into an impenetrable wall of flames, mercilessly devouring its victims in its path. The only solution available to abate the catastrophe was something so horrifying to the Soviet Union and its leaders that it would rather see itself burn then turn to the logical solution – the truth.

**Conclusion**

In the years following his arrest and forced exile, Alexander Solzhenitsyn quietly faded from the public eye. During the 1980s, the writer made limited public appearances, preferring instead to spend his time doing what he did best – writing.181 For many years, Solzhenitsyn had been predicting the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. In his 1990 essay titled “Rebuilding Russia,

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Solzhenitsyn gives a logical reason for the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and also talks about the importance and role of local governments in Russian society.\(^{182}\)

Eight years later, he wrote “Russia in Collapse” – a candid account of his thoughts and beliefs about the fate of Russia at the turn of the twenty first century.\(^{183}\) Perhaps his most convincing argument presented in the essay is his call for all Russian citizens to labor for the good of the country, as well as the distinction he makes between serving the government and serving the Homeland. On this issue Solzhenitsyn writes:

We must not serve our government, but our Homeland. Our Homeland is what produced us all. It stands higher than any ephemeral constitution. No matter how shattered right now is Russia’s multifaceted life – we still have time to hold fast, to become worthy of our inexpungible eleven-hundred-year past. That is the inheritance of dozens of generations, both before and after us.

Then let us not become the generation that betrays them all.\(^{184}\)

Solzhenitsyn’s call to his fellow citizens of Russia could not have appeared at a more opportune moment in Russian history. The transition from an essentially Marxist economy to a capitalist economy required the help and dedication of all of Russia’s children.

**Portrayal of Solzhenitsyn by the American and Soviet Press**

Much of what people perceive in the world depends largely on how a certain individual or groups of individuals are portrayed by the media. The media’s role in making or breaking a person’s reputation is so widely known by the reader that examples need not be mentioned. In today’s world, the internet has taken center stage as *the* media outlet of choice; however, in the

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\(^{183}\) Ibid., 467.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 484.
1970s, the printed word, i.e. the newspaper served as the way the vast majority of people learned about national and international news.

At the beginning of the paper, several questions were posed in an attempt to more fully engage the reader in the topic of this paper. The questions asked refer to Solzhenitsyn’s portrayal in both the American and Soviet press, as well as the level of sympathy (or lack thereof) displayed by the journalists. Having spent countless hours reading and analyzing the articles written by American and Soviet journalists, the author concludes that by and large, the New York Times portrayed Solzhenitsyn as an unfortunate victim of the vicious and senseless censorship inherent in 1970s Soviet Russia.

Although the focus of this paper deals with the portrayal of Solzhenitsyn by the American and Soviet press from late 1973 – mid-1974, the coverage of Solzhenitsyn by the Current Digest of the Soviet Press in previous years concerning Solzhenitsyn and his works merited enough importance for its inclusion as well. By and large, the articles written by American journalists reiterate the Soviet Union’s hatred and malice of Solzhenitsyn. The author wishes to clarify by saying that the articles do not reflect the journalists’ personal biases for or against Solzhenitsyn. The articles were written by American journalists who were living in the Soviet Union during the time of Solzhenitsyn’s persecution in 1974; therefore, their writing accurately reflects their perceptions of the situation as it was handled by the Soviet government.

The charge that these writers were “anti-Soviet” was obviously an attempt to discredit them for accurately reporting the truth. While Solzhenitsyn was the subject of intense coverage in the New York Times during the first part of 1974, coverage of Solzhenitsyn by Soviet newspapers, whose articles were published in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press was
considerably less. It is also important to note that the *New York Times* did not refer to Solzhenitsyn in derogatory terms; however, they did report what was said about him in the Soviet press accurately, including the insults hurled at the writer.

It is interesting to look at the way the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*’s views regarding Solzhenitsyn changed over time. With the publication of *Ivan Denisovich*, many critics hailed the book as being “phenomenal”, yet still refused to see the extent which censorship marginalized and oppressed dissidents. One writer stands out as being an exception to the rule. Grigory Baklanov had many positive things to say about *Ivan Denisovich*.

In Solzhenitsyn’s debut work, he saw a tale that was “calmly written, with restraint and even humor” which was all the more powerful due to the “everyday simplicity of manners.”

What is most striking about Baklanov’s article is his call for the erasing of the cult of the individual and the cure which would save the Soviet Union – the truth. Such a proclamation was not uttered by the foolish or the faint of heart. With the exception of Gregory Baklanov, Soviet journalists did not like Solzhenitsyn. By the time *The Gulag Archipelago* was published, the claws of the Soviet press were extended; the teeth were barred, ready to attack. The attacks continued until Solzhenitsyn’s departure from the Soviet Union in 1974.

In June of 1974, an interview was held in Switzerland (Solzhenitsyn’s temporary home) between Solzhenitsyn and ABC News Correspondent Walter Cronkite. During the interview, the topic of returning to Russia was brought up. Solzhenitsyn spoke of his family’s close ties to his native land. Cronkite then asked Solzhenitsyn when he thought he would return to Russia. In characteristic enthusiasm, blue eyes twinkling, and a boyish grin on his face, Solzhenitsyn

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186 Ibid.
exclaimed “Ah when! Unfortunately, people can never forecast when.”” 187 Twenty years after
this interview, Solzhenitsyn’s long held belief finally came true.

Solzhenitsyn’s journey from America to Russia was faithfully documented by the BBC.
Minutes before leaving his Vermont home, he expressed sadness at his departure from the house
that had been him “home away from home”. Solzhenitsyn described the years spent in Vermont
as having been, “in some respects. . . the happiest and most productive of his life.” 188
Concerning the nature of departures, Solzhenitsyn stated that “all departures were a kind of
death.” 189 His work was finished, and there was too little time for him to start something new.
He saw returning to Russia as the completion of the last chapter in his life. He was returning to
his beloved Russia so that one day he too could become a physical part of the land that he loved
so dearly. 190

Return to Russia

On May 27, 1994, Solzhenitsyn, having spent nearly twenty years in Cavendish, Vermont, once
again set foot on Russian soil. 191 He arrived via plane in the eastern city of Vladivostok, having
spent ten hours en route from Alaska to Russia. The crowds which greeted Solzhenitsyn could
not have been more enthusiastic. Hugs, flowers, and the traditional Slavic welcome of bread and
salt were all part of Russia’s wholehearted embrace of one of her long lost sons. 192 The writer
speaks plainly about his hopes for the future, as well as his fears:

188 Pearce, 282.
189 Ibid., 282.
190 Ibid., 282.
192 Ibid., 281.
Through all the years of my exile, I followed intensely the life of our nation. I never doubted that communism would inevitably collapse, but I was always fearful that our exit from it, our price for it, would be terribly painful. . . I know that I am returning to a Russia tortured, stunned, altered beyond recognition, convulsively searching for itself, for its own true identity.  

Solzhenitsyn spent the next two months travelling across Russia. He wanted very much to reconnect with the Russian people and talk with them. He wanted to truly hear their voices and understand their concerns about life in the post-Soviet age. The Russian people in turn wanted to hear what Solzhenitsyn had to say concerning the state of the country. Many Russians expressed warmth and gratitude toward the aging dissident. An eager younger woman who waited for Solzhenitsyn’s train to arrive in Moscow states: “he won’t be able to do much here, but you can believe in him. There’s no one else to believe in.” A construction worker described Solzhenitsyn as having transformed his life: “After reading The Gulag Archipelago I could get up off my knees.” The mere fact that a writer of such force as Solzhenitsyn was able to influence such a wide array of Russians, from factory workers to teachers, is simply amazing.

**Solzhenitsyn’s death**

On Sunday, August 3, 2008, one of the world’s greatest and most outspoken writers passed away at his home outside of Moscow. The cause of death was heart failure, as reported by the late writer’s son, Yermolai Solzhenitsyn; however, the BBC reported that another source had “quoted literary sources as saying he had suffered a stroke.” Three days later, on Wednesday August 6, Solzhenitsyn was given a Russian Orthodox service, attended by the writer’s widow, sons, and

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193 Ibid., 281.
194 Ericson, 232.
195 Ibid., 232.
thousands of Russians who came to pay their last respects to one of Russia’s literary giants. According to his wish, Solzhenitsyn was buried in the Donskoy Monastery, final resting place of many notable Russian philosophers and writers.197

Gennady Malinka, 68 spoke openly and affectionately about Solzhenitsyn’s bravery “I admired him for his internal honesty and his willingness to stand up very intensively for his own views.” He continued in a melancholy voice, tears streaming down his cheeks “of course, nothing is eternal, but I hope every generation will have a person such as him.”198 Another well-wisher at the funeral, Tatiyana Nikolayeva, 59, expressed her discouragement at the small numbers of people who attended the service. “It’s a disgrace so few people came. . . You get the impression that the younger generations know nothing about him.”199

Ms. Nikolayeva’s sentiment is reflected in the attitude of Alexei Tulsky, 23, who recalls that “I may have read something by Solzhenitsyn in school, but I don’t remember. . . I don’t know him, so why should I go and pay last respects to him?”200 This attitude, while certainly not prevalent among all young people, is probably held by many. This young man’s statement, while annoying, begs the larger question. Why care about Solzhenitsyn?

Solzhenitsyn in our time

Oftentimes, a person’s worth is not truly appreciated until they have left this world. While this is not necessarily the case with Solzhenitsyn, there is an element of relevancy to the statement. Solzhenitsyn was a figure who struggled for most of his life against forces more powerful than himself. Since his boyhood and continuing on to maturity, Solzhenitsyn faced hardships,
sufferings, disappointments, and sorrows. What set Solzhenitsyn apart from the masses was his outlook on life. His innate optimism, deep, unbending Christian faith, and fervent desire to educate people helped him get through some of the darkest moments in his life.

Through his writings, Solzhenitsyn spoke for an entire nation. He gave a voice to those who had none, or those whose voices had been brutally silenced by those in power. Solzhenitsyn wrote boldly and fearlessly about events which he felt were important both to him and to his people. His works profoundly altered world literature, politics, culture, and many other spheres of human society. What makes Solzhenitsyn so appealing to contemporary readers is the relevance of the messages contained in his writings. Although written in the 1960s and 1970s, his works resonate today just as clear as they did at their inception. Now more than ever, a voice of the people is needed.

Although Solzhenitsyn stands out as the “poster boy” for dissident writers, it is important and necessary to remember all dissidents, who also suffered severe repression. Today, their accomplishments are viewed as nothing short of miraculous. In the face of extreme adversity, by writing the truth, these brave men and women deliberately challenged the iron-rule of the Soviet police state of the 1960s and 1970s. Due to Solzhenitsyn’s efforts, as well as the efforts of countless individuals both at home and abroad, the history, and memory – the living history of Russia and her people – will never be forgotten.
Willow

I was raised in checkered silence
in the cool nursery of the young century.
Human voices did not touch me,
it was the wind whose words I heard.
I favored burdocks and nettles,
but dearest to me was the silver willow,
my long companion through the years,
whose weeping branches
fanned my insomnia with dreams.
Oddly, I have survived it:
out there a stump remains. Now other willows
with alien voices intone
under our skies.
And I am silent . . . as though a brother had died.

~Anna Akhmatova, 1940

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