Overwriting Chaos: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Fictive Worlds. By Richard Tempest. Cultural Revolutions: Russia in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries Series. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019. 750 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Chronology. Photographs. $159.00, hard bound; $45.00, paper.
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Richard Tempest's first scholarly monograph is a monumental approach to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's (1918–2008) work. The writer's vast oeuvre comprises several different genres and Tempest focuses on his prose fiction, occasionally referring to non-fiction works (xvi). Tempest divides his book into two parts: "The Writer In Situ" and "Ex Situ." This does not relate to his time in exile and in Russia, instead dividing his work prior to his exile in 1974 and the second period referring to his work in exile and in Russia until his death in 2008 (xviii). How does this book differ from past studies on Solzhenitsyn? It presents several lesser-known short stories by the Russian writer (additionally to more famous works). The book contains transcripts of interviews Tempest conducted with the author and also numerous photographs, which sadly lack captions except for a few that include microscopic Russian descriptions. Tempest mentions the abundance of studies on Solzhenitsyn and their evolution into more mature analyses (xiii-xiv), alas, his own work is no evidence of this. Despite his apparent attempt to introduce novel perspectives—by citing Friedrich Nietzsche or Judith Butler—his study adds little to the many stagnant works written and rewritten by Solzhenitsyn scholars since the Cold War (xvii, 476). A major problem is the overall lack of scholarly distance from Solzhenitsyn's perspective, exemplified by poignant passages such as when, in a discussion of the *Red Wheel* (1971–2009) novel series about the pre-revolutionary period, Tempest concludes his chapter in unironic eschatological terms: "The Wheel of Satan is also the Wheel of History. And so, darkness descends" (467).

The book "reflects my own readerly agenda," he writes (xvii), and of that there is no doubt. Whereas he recognizes important themes in Solzhenitsyn's work, he bypasses a critical engagement with the author's work or ideas: his acrobatic expertise in jumping over controversial topics such as antisemitism or misogyny make it seem outdated. This is especially significant because he repeatedly approaches these subjects, and then swerves away at the last moment with seemingly instinctive maneuvers to avoid hitting the ugliness (examples follow).

In his review of this book, Georges Nivat already mentions that the question of antisemitism in the novel series *Red Wheel* begs discussion and he chastises Tempest's omission (*Cahiers du monde russe*, 61/3–4, 2020, 563–68). Nivat rightly indicates the need to dispel fictitious claims about Alexander Parvus, whom Solzhenitsyn inflates from mere footnote of history to a decisive and demonic force. Tempest celebrates this characterization without exposing its proven falsehood (448–51, 596). Besides mere neglect, Tempest's arguments are contradictory in crucial moments. Tempest underlines that Solzhenitsyn's strengths are his textured and humane portrayal of his characters, his "balance and restraint," and his historiographical precision (xv, 57, 394, 449). Yet he admits that the "author is hard on his evildoers" and he mentions how Solzhenitsyn likens his Jewish (often pseudo-Jewish) villains with animals (31). Moreover, Tempest describes how the "Jew" (in fact, non-Jew) Dmitrii Bogrov, whom Solzhenitsyn Judaizes and demonizes, embodies the author's belief in fate (358–59), and his conviction that Bogrov's shooting of Prime Minister Petr Stolypin in 1911 constitutes the "opening shots" of the execution of Tsar Nicholas II in Ekaterinburg in 1918 (355). Actually, Solzhenitsyn argues that this (in fact, historically inconsequential) crime of an anarchist not only led to regicide years later, but also to the killing of Kiev's Jews by the Nazis in 1941 as an act of fate (Elisa Kriza, *Alexander*

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Solzhenitsyn: Cold War Icon, Gulag Author, Russian Nationalist? 2014, 222–29). But Tempest abandons ship: he does not expose Solzhenitsyn's false causal links, or the fictitious and indeed antisemitic aspects of these representations.

Pointing to Solzhenitsyn's "particularly good" representation of "male desire" (34), Tempest glosses over Solzhenitsyn's ignominious representation of women. He decides not to criticize Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of a character's development from "rape victim to nymphomaniac" (488–489), among other controversial passages (425–27). In his analysis Tempest draws from Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1973) even in such instances, but he skips over Solzhenitsyn's relevant (and recurring) arguments that link rape to female depravity and that some women prefer rape over celibacy (Kriza, 179–86). In these cases, "male desire" sounds more like a euphemism for troglodyte desire.

Historical allusions in this book are sometimes bizarre, for instance, when Tempest discusses the character of a literature student who becomes a nurse at the camp infirmary in the novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962). Tempest writes: "The professionally unqualified figure in a 'crisp white gown' jabbing inmates with a hypodermic needle calls to mind Hitler's *Konzentrazionslager*" (100). He then describes the doctor, who adheres to outdated penological notions that work is always beneficial to convicts, and adds: "*Arbeit macht gesund*. He is a complete medical fraud. On the other hand, one recalls Varlam Shalamov: he was saved from death by starvation by a camp doctor who got him an appointment as a hospital attendant" (100). Tempest's gratuitous references to Nazi concentration camps—human experiments carried out by doctors and the phrase *Arbeit macht frei* from the Auschwitz death camp—are not buttressed by arguments, on the contrary, he describes how there is no evidence that the student-nurse is a sinister figure (101). Since pre-revolutionary times prison nurses were often convicts who were not professional nurses—and he knows that writer Shalamov was one in the Soviet era, so why the dubious Nazi comparison? Similarly absurd is the claim that the Soviets copied from the Nazis the regulation that prison inmates had to remove their caps to greet camp guards (79). Again, this practice stems from tsarist prison camps. What, then, does he wish to convey?

Indeed, Tempest reveals more than he bargains for when he candidly writes that "Solzhenitsyn is yet to be fully understood" (xviii). His pusillanimous analysis including his constant references to Solzhenitsyn's family's help in interpreting one passage or another strengthens the impression that he fears scrutinizing Solzhenitsyn's texts for himself (xvi, 24, 44, 47, 203, 591, 599 and others). This does not only belittle his analysis, but also Solzhenitsyn's work.

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Journeys Through the Russian Empire: The Photographic Legacy of Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky. By William Craft Brumfield. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. xii, 518 pp. Notes. Index. Photographs. Maps. $49.95, hard bound.
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This book is spectacularly beautiful and provides a look at the lands of the Russian Empire, as photographed by Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky in late Imperial Russia and then by William Craft Brumfield from the 1970s to the 2010s. Prokudin-Gorsky, Brumfield argues, sought to unify the empire visually, making it legible and in full color due to his innovative use of three-separation negatives. Securing the future of the empire required more than photography, however, and one of the main aims of the book is

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