One Day—Fifty Years Later

Andrew Wachtel

In November 1962, the Moscow journal *Novyi mir* published a novella entitled *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich) by an unknown author—A. Solzhenitsyn. As is likely well known to most readers of *Slavic Review,* the appearance of this simple story describing a single day in the life of an ordinary prisoner in the gulag was destined to become the most spectacular publishing event in the history of the USSR. It catapulted the author to instant celebrity, affirmed the leading cultural position of *Novyi mir* and its editor-in-chief, Aleksandr Tvardovskii, and seemed to guarantee that the USSR, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, was continuing to make progress in overcoming the evils of Stalinism.

Later in life, Solzhenitsyn provided an account of how he developed the novella, which speaks volumes about both his literary genealogy and his ambitions: "On one long winter workday in camp, as I was lugging a handbarrow [filled with mortar] together with another man, I asked myself how one might portray the totality of our camp existence. In essence it should suffice to give a thorough description of a single day, providing minute detail and focusing on the most ordinary kind of worker; that would reflect our entire experience."[1]

Before he became a celebrated novelist and sage, Lev Tolstoi had tried and failed to write his first work, "Utro pomeshchika" (A Landowner's Morning), in which he wished to describe a day in the life of his hero so as to capture, through myriad tiny details, the totality of his existence. Although he came to recognize that this was an impossible task, his first published work, *Detstvo* (Childhood, 1852), with its focus on the ordinary details of the child's daily existence, clearly builds on the unrealized project of "A Landowner's Morning," and the capacity to observe the tiniest details of life (both external and even more importantly internal) would remain a hallmark of Tolstoi's style even as he moved to epic projects such as *Voina i mir* (War and Peace, 1869). Solzhenitsyn consciously follows in Tolstoi's footsteps, beginning with *One Day* and continuing in his later monumental works, both those focused on the camps (*Arkhipelag Gulag* [Gulag Archipelago, 1973–78]) and his cycle of historical novels, *Krasnoe koleso* (The Red Wheel, 1971–91).[2]

Given the enormity of the Stalin-era terror, the deep trauma it left on Soviet

1. Quoted in Alexis Klimoff, "The Sober Eye: Ivan Denisovich and the Peasant Perspective," in Alexis Klimoff, ed., *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: A Critical Companion* (Evanston, 1997), 4.

2. For a discussion of Solzhenitsyn's dialogue with Tolstoi in the *Red Wheel* cycle, see my book *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford, 1994). Simultaneously, *One Day* is also in dialogue with *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* (Notes from the House of the Dead, 1862), Fedor Dostoevskii's fictionalized distillation of his Siberian prison experiences between 1850 and 1854. For a thoughtful consideration of *One Day* and Dostoevskii's *Notes,* see Hugh McLean, "Walls and Wire: Notes on the Prison Theme in Russian Literature," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics,* nos. 25–26 (1982): 253–65.

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society, and the seeming unwillingness of the state to address the issue, the desire to capture the "totality of our camp existence" would become an obsession for many writers in the post-Stalin era, particularly but not exclusively for those who had themselves lived through the reality of the camps. Although he was likely unaware of the work's existence when he wrote *One Day,* Solzhenitsyn's comments on his motivation for writing clearly echo the desire expressed by Anna Akhmatova in her introduction to "Rekviem" (Requiem, 1935–1940).[3] Many other writers would subsequently attempt to capture in whole or in part the experience of the gulag, most notably Varlam Shalamov, whose collection of minimalist stories (*Kolymskie rasskazy* [Kolyma Tales, 1966, 1978]) evoke the full horror of camp life through their depiction of everyday brutality in a detached, almost Chekhovian tone, and Evgenia Ginzburg, whose autobiography *Krutoi marshrut* (Journey into the Whirlwind, 1967) tells the story of a former communist believer from the intelligentsia caught up in the insanity of the purges of the 1930s and the camps.[4] But *One Day* was the first of these works to be published in the USSR and evoked the strongest reaction.

In the face of the enormous importance of *One Day* as a cultural and political event, it is easy to overlook its literary qualities, which are considerable.[5] The work opens with a series of simple declarative sentences that set the time and place and indicate the narrative tone that will dominate the entire text: "V piat′ chasov utra, kak vsegda, probilo pod′em—molotkom ob rel′c u shtabnogo baraka. Pereryvistyi zvon slabo proshel skvoz′ stekla, namerzshie v dva pal′tsa, i skoro zatikh: kholodno bylo, i nadzirateliu neokhota bylo dolgo rukoi makhat′. [Reveille was sounded, as always, at 5 A.M.—a hammer pounding on a rail outside the camp HQ. The ringing noise came faintly on and off through

3. "V strashnye gody ezhovshchiny ia provela semnadtsat′ mesiatsev v tiuremnykhocherediakh v Leningrade. Kak-to raz kto-to 'opoznal' menia. Togda stoiashchaia za mnoi zhenshchina s golubymi gubami, kotoraia, konechno, nikogda ne slykhala moego imeni, ochnulas′ ot svoistvennogo nam vsem otsepeneniia i sprosila menia na ukho (tam vse govorili shepotom): —A eto vy mozhete opisat′? I ia skazala: —Mogu. [In the terrible years of the Ezhov terror, I spent seventeen months in the prison lines of Leningrad. Once, someone 'recognized' me. Then a woman with bluish lips standing behind me, who, of course, had never heard me called by name before, woke up from the stupor to which everyone had succumbed and whispered in my ear (everyone spoke in whispers there): 'Can you describe this?' And I answered: 'Yes, I can.']." Anna Akhmatova, "Rekviem," in Roberta Reeder, ed., *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova,* trans. Judith Hemshemeyer, 2 vols. (Somerville, Mass., 1990), 2:94–95.

4. For a general consideration of Soviet prison camp literature, see Dariusz Tolczyk, *See No Evil: Literary Cover-ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience* (New Haven, 1999).

5. The difficulty of reading *One Day* as a purely literary work was clear even to its earliest readers. Thus for example, Victor Erlich wrote, "no sane person, to paraphrase Irving Howe, can be expected to register a 'purely' literary response." He was referring to Irving Howe's comments in "Predicaments of Soviet Writing," *New Republic,* 11 May 1963, 19. From Erlich, "The Writer as Witness . . . : The Achievement of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," *Slavic Forum* (Mouton, 1973), reprinted in John Dunlop, Richard Haugh, and Alexis Klimoff, eds., *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (Belmont, Mass., 1973), 197. Thanks to one of *Slavic Review*'s anonymous reviewers for pointing out this set of comments.

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the windowpanes covered with ice more than an inch thick, and died away fast. It was cold and the warder didn't feel like going on banging.]"[6] Quickly we recognize that the entire narrative will be presented in "style indirect libre" from the point of view of the protagonist Shukhov, a normal prisoner trying his best to survive his sentence. Solzhenitsyn's decision to choose for his protagonist an everyman, a semiliterate peasant not completely capable of understanding, let alone verbalizing his situation, contributes enormously to the immediacy of the narration. An intellectual hero would have likely analyzed his position, much as does the narrator of Fedor Dostoevskii's semiautobiographical *Notes from the House of the Dead.* Instead, Solzhenitsyn, through Shukhov's eyes and for the most part employing Shukhov's linguistic resources, shows simply and without unnecessary verbiage the stark realities of camp life. Equally important is his choice of a completely normal camp day. Shukhov interacts with other inmates, works, eats, but most of all endures. When the day concludes with Shukhov falling asleep to close the circle that began with his awakening in the first paragraph, we feel we have come in contact with the rare literary work whose economical structure distills a complex reality into a series of unforgettable scenes:

> Засыпал Шухов, вполне удоволенный. На дню у него выдалось сегодня много удач: в карцер не посадили, на Соцгородок бригаду не выгнали, в обед он закосил кашу, бригадир хорошо закрыл процентовку, стену Шухов клал весело, с ножовкой на шмоне не попался, подработал вечером у Цезаря и табачку купил. И не заболел, перемогся. Прошел день, ничем не омраченный, почти счастливый. Таких дней в его сроке от звонка до звонка было три тысячи шестьсот пятьдесят три. Из-за високосных годов—три дня лишних набавлялось . . .
>
> [Shukhov went to sleep and he was very happy. He'd had a lot of luck today. They hadn't put him in the cooler. The gang hadn't been chased out to work in the Socialist Community Development. He'd finagled an extra bowl of mush at noon. The boss had gotten them good rates for their work. He'd felt good making that wall. They hadn't found that piece of steel in the frisk. Caesar had paid him off in the evening. He'd bought some tobacco. And he'd gotten over that sickness. Nothing had spoiled the day and it had been almost happy. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty three days like this in his sentence, from reveille to lights out. The extra ones were because of the leap years . . .][7]

The final dry and ironic line of the novella, seemingly in the voice of an external narrator, effectively drives home the almost unimaginable length of Shukhov's sentence. For most readers, ten years is an abstract notion, not a time period to be measured in days. Only someone who, like the book's author and its protagonist, struggled through a sentence of this length would live the days of those years so intimately and individually as to appreciate the extra suffering caused by the extra three leap days.

6. Russian text from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow, 2006), 1:15; English text from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* trans. Max Hayward and Ronald Hingley (New York, 1963), 1.

7. Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 1:114; Solzhenitsyn, *One Day,* 203.

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That *One Day* came to be published at all is something of a miracle. Solzhenitsyn was, by all accounts, reluctant to allow it to be seen. Nevertheless, through the efforts of his wife, the manuscript was lent to friends who passed it on to other friends, all of whom told Solzhenitsyn that he had to try to publish the story. Encouraged by Khrushchev's public denunciation of Stalinism at the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961 and by a speech given at the same event by Tvardovskii, Solzhenitsyn asked his friend Lev Kopelev to transmit the novella to *Novyi mir* for consideration. It took a fair amount of internal cloak-and-dagger work in the journal's editorial offices to get the manuscript to Tvardovskii, who was taken by both the subject matter and the presentation of Solzhenitsyn's work. It then took much further maneuvering to get the manuscript in front of Khrushchev. Nikita Sergeevich, however, was a peasant himself, and the simple tone of Solzhenitsyn's prose as well as its implicit indictment of the Stalinist system was fully in keeping with his literary tastes and political needs. He personally approved the publication, and the novella appeared, to the amazement of practically all.

Early Soviet response to the work was almost universally positive, as everyone was aware it had appeared with the express approval of the First Secretary. Solzhenitsyn became a household name, and he followed up the publication of *One Day* with four stories in *Novyi mir* over the following three years. But the thaw was rapidly drawing to a close and Solzhenitsyn's plans to publish his more ambitious novels *Rakovyi korpus* (Cancer Ward) and *V kruge pervom* (The First Circle) came to naught. Soon, he would find himself the most famous dissident in the USSR, watched at every step by the KGB, until he was eventually sent into exile in the west in 1974.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of *One Day* there will undoubtedly be a significant number of publications, in both the scholarly and the public press. What is likely to be overlooked in this discussion, however, is what I will explore here: how the November 1962 journal issue of *Novyi mir* was structured, how that structure might have affected the initial experience of the first readers of the novella, and what this might tell us about how to understand Solzhenitsyn's debut work.

That the context in which a literary work first appears has an effect on how it is received, particularly when it is packaged not as a separate edition but as a section of a publication such as one of the Russian "thick journals," is something of a commonplace.[8] In the case of a work that made as immediate an impression as *One Day,* however, this is easy to overlook. Indeed, one might argue that Solzhenitsyn's novella created such a sensation as to have completely overshadowed the context in which it was published. In hindsight, this is clearly true, but that does not mean that in putting together the issue in which the work appeared, Tvardovskii was not thinking about how to con-

8. For a multifaceted treatment of issues relating to thick journals in Russia, see Deborah A. Martinsen, ed., *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997). See also Robert Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Ithaca, 1967), esp. 36–100. For a study of *Novyi mir* in the period before the publication of *One Day,* see Edith Rogovin Frankel, *Novyi mir: A Case Study in the Politics of Literature, 1952–1958* (New York, 1981).

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textualize a story regarding whose reception he could not be completely sure. As we will see, Tvardovskii took great care to "package" Solzhenitsyn's story in such a way as to emphasize its Soviet bona fides, framing it with texts that take up many of the same themes that appear in *One Day*, but that treat those themes in a far more orthodox fashion. Furthermore, he avoided tipping off the reader as to the historic importance of Solzhenitsyn's work: the typeface of the cover and table of contents were exactly as they had been for many years, and even the fact that Tvardovskii had appended an unusual editor's note, "Vmeste predisloviia" (In lieu of a preface), before the story is not noted on the contents page (see figure 1).

As it happened, very few readers ultimately appreciated the careful work of the journal's editor. The glowing review of the novel by the well-known writer Konstantin Simonov that appeared in the national newspaper *Izvestiia* just before the release of the November issue ensured that almost all readers were tipped off in advance to go straight to the story.[9] As a result, there were few if any fully naive readers of the actual journal issue. But since Tvardovskii had had no way of knowing that the laudatory review would be published in advance of the journal's release, it is quite plausible to imagine that he had planned and organized the issue precisely with the naive reader in mind.[10] In any case, as we will see, reading *One Day* in the context of the journal issue in which it appeared can shed new light both on the story itself and on the ways in which Tvardovskii tried to control its reception.

From the editor's "in lieu of a preface," it is easy to see that Tvardovskii was extremely concerned with how the story would be received, especially by those who might have found its forthright treatment of life in the camps offensive. His preface is a masterpiece of what Mikhail Bakhtin would have called double voicing; Tvardovskii predicts his potential reader's objections, brings them up, and then answers them in an attempt to control the reception of his message. In the very first sentence, he admits that what Solzhenitsyn is describing is "unusual" (*neobychen*) for Soviet literature. He hastens to explain that treating such material is necessary in light of the struggle against the "cult of personality" that the party and its leader (who is quoted directly at the end of the first paragraph) have endorsed, thereby deflecting any potential accusation that the novella is somehow "anti-Soviet." In the second paragraph,

9. The November 1962 issue of *Novyi mir* was released on 18 November 1962 in an edition of almost 100,000 copies. Simonov's article, entitled "O proshlom vo imia budushchego [From the Past in the Name of the Future]," appeared on 17 November. As a result of unprecedented reader demand, an additional 25,000 copies of the journal were apparently printed very soon thereafter, presumably in response to demand caused by *One Day*.

10. According to Tvardovskii's notebooks, he learned that Khrushchev had approved *One Day* for publication on 15 October 1962. See Aleksandr Tvardovskii, "Rabochie tetradi 60-kh godov," *Znamia*, no. 7 (2000), at magazines.russ.ru/znamia/2000/7/tvard.html (last accessed 5 December 2012). He met with Khrushchev in person on 22 October. Solzhenitsyn's chronology in *Bodalsia telenok s dubom* (The Calf Butted the Oak, 1975, 1996) indicates that he received the proofs of the story "just before the November holidays" (i.e., just before 7 November). This means that Tvardovskii would have had at least two weeks to decide what else would appear with Solzhenitsyn's story.

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НОВЫЙ МИР

ЛИТЕРАТУРНО-ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ И ОБЩЕСТВЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ

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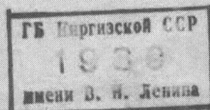
ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
«ИЗВЕСТИЯ СОВЕТОВ ДЕПУТАТОВ ТРУДЯЩИХСЯ СССР»
Москва



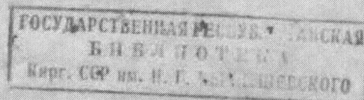


Figure 1. Cover of *Novyi mir*, 1962, no. 11.

he insists on the story's artistic value, while simultaneously asserting that such artistry could only be achieved on the basis of personal experience.[11] In so doing he counters two potential objections: first, that *One Day* is an "invention" that does not tell the real truth about the camps; and the equally damaging reading by which it is "merely" a memoir that does not rise to the level of artistic truth.

The paragraphs that follow describe what Solzhenitsyn is doing primarily by explaining what he is not doing, again sidestepping possible accusations on a variety of scores. *One Day* is not an attempt at an all-encompassing treatment of the camps (*Gulag Archipelago* was long in the future), even more important, the book should not be accused of leading the reader to despair. Its great triumph, according to Tvardovskii, is that it does not lead to pessimistic thoughts (one of the great bugaboos of Soviet criticism about any work), but rather to the kind of optimism that socialist realism was always supposed to evoke.[12] This is immediately followed by a compliment to existing Soviet literary norms, which supposedly do not in any way limit the material that can be treated by writers (just in case anyone might have thought that such limitations still existed). Tvardovskii closes his lapidary preface with two short paragraphs: the first assures readers that the editor does not want to prejudge their evaluation of the work (while simultaneously doing just that by saying that he personally feels that *One Day* heralds the appearance of a new "master"). The second is a curt explanation/apology to those readers who might find the (limited) use of prison camp jargon offensive, followed by a final claim that this is a work of literature that evokes a desire to share it with other readers.[13] Overall, one can say that the consistent thrust of Tvardovskii's argument is that despite the disturbing thematics of the story, Solzhenitsyn's work can and should be seen as an acceptable example of contemporary so-

11. Tvardovskii's tone here seems borrowed from Tolstoi's autocommentary on *War and Peace*: "*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* — eto dokument v memuarnom smysle, ne zapiski ili vospominaniia o perezhitom avtorom lichno [. . .] Eto proizvedenie khudozhestvennoe. [*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is not a book of memoirs in the ordinary sense of the word. It does not consist merely of notes on the author's experiences [. . .] It is a work of art.]". *Novyi mir*, 1962, no. 11:8; Solzhenitsyn, *One Day*, xix. Compare this with Tolstoi's words: "Eto ne roman, eshche men'she poema, eshche menee istoricheskaia khronika. [This is not a novel, still less a narrative poem, still less a historical chronicle.]" Lev Tolstoi, "Neskol'ko slov po povodu knigi 'Voina i mir,'" *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh* (Moscow, 1928–1958), 16:7; translation mine.

12. According to Tvardovskii's notebooks, he had, in the original handwritten preface that was read by Khrushchev, used the highly Soviet adjective *zhizneutverzhdaiushchaia* (life-affirming) to describe Solzhenitsyn's work, but on the advice of some colleagues removed it from the final published version of the preface. See the entry for 21 October 1962, in Tvardovskii, "Rabochie tetradi 60-kh godov."

13. Tvardovskii was correct in his fear that some readers would be bothered by the language of the story, as we know from letters written by ordinary Soviet readers immediately after the story was published. On this topic, see Miriam Dobson, "Contesting the Paradigms of De-Stalinization: Readers' Responses to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 580–600, esp. 590–92. See also D. Kozlov, "Otzyvy sovetskikh chitatelei 1960-kh gg. na povest' A. I. Solzhenitsyna *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* : Svidetel'stva iz arkhiva 'Novogo mira' (Chast' I)," *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii*, 2011, no. 1:178–200, esp. 181.

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cialist realism (although he never uses the term): it is true to life, optimistic, and fully in keeping with the party line in literature.

Immediately after the editor's name, Solzhenitsyn's story begins, with its unforgettable first line, quoted above. At this moment one might easily recognize that the preface was not the only way in which Tvardovskii was trying to control the reader's experience of Solzhenitsyn's text. This is because the attentive reader had already read these lines, or a variant of them, not twenty minutes before, at least would have done so if, like most readers probably do, this reader had started, not with Solzhenitsyn's story on page 8 of the journal (and, given that there was no way of knowing that this story was going to change the world, why would a reader have opened directly to it?), but rather with the beginning of the issue. Had our reader in fact done so, what would he or she have found, and how might his or her reading of *One Day* been affected?

As it happens, the texts that appear just before Solzhenitsyn's novella are a selection of lyric poems by the Lithuanian poet Eduardas Mieželaitis (1919–1997), the first of which is entitled "Gimn utra" (Hymn to Morning). In retrospect, reading the opening lines of the first poem gives the reader a vertiginous feeling of déjà vu: "Sperva razlichaiut na slukh / luch, v stekla stuchashchiisia zvonko, / chisteishii i utrennii zvuk— / zvuk solntsa—mednogo gonga. [The first thing that reaches the ear / is a ray knocking plangently against the glass, / the clearest morning sound / the sound of sun—like a bronze gong.]"[14] To be sure, Mieželaitis's morning wakeup call is a ray of sun rather than an actual gong, but this metaphorical wakeup sound passes through the glass, exactly as does the sound of the real gong that wakes Shukhov at the beginning of *One Day.* The person awakened in Mieželaitis's hymn is not a *zek* in a Soviet prison camp, but rather precisely the type of literary personage favored by contemporary socialist realist literature—he is a "man" (*chelovek*), who wants to "build, create, and work" (*stroit', tvorit', rabotat'*), precisely the activities in which Shukhov will engage on his construction site. Even the actual work that Shukhov will do, laying bricks, is anticipated in a description of Mieželaitis's worker who reaches for "clay and sand."

How should we understand the relationship between Mieželaitis's poem and Solzhenitsyn's text? Some may say, of course, that the echoes I point out here are a mere coincidence and should in no way influence our reading of the Solzhenitsyn novella that follows a few pages later. Even if they are, although it is difficult for me to believe that an editor as sophisticated as Tvardovskii could have possibly failed to notice the accidental intertextual connections between the two texts, the fact remains that there is a clear echo and it would undoubtedly have had an effect on anyone who read them in succession.[15]

14. Eduardas Mieželaitis, "Gimn utra," *Novyi mir,* 1962, no. 11:3. The Russian translation is credited to the well-known Soviet poet David Samoilov.

15. There is evidence that Tvardovskii specifically chose these poems as the lead-in to Solzhenitsyn's work. According to the critic Vladimir Lakshin (one of Tvardovskii's close confidantes) the censor who reviewed the original text of the journal affirmed that when he first saw it (on 17 October 1962) neither Solzhenitsyn's text nor the poems of Mieželaitis were included. On 23 October, however (the day after Tvardovskii's conversation with Khrushchev in which he received the go-ahead to publish *One Day*), the story and the

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Furthermore, I would argue, the first text read would leave a certain suggestion in the reader's mind regarding how properly to read the second text.

To be sure, the vast majority of readers might not in retrospect have remembered the suggestion, either because of the exceptionally powerful immediate impression made by *One Day* in comparison to Mieželaitis's eminently forgettable verses or because of the enormous amount of critical discussion generated by Solzhenitsyn's work in the months and years that followed. But this does not change the fact that Mieželaitis's poems, read before the novella, might well have left a trace in the reader's mind. In my view, the Mieželaitis poem was placed here precisely to emphasize the main point that Tvardovskii was so careful to make in his preface: *One Day* should not be read as a bitter and gloomy indictment of the Soviet system but rather as a somewhat unusual variant of the optimistic, properly Soviet attitude one finds in Mieželaitis's poems. After all, both works, though undoubtedly of different quality and in different genres, tell analogous stories. A symbolic Soviet "everyman" wakes up and faces resolutely and with a positive attitude the task of working and creating, regardless of whether he finds himself in a Vilnius writer's studio or in a Siberian prison camp.

The next poem, "Rzhavchina" (Rust), creates equally surprising connections with *One Day*. The poem's ostensible stimulus is the poetic "I"'s contemplation of a piece of barbed wire. Like Solzhenitsyn's hero, the poetic narrator has apparently been surrounded for some time by this symbol of the twentieth-century concentration camp: "priznaius', ia ochen' dolgo shel, / provolokoi opleten koliuchei. [I admit that I walked a long way, / surrounded by barbed wire.]"[16] Again, the main point of the poem appears to be to take what could be seen as a negative symbol and give it an optimistic spin. The barbed wire turns into a rusty rose cane, and the narrator proposes not to stir up too many difficult memories of this symbolic object: "Proshluiu bedu ne voroshu— / vse ravno ne vyrazit' slovami [Let's not wallow in old troubles— / in any case words can't express them]." In the end, just as Tvardovskii implies that *One Day* can help the reader overcome the legacy of the past, so the poetic narrator decides to overcome this image of the past and stride optimistically into the future: "My brosaem provoloku proch', / vetku rzhavuiu i nezhivuiu. / I ukhodim, pokidaia noch', / na dorogu, solntsem zalituiu. [We throw the wire away, / a dead and rusty cane. / And we head out, leaving the night behind/onto the sundrenched road.]" All is well. There were admittedly difficult moments in the past (during the time of the discredited cult of personality), but they have been overcome and now we can look with joy to the future. In sum, Mieželaitis's poems serve to set the reader up to accept Solzhenitsyn's admittedly more ambitious and potentially difficult to accept work in the best possible light, echoing some of its main themes and images in a much more orthodox Soviet way, thereby softening the edges of the work to follow.

Nor are Mieželaitis's poems the only contents of the November 1962 num-

poems were added to the journal manuscript. See V. Lakshin, *"Novyi mir" vo vremena Khrushcheva: Dnevnik i poputnoe (1953–1964)* (Moscow, 1991), 78.

16. Mieželaitis, "Rzhavchina," *Novyi mir*, 1962, no. 11:5. This translation is credited to Stanislav Kuniaev.

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ber of *Novyi mir* that provide a particular context for Solzhenitsyn's groundbreaking text. The only other Russian prose fiction text in the issue is by the now mostly forgotten Aleksandra Brushtein (1884–1968). This prolific writer, best known for her 1964 novella *Doroga ukhodit v dal'* (The Road Leads to the Horizon), was a lifelong communist, and her short story "Prostaia operatsiia" (A Simple Operation) appears almost immediately following *One Day.*[17] As with the poems by Mieželaitis, Brushtein's story creates a telling counterpoint to Solzhenitsyn's novella and implies an "appropriate" way to read it.

"A Simple Operation" concerns a woman *intelligent* (presumably an autobiographical avatar of the author) whose vision has been growing progressively weaker as the result of an eye ailment. Eventually, she realizes she is going blind, a condition she compares to prison: "Slepota—vot eto shto. Temnitsa do kontsa dnei. [Blindness—there it is. Like a prison until the end of one's days.]"[18] Although she is approaching the age of 80, she decides to go to the clinic of the great Soviet ophthalmologist, V. P. Filatov, for a risky operation that might restore her sight. In the train on the way to the clinic in Odessa, she reminisces about her earlier life. One episode in particular concerns the ability of the imprisoned to achieve inner freedom, a theme that resonates strongly with *One Day.* She recalls how, as a young writer, she had visited the iconic Soviet novelist Nikolai Ostrovskii. The author of the classic socialist realist novel *Kak zakalialas' stal'* (How the Steel Was Tempered, 1932–36) suffered for much of his short life from the terrible disease ankylosing spondylitis, which would eventually leave him blind and virtually paralyzed.

As Brushtein's narrator tells it, Ostrovskii's story is a variant of the same story that Solzhenitsyn tells about Shukhov in *One Day:* it illustrates how a person can be physically imprisoned by an unfair and implacable foe but nevertheless retain inner freedom. Brushtein's narrator walks into the room where Ostrovskii is lying: "Teper' peredo mnoi lezhal na krovati—mertvyi chelovek. [. . .] No Nikolai raskryl glaza, litso srazu stalo zhivym. [Now lying before me on the bed was a dead man [. . .] But Nikolai opened his eyes, and his face immediately came to life.]"[19] Ostrovskii's ability to fight through the physical imprisonment caused by his illness symbolizes for the narrator the crucial concept, "never give up" (*ne sdavat'sia*).

When the narrator arrives at the clinic in Odessa, she is housed with three other women. The presence of the other women allows Brushtein, as it does Solzhenitsyn, to escape the potentially solipsistic point of view of a single narrator and to include interpolated stories that capture a broader spectrum of Soviet life—in this case the women are a young Georgian student, a middle-aged teacher from Voronezh, and a young woman named Mura. What impresses the narrator about all of them is their willingness to fight for their vision. Like most of the zeks who surround Shukhov and whose stories appear at various points in *One Day,* they are not ground down by their unfair punishment, but rather ennobled by it. "Ochen' bol'shoe uvazhenie

17. The two works are only separated by a two-page translation by Samuil Marshak of the poetry of William Blake.

18. Brushtein, "Prostaia operatsiia," *Novyi mir,* 1962, no. 11:78.

19. Ibid., 80.

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vnushaiut k sebe te molodye, kotorye ia zdes' vizhu, s ikh udivitel'nym uporstvom, s ikh umnoi nastoichivost'iu v bor'be za utekaiushchee zrenie, za mesto v zhizn'—ne potrebitel'skoe, ne izhdivencheskoe, a nastoiashchee, trudovoe. [The young people I see here command my respect for their incredible willpower, their intelligent tenacity in their battle for their fading sight, their place in the world—not exploitative or parasitic, but true, working class.]"[20] Here we see the typical clichés of post-Stalinist socialist realist narration, all of which appear in one form or another in *One Day*—optimism in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, endurance, simple heroism, struggle for a better future.

At the center of these interpolated stories is the narrative of the woman from Voronezh, Mariia Semenovna Koreniako. And perhaps surprisingly, despite Tvardovskii's claim in his preface that the subject matter of Solzhenitsyn's story is "unusual," Brushtein's character reminisces precisely about the terrible events of the Stalinist era. Indeed, one might say that Brushtein's story is more about the horrors of the Stalin period than is Solzhenitsyn's. After all, although *One Day* is set in a "political" camp, Shukhov is said to have been imprisoned not for political activity but rather for having failed to avoid capture by the enemy during the war (and thereby is seen as a spy).[21] For Brushtein's character, however, an upstanding teacher and *komsomolka*, life is turned upside down specifically for political reasons. "V 1937 godu, v shkolu, gde rabotala Mariia Semenovna, pribezhali deti, ispugannye, v slezakh. Chto sluchilos'? Sluchilos' to, chto pochti srazu stalo v to vremia budnichny, i perestalo kogo-libo udivliat'. No togda—v 1937 godu—eto eshche bylo, kak govorit'sia, v novinku. Prishli kakie-to liudi, uveli otsa—muzha Marii Semenovny,—opechatali kvartiru. [In 1937 in the school where Mariia Semenovna was working, frightened, teary-eyed children came running up. What happened? What happened was something that was soon to become an almost everyday event at that time, something that would soon not amaze anyone. But at that time, in 1937, it was still, so to say, something brand new. Some people appeared, took away the father, Mariia Semenovna's husband, and sealed their apartment.]"[22] Brushtein leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that the arrest was unmotivated by any crime, merely a reflection of the overall insanity of the period.

In the end, however, the situation is not hopeless. After twenty years of imprisonment, the Soviet system, as personified by Filatov's widow, frees the narrator from blindness, and leads her to the new light of the post-Stalin Soviet remake. The story ends with the narrator on her way back to Moscow,

20. Ibid., 86.

21. That at least some readers made a strong distinction between those communists imprisoned in 1937 (who were seen by 1962 as having been unfairly suppressed) and those who found themselves in the camps for other reasons, such as wartime activities, can be seen from the letters they sent to *Novyi mir* after reading the story. See Dobson, "Contesting the Paradigms of De-Stalinization," 584–88. For further discussion of the distinction that some readers made between those whom they felt had truly suffered unjustly versus those whom they identified as true "enemies," see Kozlov, "Otzyvy sovetskikh chitatelei," 189–93.

22. Brushtein, "Prostaia operatsiia," *Novyi mir*, 1962, no. 11:92.

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experiencing the same upward, optimistic motion exhibited in Mieželaitis's poems and which Tvardovskii, apparently, hoped his reader would extract from Solzhenitsyn's novella as well: "I vot ia edu domoi v Moskvu. Edu i ne otryvaius' ot okna! Do chego prekrasen mir i kak mnogo v nem dlia menia zabytogo, radostno vspominaemogo snova! [. . .] idet poezd—zhizn' b'et volnoi za ego oknom. [And now I'm heading back home to Moscow. I go and can't pull myself away from the window! How wonderful the world is, and how much there is in it that I forgot and which is now joyfully coming back to me! [. . .] the train moves, and life surges outside the window.]"[23]

So what can we learn from rereading *One Day* in the context of its original *Novyi mir* publication? On the one hand, our analysis seems to indicate that Tvardovskii's attempt to shape readers' attitudes to the text (specifically to encourage them to see the work as a representative, albeit unusual, example of post-Stalinist socialist realist literature) was something of a failure. He did, to be sure, convince the most important reader of the day that this was the case; for had Khrushchev not approved publication of *One Day* it likely would not have seen the light of day, or at least would have appeared in a highly redacted version. At the same time, despite Tvardovskii's explanatory preface, and despite the intertextual suggestions provided by Mieželaitis's poems and Brushtein's story, it appears that the vast majority of readers simply did not concern themselves with the question of whether or not *One Day* was an appropriate work of socialist realism.

One of the biggest problems facing scholars interested in reader reception is the dearth of responses from normal readers at the time of publication. Generally, reader response critics must infer what readers thought by extrapolating from rare contemporary comments, using reviews (although reviewers, as professional readers, likely do not provide a representative sample of contemporary opinion), or retrospective reminiscences. In the case of *One Day*, however, we have a considerable number of more or less contemporary and more or less nonprofessional responses, which allow us to see what concerned Solzhenitsyn's early readers. And from these it seems that whether or not Solzhenitsyn's work was proper socialist realism was not high on their list of priorities.[24] There are several good reasons for this. *One Day* was published in a respected literary journal, which meant it had received official approval and was therefore, by definition, a work of socialist realism. Thus normal readers would not have felt it necessary to worry about this issue. But, even more important, the immense power of *One Day* was such that the majority of

23. Ibid., 107.

24. I have not had the opportunity to read these letters, but as I noted earlier, there are two fairly comprehensive studies of their contents: Dobson, "Contesting the Paradigms of De-Stalinization," and Kozlov, "Otzyvy sovetskikh chitatelei." According to Kozlov, the archive of *Novyi mir* contains some 532 comments from readers of *One Day* written between 1962 and 1969 (178). The great majority of comments were positive (422), but 100 were negative, indicating that the reception of the work was by no means one-sided. Of the negative comments, a certain number came from former prison guards who were undoubtedly trying to justify to themselves their role in the gulag system. Others, however, came from a variety of people, some of whom objected to Solzhenitsyn's even-handed treatment of zeks from various epochs.

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readers appear to have seen it as sui generis; as a result they did not generally compare it to other works, nor do they appear to have paid much attention to the context in which it was packaged, which does not exclude the possibility that their reception of the work was shaped, at a less than conscious level, by Tvardovskii's preface or by the poems and stories that surrounded *One Day*.[25] Instead, in their letters to *Novyi mir*, readers for the most part focused on whether or not Solzhenitsyn had told the truth about life in the camps, and the only more or less purely literary issue that bothered at least some of them was whether the language he used was appropriate or not.

While the question of *One Day*'s socialist realist bona fides might not have interested normal readers, it did capture the attention of professional literary critics, although even they did not confront the issue directly. Still, some critics attacked Solzhenitsyn's novella by pointing out a number of ways in which the work and its hero did not conform to Soviet literary orthodoxy. In his article in *Oktiabr'*, for example, the critic N. Sergovantsev used a number of coded phrases meant to imply that the hero of the text was not an appropriate figure for Soviet literature. Ivan Denisovich was, according to this critic, overly accepting of his fate, unheroic, unwilling or unable to struggle against the surrounding world. Therefore, the story fails "to open up before the reader the infinite horizons of life."[26] As we have seen, Tvardovskii had attempted to head off such criticism with his description of the story as "life-affirming" in his original preface to the work. In his 1964 defense of the novella, Vladimir Lakshin strove to do exactly the same thing, reminding those critics who did not find Ivan Denisovich sufficiently heroic that, "from a Marxist-Leninist position, this theme [that of the leaders and organizers] is at the very least not complete without a description of the led and the organized, the most normal people, those who carry the everyday burdens of labor and who make up, in the words of Lenin, 'the central part of the laboring masses.'"[27] Defending Ivan Denisovich and his creator, Lakshin pulls out a number of socialist realist critical clichés to discredit the arguments of those who found Solzhenitsyn's novella insufficiently Soviet: "In reaffirming socialist legality and Leninist norms of social life, the party also gave new meaning to the concept 'of the people.' From this point of view, the appearance of Solzhenitsyn's novella is a noteworthy event. Works of this sort—L. F. Ilichev said in describing *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—help to develop a respect for working men and the party supports them [. . .] Solzhenitsyn's book, despite the cruelty of its theme, has become a party line book, fighting for the ideals of the people and the revolution.'"[28]

Rereading *One Day* in its original context, therefore, allows us to understand a great deal about this text that has been obscured by the passage of time. Most important, it compels us to appreciate that at least in 1962, Sol-

25. The exception appears to be one reader's comparison of *One Day* with the 1948 novel *Daleko ot Moskvy* (Far from Moscow) by the writer Vasilii Azhaev.

26. As described in V. Lakshin, "Ivan Denisovich, ego druz'ia i nedrugi," *Novyi mir*, 1964, no. 1:228–29.

27. Ibid., 230.

28. Ibid., 245.

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zhenitsyn, far from being seen as some sort of dissident or even oppositionist, could be read as an appropriate, albeit somewhat unusual Soviet writer. In the interpretation provided in Tvardovskii's preface, *One Day* conforms to the main lines of contemporary socialist realist literary development: its hero is a simple Soviet man engaged in physical labor. Despite all the difficulties of his position, he retains an optimistic, forward-looking attitude; indeed, far from being ground down by his situation, he has developed inner freedom as a result of his ordeal. On this reading, the reader's attention should be focused, not on the horrors of camp life, but rather on passages such as this one describing Shukhov's work on the brick wall, incidentally one of the rare passages of world literature devoted to the sheer pleasure of physical work:

> Шухов и другие каменщики перестали чувствовать мороз. От быстрой захватчивой работы прошел по ним сперва первый жарок—тот жарок, от которого под бушлатом, под телогрейкой, под верхней и нижней рубахами мокреет. Но они ни на миг не останавливались и гнали кладку дальше и дальше.
>
> И часом спустя пробил их второй жарок—тот, от которого пот высыхает. В ноги их мороз не брал, это главное, а остальное ничто, ни ветерок легкий, потягивающий—не могли их мыслей отвлечь от кладки.
>
> [Shukhov and the other bricklayers didn't feel the cold any more. They were now going all out and they were hot—the way you are at the start of a job like this when you get soaking wet under your coat and jacket and both shirts. But they didn't stop for a second and went on working like crazy.
>
> After an hour, they got so hot the sweat dried on them. The main thing was they didn't get the cold in their feet. Nothing else mattered. The slight cutting wind didn't take their minds off the work.][29]

The texts that surround *One Day* in the November 1962 issue of *Novyi mir* serve to further ground the novella in the contemporary socialist realist tradition, demonstrating that its main themes and structure are echoed in more orthodox works.[30] Furthermore, the immediate critical reception of the novella, both by regular readers and professional critics demonstrates that the entire initial understanding of *One Day* took place in a context in which the basic framework of normative socialist realism was essentially unchallenged. For the majority of readers, the question never arose. Insofar as Solzhenitsyn's novella was officially published, it was by definition an appropriate Soviet

29. Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:69; Solzhenitsyn, *One Day*, 111. Lakshin specifically points to these passages in his defense of Ivan Denisovich and his creator against insinuations that the work is not sufficiently Soviet.

30. Even if one does not believe that Tvardovskii consciously chose to surround *One Day* with works that would help it to be read "properly" (as is the case with one of the anonymous readers who evaluated this article for *Slavic Review*), the fact that Solzhenitsyn's story is echoed and amplified by them is an indication of just how "typical" an example of contemporary Soviet writing it was. Indeed, it proves the point even more definitively. After all, if two literary texts pulled at random from contributions Tvardovskii had recently accepted sounded many of the same general themes and even employed some of the same imagery as Solzhenitsyn's novella, how unusual (except in execution) was *One Day* really?

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literary work, and it could be read and criticized only within the existing norms of socialist realism. Opponents of the work in the professional literary community could imply that it was not sufficiently socialist realist, but the combination of the fact that *One Day* could be interpreted as being a "pravdivogo, istoricheski-konkretnogo izobrazheniia deistvitel'nosti v ee revoliutsionnom razvitii [an accurate, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development]," which could contribute to the "vospitaniia trudiashchikhsia v dukhe sotsializma [education of the workers in the spirit of socialism]," along with the unambiguous approval it had received from the First Secretary of the Communist Party ensured that this criticism could be deflected.[31]

Subsequently, of course, the question of Solzhenitsyn's relationship to Soviet literary orthodoxy became more complicated. For one thing, soon after the publication of Lakshin's article in 1964, the criticisms of Solzhenitsyn's "enemies" became more strident. After Khrushchev's fall, when the party line changed, it suddenly became clear that Solzhenitsyn's work was not and had never been appropriate Soviet literature (which should help us to appreciate, if we need reminding, that for all the criteria scholars have advanced to describe what socialist realism was, the most important criterion was that it was always and only what the party said it was at any given time). Simultaneously, in the west the story and its author were quickly touted as exemplars of anti-Soviet thought as the "thaw" faltered and Cold War attitudes rehardened. Thus in an influential article Max Hayward stated: "Whatever Solzhenitsyn's conscious intentions (and I am far from suggesting that he consciously set out to write an 'overt indictment' of the system), I feel sure that *One Day,* as well as the two later works ["Matrena's House" and "For the Good of the Cause"], have implications overlooked by Khrushchev, but clearly seen by both the 'friends' and 'enemies' of Ivan Denisovich, which cannot but raise doubts in the minds of readers as to the very legitimacy of the Soviet regime both in the past and in the present."[32]

Solzhenitsyn himself, once he found it impossible to publish and eventually to live in the Soviet Union, contributed to the retrospective reading of his earliest published work as a kind of proto-dissidence. Thus, for example, in his memoir *The Calf Butted the Oak* (1974), describing Tvardovskii, he writes: "Vsiakuiu rukopis' poliubiv sperva chuvstvom pervym, Tvardovskii nepremenno dolzhen byl provesti ee cherez vtoroe chuvstvo i lish' togda pechatat'—kak proizvedenie **sovetskoe.** [Having first come to love a manuscript with his first sense, Tvardovskii always had to reconsider it through his second sense and only then publish it—as a **Soviet** work.]"[33] The clear implication

31. The phrases in this sentence are taken from the famous speech by Andrei Zhdanov defining socialist realism at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.

32. Max Hayward cemented the author's role in the west as, if not a full-blown dissident, at least a foe of the Soviet Union. Hayward, "Solzhenitsyn's Place in Contemporary Soviet Literature" *Slavic Review* 23, no. 3 (September 1964): 434.

33. A. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsia telenok s dubom: Ocherki literaturnoi zhizni* (Paris, 1975), 36. Emphasis in the original. Any reader wishing to investigate Solzhenitsyn's bona fides as an appropriate Soviet writer (at least as defined in the mid-1960s) is encouraged to read "Dlia pol'zy dela" (For the Good of the Cause), Solzhenitsyn's most socialist real-

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is that his own work was not in fact "Soviet," but was somehow Sovietized by Tvardovskii. What a reading of *One Day* in the light of its first publication tells us, however, is that in 1962 it was perfectly plausible to present and to read the story as an appropriate Soviet text. Tvardovskii helped shape such an interpretation both through his own preface and by his placement of the story in a context that brought out its most Soviet elements. But had Solzhenitsyn's story really represented a break with the canons of socialist realism, this would have been impossible.

In saying that *One Day* should be read as a socialist realist text (at least as socialist realism was understood in 1962), I do not in any way mean to denigrate Solzhenitsyn's achievement. Indeed, when one compares the story to the second-rate texts that surround it, and even to Tvardovskii's rather boring interpretation of it, the magnitude of Solzhenitsyn's feat becomes more rather than less impressive. What he accomplished, on this reading, was to take some of the most worn-out clichés of socialist realism and recast them into a tale that succeeded in almost completely obscuring its own literary and cultural origins.

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ist production, which was published in *Novyi mir* in 1963. For more on the way this topic was seen at the time, see György Lukács's contemporary article "Sotsialisticheskii realizm segodnia" (1964) republished at scepsis.ru/library/id_693.html (last accessed 5 December 2012).

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