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A Postmodern Solzhenitsyn?

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William H. Thornton,
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Abstract: William H. Thornton undertakes in his article, "A Postmodern Solzhenitsyn?," to bring Solzhenitsyn in from the cold, critically speaking, by closing the gap between him and his many postmodern detractors. That gap has been premised on the rough equivalence of poststructuralism and postmodernism. The postmodern realism advanced in this study challenges not only Solzhenitsyn's critics but his own stated aversion to postmodernism. Operating on both a microhistorical and macrohistorical plane, Solzhenitsyn's literary historiography testifies to the awesome scope of the gulag while never losing sight of its human factor.The double vision of Solzhenitsyn's proto-postmodern referentiality, a simultaneous centering and decentering, is matched by his determination to keep the past as a creative force within the present and future. Here poststructural, anti-realist post-modernism becomes his adversary; for just as it attempts to comprehend the local in pristine isolation, never connecting the dots, so too it isolates the past. Solzhenitsyn accuses (anti-realist) postmodernism of recycling many of the same avant-garde tools of forgetfulness that were used ever so effectively early in the twentieth century to dismantle existing cultural values, and indeed the very category of the cultural as a setting for local meaning.

William H. THORNTON

A Postmodern Solzhenitsyn?

Solzhenitsyn's political exile has ended, but his long critical exile continues. In making a case for his postmodern retrieval, this article faces stiff opposition on two fronts. First, consensus has it that Solzhenitsyn is more a premodern than a postmodern author; and second, there is Solzhenitsyn's stated aversion to everything associated with postmodernism ("Relentless" 17). Part of the problem may be traced to semantics, for two very different modes of postmodernism are at issue. What Solzhenitsyn deplores is the kind of postmodernism that would discredit in advance the objective concerns of his literary project. It will be shown how the very different premises of another postmodernism --postmodern realism -- are consistent with Solzhenitsyn's literary historiography. Textual critics will object that the "readerly" elements in Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (far more than in his shorter works, such as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; see Boyers 97) are averse to any postmodernism. This conclusion is inevitable where credence is given to the notion that every abiding theme is an instance of "totalistic" realism. F.R. Ankersmit transplants that poststructural notion to historiography by likening history to the parts of a tree. He sees speculative historians as dealing mainly with the essential trunk of this tree, while modernists would seem to be empirically decentered. Modernists proceed, however, to declare themselves scientific and thus to privilege a mode of analysis (often negatively defined by its antinarrative bias) which allows the center to hold. Only with postmodern historiography does that centrist "trunkism" finally give way to a focus on history's nominalist "leaves." For Ankersmit this accords with an anti-foundationalism that precludes any form of synthesis (149).

What must concern a postmodern realist is that anti-postmodernists tend to accept Ankersmit's type of poststructuralism as normative for postmodern historiography. Perez Zagorin, for example, takes Ankersmit as his ideal strawman for dismissing all postmodernism as antiquarian or objectively defeatist (273). Postmodern realism shares something with both poles of this debate. Like Ankersmit it rejects historical "trunkism" and like Zagorin it impugns the critical entropy that labels itself postmodern. What a postmodern realist cannot accept, however, is Ankersmit's assertion that all postmodern historiography precludes synthesis and Zagorin's similar assertion that all postmodern historiography voids coherent reference. What in my view makes "trunkism" reductive is not so much its infrastructural or panoptic centrality as its insularity -- its isolation from the reciprocal perspectives and causalities of history's branches and leaves.

In terms of his realist style and his readiness, in *Gulag* at least, to interject broad interpretions, Solzhenitsyn could sometimes be accused of perching himself on history's trunk; but he never stays there long. In practice he rejects perspectival monism in favor of a dialogics of decentered parts -- parts, moreover, which are never quite at ease with each other. His manner of jumping from branches to trunk and back again -- as if to foil postmodern and anti-postmodern critics alike -- can best be understood in his own words. If I may mix two of his metaphors, he reminds us on the one hand that all he claims as a writer is what he had as a prisoner: "a peephole into the Archipelago, not a view from a tower"; but he avers, on the other hand, that this is enough, since to "taste the sea all one needs is one gulp" (*Gulag* 2, 7). The paradox is that Ankersmit's postmodern solution -- amounting to a methodological quarantine for local knowledge, for history's leaves -- serves to perpetuate the modernist isolation of the metahistorical center from the parts which give it life. That trunk will not go away just because a few postmodern historians decide it should; and it could, by default, end up as dry lumber for scholars of a reactionary cast.

Some of these new trunkists will not hesitate to give highly tendencious answers to dubious historical questions, e.g., the issue of Holocaust revisionism, or the end-of-history teleology that promises to do for today's multinational capitalism what social Darwininism did for national capitalism and colonialism. Meanwhile, the trunkists will push real issues aside; and, however unwittingly, postmodern anti-realists will be there to help them push. If Stanley Fish is right in his classic postmodernist essay, "Interpreting the Variorum," one's stance on such issues derives from the formal encoding of interpretive strategies -- strategies which in turn derive from interpretive communities (171-73). Apart from that there can be no issue -- no text, no point of objective reference, no Nazi

Holocaust, no Soviet gulag. It is my position that postmodern literary historiography is capable of dealing with such issues on both a microhistorical and macrohistorical plane. A principal case in point is Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*, which vastly extends the macrohistorical range of a work like *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovish*. The result is a narrative objectivity that testifies to the awesome scope of the gulag while never losing sight of its human factor. In short, Solzhenitsyn adumbrates the trunk of Soviet history without effacing the individuality of its leaves. The latter corresponds to what Steven Seidman calls "general stories," as opposed to modernist metanarratives, which tend to "disregard the enormous social complexities and heterogeneous struggles and strains within a specific society at a specific time" (130-31).

The individuality of such stories has never been self-contained in any social system, let alone in the Soviet system. Not to deal with the relationship of parts to the whole, of leaves to the trunk, or Ivan Denisovich to Joseph Stalin, would be as mendacious as ignoring the gulag altogether (and that, Solzhenitsyn reminds us, is exactly what the Western press did for fifty years; Carter 130). To comprehend even one day in the life of an Ivan Denisovich is to recognize that while he is certainly an individual, he is anything but the kind of atomistic leaf that Ankersmit's postmodernism would mandate. All Solzhenitsyn's work on the gulag is guided by that same holistic imperative. Even camp guards get their share of sympathy in *One Day*, where it is noted that the arctic wind spares no one (43). It is the oppressive weight of a common malady that allows Solzhenitsyn to present the gulag, as Stephen Carter notes, as a metaphor for Soviet society in general (15) -- and, we may add, allows him to present Soviet society as a metaphor for modernist social designs in general. This double metaphor -- which is profoundly postmodern in the challenge it poses to modernist ideology -- would be lost on Ankersmit's formula for the representation of isolated leaves. *Gulag*, I suggest, is all the more a postmodern work because it never forfeits its attention to the center against which every decentering act must be measured. Stalinism is the trunk if not the root of Ivan's tribulations, and there is nothing unpostmodern about saying so.

Nevertheless, Solzhenitsyn's method of counterpointing Ivan and Joe, leaf and trunk, is no simple juxtaposition. Usually he conveys the weight of Soviet oppression through its impact on average persons, such as the lowly tailor who is convicted of the political crime of sticking a needle through a newspaper, not realizing that Stalin's smiling picture is waiting there on the opposite side of the page (*Gulag* 3, 514). This referential double-vision, a simultaneous centering and decentering, is matched by Solzhenitsyn's determination to keep the past as a creative force within the present and future. Here again anti-realist postmodernism becomes his adversary, for just as it attempts to comprehend the local in pristine isolation, never connecting the dots, so too it isolates the past. Solzhenitsyn accuses postmodernism of recycling many of the same avant-garde tools of forgetfulness that were used ever so effectively early in the twentieth century to dismantle existing cultural values, and indeed the very category of the cultural as a setting for local meaning and selfhood. He reminds us how, under the banner of futurism, the idea was advanced that cultural history must begin entirely anew. True to their word, Russian futurists wasted no time after the revolution in beginning anew. They immediately changed their name to the "Left Front" and took their place at the "left-most flank" of the new ruling order. For Solzhenitsyn the key point is that "earlier outbursts of ... `avant-gardism' were no mere literary froth, but had very real embodiment in life" (Relentless" 3). He is more than hinting at an analogical lesson with regard to the postmodern treatment of representation as a matter of "play," of literary froth. Tellingly he adds that neither the ravings of this Soviet "avant-garde" nor its power over culture lasted long. Its demise marked the beginning of what Solzhenitsyn saw as seven decades of cultural coma (Solzhenitsyn, "Relentless" 3).

This bleak message did not immediately alienate Solzhenitsyn from either pole of the Western critical establishment. Certainly it posed no problem for the Right, and since Solzhenitsyn's arrival on the global scene was concurrent with the rise of the new left, his case against old left ideology and institutions met little resistance from that side as well. The problem arose, rather, when he addressed himself to the cultural and spiritual state of the West itself. Soon he was being called an authoritarian nationalist and, on top of that, an anti-Semite. My reading of *Gulag* -- all three volumes and some 1,932 pages of it -- reveals not a single anti-Semitic line. As for his alleged authoritarianism, his anti-Western sentiments do take a religious form that is bound to offend liberals weaned on a Luckmannian preference for "invisible religion." From this perspective Solzhenitsyn looks theocratic, and in that

sense authoritarian. This illiberal view of Solzhenitsyn, as Aileen Kelly points out, was set in stone by the media's tendency to compare him with liberal-democratic Sakharov (16).

It should be stressed, therefore, that Solzhenitsyn's objection to liberalism is not its promotion of freedom and individualism per se. It is only necessary to read a dozen pages by Solzhenitsyn -- his letters of May and September 1967, to the Soviet Writer's union and the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers -- to become aware of his deeply individualistic convictions and his consequent antipathy towards censorship. Indeed, the single social trait (the enabling defect, so to speak) that Solzhenitsyn most often cites as allowing the gulag to develop is a lack of real individuality in Soviet society. Solzhenitsyn, it turns out, only recoils from the narcissitic individualism that has emerged in the West along with other "cultural contradictions of capitalism," to borrow Daniel Bell's terminology. Along with Bell, American cultural critics as diverse as Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 1985) and Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Returns*, 1979) have deplored this development as surely as Solzhenitsyn does.

As for Solzhenitsyn's nationalism, it can be succinctly described as the antithesis of Stalin's views on the subject. In *The First Circle* Solzhenitsyn posits Stalin as the Party's foremost specialist on nationalism -- his major theoretical contribution being a blueprint for the exile of whole nations (*First* 109). Solzhenitsyn simply inverts that blueprint, defending everything that Stalin would obliterate. A more innocuous nationalism could hardly be conceived. The very word "nationalism," however, invites guilt by association with ideologies based on blood or some other putative source of superiority. Consider, for example, T.S. Eliot's statement in *After Strange Gods* that tradition is a matter "of the blood" rather than "of the brain." Nothing of the kind is to be found in Solzhenitsyn, who honors the virtues and individuality of all nations -- which is simply to say all cultures. He sees that individuality as having its origin in collective memory, not blood, and being shaped by a dialogics of mutual respect, not ethnic cleansing. Literature is its very soul, while its twin nemeses are the great colonial ideologies, communism and capitalism, which would expunge all local repositories of memory.

In his Nobel lecture, Solzhenitsyn warned that this modernist colonization will "impoverish us no less than if all people were to become identical, to possess one single, identical personality, one identical face. Nationalities are ... crystalized personalities; even the smallest among them has its own special coloration, hides within itself a particular facet of God's design" (21). It is not necessary that we share Solzhenitsyn's religious reverence for difference in order to appreciate his aversion to the in-difference of modernist statism. It is only necessary that we be half as relativistic as postmodernists claim to be, and thus tolerate Solzhenitsyn's different way of respecting difference. Many political derogations of Solzhenitsyn -- and of other writers, such as George Faludy, who were persecuted in the East and spurned in the West -- stem from the fact that the modern political universe has been divided neatly into three categories: liberalism, communism, and fascism. Given Solzhenitsyn's public position on the former two, a simple process of elimination leads to the risible conclusion that Solzhenitsyn is some kind of fascist. It does not help, as Kelly notes, that Solzhenitsyn's "small is beautiful" affinity for Russian village life and culture bears some resemblance to the pastoral sentiments of right-wing extremists such as Victor Chalmayev. Chalmayev is a nationalist who openly admires the social philosophy of the pre-revolutionary Black Hundreds, that pogrom-loving Russian equivalent of the Klu Klux Klan.

To condemn Solzhenitsyn on this basis would be rather like opposing animal rights reform on the ground that Hitler called for the humane treatment of dogs and cats; but for a jury of New World Order liberals -- who think that the only good Russia is one modeled on Washington politics and Wall Street economics -- the Chalmayev connection is solid enough for a verdict of guilt-by-association. For what it is worth, Solzhenitsyn has repeatedly stated that he does not in principle oppose democratic freedoms, but only the use that is presently made of them in the West (Kelly 16). Needless to say he would oppose their capitalistic export, *pace* Fukayama, to the entire world. In this respect his position is simply a Russian variant of postcolonial resistance. As such, it involves a political as well as cultural stance. I must, therefore, take issue with Kelly's defense of Solzhenitsyn, as much as I appreciate her apologetic motive. Kelly contends that Solzhenitsyn "is not a political thinker, but a Russian moralist in the utopian tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky" (16). On the surface this is a valuable corrective to those, such as Michael Scammell, whose biography of Solzhenitsyn frames him in the East vs. West

(Solzhenitsyn vs. Sakharov) terms of Soviet dissident politics. Kelly is right that Solzhenitsyn's priorities have not been political in any ephemeral sense; but the same could have been said of Machiavelli at the time he wrote *The Prince*.

A crucial turning point in Solzhenitsyn's politics came in March 1963, when the political support that his project initially received from Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign suddenly vanished. Khrushchev was forced to partially rehabilitate Stalin's image on the tenth anniversary of his death (Bjorkegren 12). In a single day the former atmosphere of intolerance was restored, and intellectuals were called upon quite literally to clap at the news (Solzhenitsyn, *Oak* 62). Under these circumstances Solzhenitsyn was forced to choose between the long-term priorities of his literary mission and the immediate needs of dissident politics, such as signing petitions and staging public demonstrations. As Kelly insightfully puts it, Solzhenitsyn's "epic history of the camps was a solitary, secret, and dangerous undertaking, and he could not afford to divert his energies to battles which others could fight" (Kelly 15-16).

Unfortunately, in making a cogent case for Solzhenitsyn the moralist, Kelly ends up declaring him incompetent to stand trial politically. He is found innocent, in effect, by reason of political imbecility. Well intentioned as this argument certainly is, it obscures the enormous political insight of Solzhenitsyn's best work. Louis Horowitz rightly sees the *Gulag* trilogy as a political classic, locating it in the same sub-genre as Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Aron's *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Kolakowski's trilogy on Marxism, and Jasper's *The Future of Mankind* (76). We might expand this list to include Serge's *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*, the autobiographical expositions of Milosz and Spender, and, of course, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.

As Robert Boyers observes, the critical genre that includes Koestler seeks the nature of Soviet communism in the dark recesses of Marxist logic (95). Solzhenitsyn would certainly not disagree. In *Gulag* he gives Koestler high marks (*Gulag* 1, 409), and himself credits Marx as the original architect of the Soviet logic of forced labor (*Gulag* 2, 143); but the implications of his investigation reach beyond the specifics of Marxist ideology to the ideology of forced modernization and the terroristic side of ideology per se. He concludes that Shakespeare's evildoers, having no modernist ideology, stopped short at a dozen or so corpses: "Thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions" (*Gulag* 1, 174), with the archipelago alone claiming 66 million lives from the October Revolution to 1959 (*Gulag* 2, 10). That is the hard social reality that constrains the action of *Gulag*'s characters as well as the narrative choices of the author. There is no room here for the kind of antithetic heroics that one associates with the bourgeois novel. The standard bourgeois hero, rising in puristic opposition to the social world, would not last a month in the gulag; nor would the brief action of this hero have any representative meaning in such a place.

Solzhenitsyn's challenge is to trace a representative action which neither transcends the situation ideologically (in the manner of Koestler's Marxist logic) nor subjectively (in the manner of bourgeois heroics); but neither can that action descend to the level of the merely typical (Boyers 96-97). *Gulag* manages to strike this delicate balance between an action which is true to the situation yet is just atypical enough to sustain dialogic tension in the Bakhtinian sense. By preserving a place for real -- although unobtrusive -- heroics in the midst of the everyday, Solzhenitsyn moves beyond the tendency of anti-realist postmodernism to model the everyday on a simple inversion of classical heroics, and beyond the reverse tendency to define heroics as that which transcends everydayness (on that simplistic dichotomy, see Featherstone 160). The convergence of those opposites had already taken place in *One Day*, whose hero, Shukhov (Ivan Denisovich) has been described as "a humble, utterly bewildered plain man who wants nothing more than to live out a normal working life as best he can" (Hayward vii).

Bakhtin's culturalism offers a key to Solzhenitsyn's increasingly egalitarian field of vision. In the first volume of *Gulag* (chapter 5) Solzhenitsyn tells how he began to open his mind to his first cultural mentor, an Estonian named Susi, who transmitted to Solzhenitsyn his love of democracy. Later Susi remembered Solzhenitsyn as a curious political hybrid -- part Marxist, part democrat (213). Under the tutelage of Susi and later mentors, Solzhenitsyn underwent his conversion to a communal ethos that is as far removed from communist abstraction as it is from bourgeois atomization. This equalitarian culturalism, which belies the authoritarian images we have of Solzhenitsyn from the Western press, bears a striking resemblance to the earthy realism and egalitarianism that Bakhtin discovers in

Rabelais. That same democratism pervades *One Day* and especially *Gulag*. Like some postmodern democratic theorists -- who have abandoned abstract, Kantian notions of democracy in favor of norms deriving from historically constituted conventions (Shapiro 19) -- Bakhtin and Solzhenitsyn approach democracy from a cultural and hence contextual perspective (though one that is marked by a vital dialogic tension, as opposed to Richard Rorty's rather inert consensualism). If Solzhenitsyn's critics miss this democratic current in his work, it is perhaps because they think of democracy as a liberal-idealist invention, forgetting the deep communal roots of democracy that Bakhtin rediscovers in Rabalais and in carnival. This democratic dynamic helps to explain why *Gulag* remains one of the most compelling narratives of cultural resistance available in any literature. *Gulag* reconstructs the genocidal war on cultural difference that in Solzhenitsyn's view traces directly to Lenin (Carter 25). Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow* corroborates the main thrust of *Gulag*'s thesis concerning Stalin's agrarian terror tactics. This experiment in social engineering lead directly, even in the absence of drought or war, to a massive three year famine that provided a final solution to the problem of peasant recalcitrance.

Solzhenitsyn's readers will not be surprised by Conquest's account of how Western correspondents sat in Moscow recording all the official denials while Ukranians went on starving. This program proved so successful from Stalin's view that he expanded it to include other ethnic groups. There can be little doubt, as Solzhenitsyn notes, that Hitler's similar tactics had this Great Original as their prototype (*Gulag* 1, 54-55). And these methods continued unabated after World War II. In addition to Japanese units, raked into the gulag after their three week war with the Soviet Union (*Gulag* 1, 84), waves of Cossacks, Moslems, and the so-called Vlasov men fell into the grinder. More than a million such unfortunates were sent to their destruction, courtesy of the allies, in the name of repatriation (*Gulag* 1, 85). Then the cultural logic of late Stalinism was turned upon Jews, who were found guilty of the crime of cosmopolitanism. Their actual crime, of course, was simply their cultural difference. One might expect that Solzhenitsyn's unflagging defense of difference would recommend him to today's multiculturally-minded critics. No doubt his continued critical exile owes much to misunderstandings concerning his politics; but another important factor, I suggest, is his chosen genre. *Gulag* is the kind of work that most literary critics prefer to call history, and most historians insist upon calling literature. Both of these disciplinary exclusions stem from a category error that should not have survived the postmodern turn of either literary theory or historiography. However, given the staying power of that error on both sides, it is necessary to place *Gulag* in the provisional third category of postmodern literary historiography. By this I mean not only the genre of literary nonfiction but a critical device to match. The underdevelopment of that category during the years of Solzhenitsyn's initial reception accounts for much of his difficulty with Western academics. His documentary style simply ran against the grain of prevailing formalist criticism. That at least is understandable. What is not so clear is why the historical turn of literary criticism since the early 1980s has done so little to redeem Solzhenitsyn's literary reputation. *Gulag* is a prescient example of the "newer" historicism that accords with the realist postmodern turn. This label is justified not only because of *Gulag*'s concern for cultural difference in the abstract, but its manner of anchoring difference in the bedrock of local memory.

Modernist historiography, with its stark "scientific" division of subject and object, pushes memory to the subjective side and treats it as an obstacle dividing historical fact from personal perception, and therefore past from present. While anti-realist postmodernism repudiates that modernist subjectivity, Solzhenitsyn treats memory as a bridge between subject and object, present and past. This is the viewpoint of postmodern realism. While postmodern anti-realist historiography shares with modernism a deep epistemological wariness towards narrativity -- a wariness which, as Primo Levi points out, is also common to survivors of concentration camps -- postmodern realists take a pragmatic view of the problem. Their representational openness leaves ample room for the kind of experimentation that Solzhenitsyn alludes to in *Gulag*'s subtitle: *An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. The fact that Solzhenitsyn still wears an anti-postmodern tag indicates a curious bond between the major gatekeepers of High Modernism and High Postmodernism. Both, for different reasons, take an oil and water view of objectivity and narrativity, the one holding that objectivity must be protected from narrativity, while the other considers that there is no objectivity to protect. Both, that is, take a dim view of narrative objectivity. This explains why the historical turn of criticism is still taken in some

quarters as a challenge not only to the old formalism but to postmodern theory as well. A corollary to that false dichotomy (historicism versus postmodernism) was the idea that a postmodern literary-historical convergence -- such as one finds in Doctorow's *Ragtime* or Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* -- would require the forfeiture of objective reference in both literature and history. Solzhenitsyn, by contrast, has always seen literary-historical convergence as a path toward narrative objectivity. For that he has been considered, and has considered himself, an archetypal antipostmodernist.

As we have seen, this misunderstanding is compounded by popular notions of Solzhenitsyn's politics. Insofar as his position is far from the Left, he must be, so the logic goes, somewhere on the far Right. In fact he is nowhere on that conventional spectrum. Historians might be expected to grasp that fact faster than literary critics. Unfortunately they look askance at Solzhenitsyn for quite another reason: his unforgivably literary approach to objectivity. Lionel Gossman takes a very different view, amalgamating Jack Hexter's experiential model of history with Hayden White's historical poetics to forge a renewed case for narrative objectivity (287). Gossman's approach, I suggest, is made-to-order for Solzhenitsyn. Whereas "scientific" historiography pictures narrativity as being superfluous or even injurious to objectivity -- and whereas poststructural theory treats objective claims as illusions--I follow Gossman in recognizing the dependency of objectivity upon narrativity without devaluing either. No doubt Solzhenitsyn's confidence in narrative objectivity stems from the fact that in the world he knew meaningful political commentary was usually buried under the cover of literary devices that could turn up almost anywhere. *Gulag* emplots otherwise inert facts in a narrative stream that lends them meaning. Since any given fact can become an element in a wide variety of narrative discourses, it would be naively positivistic to speak of an "established fact" apart from such a narrative context. Narration, therefore, can be understood as the channeling agency behind factual meaning. By lending historical meaning to otherwise disjointed parts, Solzhenitsyn's narrativity is precisely the agent of synthesis that Ankersmit would proscribe. Like most 'second turn' postmodernists, Ankersmit imagines himself to be protecting those autonomous parts from colonization by a central order of meaning; but the outpouring of appreciation that survivors of the gulag have shown for Solzhenitsyn's work leaves no doubt that they do not desire such protection. What they want is to be reconnected with the kind of historical meaning and significance that *One Day* affords, at the popular level, and *Gulag* expands on a scholarly level.

Survivors immediately recognize in both works the congruity of their part to Solzhenitsyn's narrative whole. Part of their appreciation may stem from the fact that Solzhenitsyn does not represent them as passive victims in an Orwellian dystopia. For all its horrors, the gulag was not a spiritual wasteland. Many experienced it as a university of sorts (see also Faludy) -- a parodoxical sanctuary for outlawed values and traditions. *Gulag* the book offers a return ticket for that exiled world -- a victory for culture over ideology. This recycling of cultural energy bears comparison with the dynamics of Greenblatt's "cultural poetics." Alistair Fowler prefers to call it "cultural historicism," while I have suggested a more Bakhtinian label, "cultural prosaics" (Fowler 16; Thornton, "Cultural," "Toward," *Cultural Prosaics*). All three terms, in any case, signify a social circulation of aesthetic energy that effectively reverses the classical Marxist base-to-superstructure line of causality. Culture, therefore, is no longer construed as a mere reflection of material forces, but is seen as a major social force in its own right. In *Gulag* we observe the extension of that circulatory system beyond formal texts to the only means of communication that survived in the archipelago: oral representation. That orality, needless to say, was completely dependent upon memory. While *Gulag* gave circulation to hundreds of disparate memories, they in turn were the shaping agents of both the author and his history. It is in that sense that Christopher Lasch (*The True and Only Heaven:Progress and its Critics*, 1991) can look upon memory not simply as the grist of history but as its interpretive grid.

Whereas this empowered sense of memory is a mainstay of postmodern realism, postmodern anti-realism fosters the "Ersatz memory" of nostalgia. Lasch sees the latter as a distinctive postmodern fetish, filling the void left by the loss of modernism's metanarrative of progress. Fredric Jameson, likewise, regards nostalgia as the forfeiture of any meaningful sense of history. This loss is assured by poststructural treatments of the past as a series of pure and unrelated presents. By naturalizing a condition of fragmentation and discontinuity, poststructuralism demolishes any possible narrative bridge between past and present. The result is a condemnation of all representation, but especially historical representation. There is no place here for the functional contrast that Lasch and Jameson

make between memory and nostalgia. Nor is any distinction made between fictional and nonfictional narrativity. Drawing upon Lasch and Jameson, Lorenzo Simpson charges postmodernism with temporal irresponsibility in treating the past as a text or simulacrum rather than a referent that might have a material impact on the present or future (see 144 and 146). Nostalgia, so defined, is the polar opposite of memory as Solzhenitsyn employs it. His critical exile entails, also, the exile of "empowered" memory and the mode of narrative objectivity it supports. As little as this exile may concern Solzhenitsyn, it should concern those of us who are looking for more from literary historiography than nostalgia or political correctness.

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