

RESEARCH PAPER

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“THE NAKED PERSON” AND “THE UNBEARABLE  
WORLD”: VARIATIONS OF EXODUS (BASED ON  
EARLY PROSE BY A. I. SOLZHENITSYN)

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This paper analyses the motif of “the naked person” in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s early work. Epic tales which belong to the so called “labour camp prose”, such as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1959) and *The Cancer Ward* (1968), stand out in the context of this motif. Moreover, the “unbearable world” and the “naked person” have been structurally significant for the “labour camp prose” since Fyodor Dostoevsky and Anton Chekhov. All of them imply that these elements bring the reader closer to understanding the ontology of a person who is forbidden to wear a cross on his chest and thus seek protection from God and cultural myths.

The paper examines historical developments of the “naked person” imagery in Russian literature from the seventeenth century to the Avant-garde and postmodernism by analysing relations between reality and the “unbearable world” (the space of labour camps) in which nakedness and misery are deemed to be *charisma*, gifts from God. *The Cancer Ward* is still one of Solzhenitsyn’s most widely read works in Europe and America. Unlike the peasants in the story, Kostoglotov, an intellectual, reflects on the value of freedom, prospects of choice and the nature of evil – something which Ivan Denisovich touches upon only vaguely. The author is interested in mechanisms of self-identity in horrendous living conditions. Solzhenitsyn’s *The Cancer Ward* is a variation of the classic “non-finito” narrative. The protagonist, who has endured hardship and overcome limits of the “unbearable world”, moves towards the house-

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ark as his life is just beginning. In fact, by employing terrible history, a labour camp and the hospital ward of the doomed, Solzhenitsyn's text explores the driving forces behind a person's self-identity, the most important of which are moral elevation, will, mercy and belief in life.

**Keywords:** A. Solzhenitsyn, "naked person", "labour camp prose", *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *The Cancer Ward*

## INTRODUCTION

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In the literature of the second half of the twentieth century, "the naked person" motif, which is vital for understanding Russian laughter tradition, is most closely related to the image of a *zek*, a labour camp prisoner, who survives in difficult conditions and in the face of hardship. This motif is often found in modern culture, since it brings the reader closer to understanding the ontology of a person who is forbidden to wear a cross on his chest and thus seek protection from God, myths and cultural utopias. The image of the "naked person" is deeply rooted in Russian literature and goes back to seventeenth-century satirical traditions – "The ABC of a Naked and Poor Person", a well-known satirical story is an "encyclopaedia" of the inner world" (Likhachev 2001: 354). In this story, a protagonist, who is barefoot, hungry and cold narrates his fate with caustic irony. The hero's difficulties are explained differently across various texts, but more often the explanations boil down to orphanhood, other people's envy, "corrupt slanderers", malediction and downfall brought upon by the "wrongdoers". The protagonist, who was once rich, is now abandoned, without a home, clothes, relatives and anything that ensures survival. Food, clothes and money are seen as objects which define worlds and cultures. The "naked person" is thus ridiculous and pathetic, but to laugh at him is to laugh through tears, which leads to affect and release of grief. It is no coincidence that A. Bergson considered the experience of excitement and compassion to be the most dangerous for the comic element (Bergson 1914: 98). The tragic substrate is specific for Russian comedic culture as a whole, which is associated with the motif of two realities (carnival in the European tradition replaces the present, but does not represent a second reality), hence the development of the motif of duality which indicates the twisted and clownish nature of the plot. "Russian carnival couples are characterised by reduction in the laughter principle" (Agranovich and Samorukova 2014: 46). D. Likhachev explains this in the following way: "In the seventeenth century, the naked person was not considered a travesty, but reality. Life itself transfers humour into something

serious" (Likhachev 2001: 389). Mirror and circular structures, repetitions, characters' specificities (appearance of laughter's doubles) and jest form a "funny text" whose protagonist is doomed to live a horrible life in perpetuity from which he is not able to escape. An example of this can be found in the famous seventeenth-century satirical stories "Foma" and "Erema", which were reproduced in popular prints (*lubok*), fairy tales and folk music. The pairing of characters is fatal, all of their efforts are doomed from the start and entry into the real world is prohibited. Contrary to official medieval culture, which instilled the idea of choice, "humorous opposition implies that the possibility of choice is fictional" (Panchenko 1984: 44). In this context, the tragic and farcical image of Russian history is symbolic – whichever events occur, their meaning is always the same. This is demonstrated in plots from Russian classics: from *Eugene Onegin* and *A Hero of Our Time* to the works by Fyodor Dostoevsky, where the "underground man", Smerdyakov or Ivan Karamazov, represents the back side of an "unbearable world" (Meletinskii 1994: 86–118). In Solzhenitsyn's story "Zakhar-Kalita" the composition of the text corresponds to the image of a noose, which "returned in loops, returned and strangled".

The so-called doubling world (the perceived and the divine) motif is associated with the passage through the phase of decay, immersion in death and hell and it is no coincidence that everyone in hell laughs. The "naked person" cannot stand up to the world that mocks and humiliates him. Increasing in its nakedness and poverty, the "unbearable world" is introduced into the real world, replacing and displacing it. In "The ABC of a Naked and Poor Man" the author not only unfolds a picture of scarcity, hunger, and the absurdity of the back side of existence, but demonstrates that the real world is also unjust and wrecked, since it permits cruelty towards a naked and unhappy person. The jester and fool in this way become more familiar than a living person and, in this case, the reality itself becomes twisted and illusory. Both unbearable and real worlds are unacceptable, each in its own way. "A happy world is unhappy with its injustice. An unhappy world, although ridiculous, still evokes sympathy, it is an insider, and its character is a victim of the happy world" (Likhachev 2001: 383). Moreover, both worlds are hostile to each other, both have the status of reality. The "unbearable world" is distinguished by the upcoming activeness, it retains its typical features: clownish outfit, gestures, characters' jokes, and *raesbny* verse. Thus, the antiworld becomes a mirror exposing untruth, the duplicity of the present world, in which the actual disorder – injustice – has been revealed. Hunger and nakedness become a terrible reality in which a person finds himself; the eversion of the world

ceases to cause laughter, instead, it causes sadness, fear, confusion, a feeling of loneliness, and abandonment. In order to escape this environment, the protagonist must be insensitive and unemotional, which is, to a certain extent, demonstrated in Varlam Shalamov's "new prose" in which the Stalinist camp is compared not solely to hell, but to a place incompatible with existence, where, according to V. Podoroga, "there are no people at all" (Podoroga 2013: 104). In developing theoretical positions of Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky, concerning the binary structure of Russian culture, Kevin Platt notes, "The only possible way to escape from this involuntary horrendous repetition of the past may be found in rejecting the idea of revolution in history and reconciling with the traditions of the past as a valuable and necessary addition to the innovations of the future" (Platt 2006: 233). An analysis of the connection between the image of the "naked person" of A. Solzhenitsyn, including the author's personal experience, and an emergency situation (including revolutions), featured in the works by G. Agamben (1998) based on Western civilization, would be highly promising material for a separate study.

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The actualization of images of the "unbearable world" and the idea of "duality" occurs in literature "during periods of social and spiritual crises" (Agranovich and Samorukova 2014: 35). During ordinary times they exist in a weakened and contextual form. If we turn to twentieth-century Russian literature, texts written in the 1920s particularly stand out – *The Twelve Chairs* by I. Ilf and E. Petrov, based on adventurous and clownish "dressing up" of the character, *Envy* by Yury Olesha and *The Heart of a Dog* by Mikhail Bulgakov. European satirical tradition is noticeable in these literary works. Sharikov, who enters the real world naked and hungry, is an ideal example of the "unbearable world" in which hunger and nudity are his *charisma* (Men'shikova 2015: 105). The introduction of the "anti-world" into a pure, well-fed Philistine life leads to its deconstruction. Sharikov is ridiculous only within the space of the professor's apartment, but when he joins the proletariat, where nakedness and hunger are reality – only then does he seem terrifying. Evgeny Zamyatin and Andrei Platonov's works are often described as "revolutionary grotesque". In *Chebengur* the post-revolutionary world is characterized by orphanhood, nakedness, and wretchedness. The overcoat is analogous to the "patchwork and patched-up shirt" of the holy fool (Günther 1998: 117–131), under which the protagonists

do not wear clothes. Chepurnoi is convinced that a communist must be naked (Platonov 1988: 350).

A number of scholars note a modernist influence on Solzhenitsyn's early works, notably Remizov's school: Boris Pilnyak, Evgeny Zamyatin, Mikhail Prishvin, and Sergey Klychkov (Gul' 2012: 349). In a 1976 interview, the writer singles out not only Alexander Pushkin and the late Leo Tolstoy, but also John Dos Passos, Marina Tsvetaeva and Evgeny Zamyatin, whom he calls his teacher (Solzhenitsyn 1997: 186). Solzhenitsyn's language is particularly attractive due to an abundance of similes and metaphors, creating "a truly mythological duality of phenomena, where "everything is in everything" and everything is like everything" (Shaitanov 2014: 367–368). Solzhenitsyn claims that this richness of language is unique for early twentieth-century literature. Well known is his interest in literary works by Vladimir Nabokov, which he enjoys as a reader and Iosif Brodsky's poetry, the heir to the modernist sensibility tradition. In this regard, L. Losev subtly remarks that "in striving to be read by the masses, Solzhenitsyn creates a literary language comparable to the language of the futurists with regard to its artificiality" (Losev 2010). Of course, the traditionalist assertions of the author of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* definitely prevail, but this emphasises the importance of interest in modernist techniques (from language constructed and embedded in the mouths of peasant characters to the typology of characters marked with jester and trickster traits).

It is particularly worth noting the interest of Russian avant-garde culture in the "naked person" idea (suprematism, Mikhail Zoschenko's tale), among the *chinari*, primarily in Daniil Kharm's work, all of which receives a philosophical justification in Yakov Druskin's treatise "On the Naked Person" (1936). Nakedness and restlessness in the philosophy of the *chinari* are seen as symbols of freedom; the "naked person" is seen through the paradigm of *messengers* and *angels*, forever open to the world and free from the materiality of the world (Shadrin 2016: 35–44). The messenger is a distinct creature – living on the threshold, looking into our world, but staying within the limits of another. Appearance of a messenger is a sign of the invasion of the miraculous (Podoroga 2013: 556–568).

Representations of the image of a "naked person" in Russian culture are also visible in the "long 70s" era, when the "little man", who became "naked" involuntarily and forgotten on the margins of Soviet construction projects, returns to literature: from *Alive* (1964–1965) by Boris Mozhaev to Vasily Shukshin's "eccentrics" (Kovtun 2011a: 132–154) and tricksters of the late

Valentin Rasputin (Kovtun 2011b: 65–81). However, the theme of the “naked person” went through a genuine renaissance in “the other prose” of the 1990s, in the short story “The Manhole” (1991), in the novel *The Underground, or a Hero of Our Time* (1998) by Vladimir Makanin where a new kind of “underground man” is presented (Semykina 2008). “Makanin’s interest in the everyday life in a psychiatric hospital and in marginal types (whether as a norm or as a deformation) is related, as it seems, to the desire to analyse the mental structure (or disorder) of a modern person and the modern society. The analysis turns out to be so acute that there are probably no equivalent to it in this respect,” proclaims E. Ermolin (Ermolin 2003: 188). In his essay “Angle” Makanin interprets the history of the twentieth-century Russian novel as a story of *denudation of the hero* and his transformation into “the poorest of the poor”. This interpretation is also present in *The Underground, or a Hero of Our Time*. The author states that “the Russian novel has revealed a perfectly robbed character [...]. The toxic Slavist notices that Petrovich represents the next step for the “undressed character” in the Russian novel and that he was needed after the labour camp prisoner” (Makanin 2004: 2–9).

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Irony and sarcasm become foundational in the artistic fabric of post-modern literature, which is woven from contradictions, ambivalence of grotesque images, conflicting natures of everyday life and commonness of the absurd (Dmitry Prigov, Vladimir Sorokin, Lev Rubenstein, Timur Kibirov, Viktor Erofeev...). Provocation and satire also occupy an important place in public consciousness and culture (Tatyana Tolstaya, Yuri Mamin). Through laughter, the author and his characters try to survive, escape from fears produced by utopias that came to life in Russia, and overcome the hardships of everyday absurdity, which have become the norm, while at the same time understanding but not accepting and resisting their condition, wearing laughter like an armour. Postmodern culture itself is defined as intermediary and transitional, destabilising previous aesthetic criteria. P. Kawiecki emphasises postmodernist fluctuations between the priest and the clown, where the former is the keeper of ancient secrets and shrines and the latter is a sceptic, a player and an observer, but not a creator. Repetition, copies of copies (simulacra) and obvious deliberation within postmodernism resemble slapstick or puppet shows and the ritualism within a priestly gesture turns into a paradox when “the postmodern clown acts like a priest” (Kawiecki 1989–1990: 101).

The position of the “naked”, funny person – a trickster – in the “laughing” culture of postmodernism, however, is rather tragic. Mikhail

Epstein concludes that "postmodernism sees culture as an endless field of play, without privileged, "non-playing" elements, such as "the beginning of everything," "the fundamental principle," "the initial concept," and "true reality," (Epshtein 2005: 300). In the novel *Slymxx* (2000), Tatyana Tolstaya raises ontological issues, but embeds them into a phantasmagoric form, which endows the post-catastrophic and extra-evolutionary "unbearable world" with "cheerful relativity" (Kovtun 2009: 85–98). Special studies examine similarities in discussing the theme of the national unconscious in the texts of Solzhenitsyn and Tolstaya (Spivakovskii 2018: 80–86).

#### THE IMAGE OF THE "NAKED PERSON" IN "LABOUR CAMP PROSE"

"Labour camp prose" occupies a special place in the aforementioned paradigm. It continues the tradition which dates back to "The Prayer" and "The Word" by Daniel the Prisoner (twelfth-thirteenth century). According to the medieval laughter tradition, the prisoner humorously refers to himself and his miserable position – he is an exiled or enslaved person in an "inverted" position (Likhachev 2001: 358–359). His world is in opposition to the real world of the royal court. The character is abandoned by friends and family, he has nothing. Since he is not a free man, he makes ridiculous assumptions about the ways to free himself. The "labour camp texts" of Russian classics belong to the same paradigm: from *The House of the Dead* (1860–1861) by Fyodor Dostoevsky to the texts of Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, *The Zone* (1982) by Sergey Dovlatov and "new labour camp prose" represented by Guzel Yakhina, Zakhar Prilepin, and Evgeny Vodolazkin (Kovtun 2019: 157–168).

In contemporary Russian metropolitan literature, Solzhenitsyn embarks upon the "labour camp theme" with the epic story *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1959); the original name is *III-854 (One Day of a Convict)*. M. Geller sees the beginning of new Russian literature in Solzhenitsyn's stories, "After Ivan Denisovich, the reader faces the protagonists of *An Incident at Krestetovka Station* and *Matryona*, which instigated what came to be known as "village" literature" (Geller 1989: 8). V. Zakharov emphasises the fact that the very presence of Solzhenitsyn and "village prose" authors after him, changed the meaning and context of what we are used to call Russian literature" (Zakharov 2005: 409). Despite the temporal (one day) and spatial (labour camp) limitations, in his famous story Solzhenitsyn outlines contours of

national history progression as a whole, a history that has reached a dead end, collapsing into otherness. Literary critics compare Ivan Denisovich with the protagonists of "The Overcoat" (1842) by Nikolai Gogol, *The House of the Dead* (Aleinikov 2012: 578), as well as *Notes from the Underground* (1864) by Dostoevsky, and note the resemblance of Solzhenitsyn's text to *Sakhalin Island* (1891–1894) by Anton Chekhov. The "underground nature" of existence and voluntary or violent separation from the real world become criteria upon which aforementioned works are based. The character "akakia", an old piece of cloth placed underfoot, whose humility irritated Dostoevsky, became one of the arguments for condemning society that indifferently looked at the torments of the "orphaned and poor" for Chekhov (Pletnev 2012: 369). It is interesting that after the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Russia's underground community, living in "underground" conditions, became interested in the author more than anybody else: "The attitude of the underground towards Solzhenitsyn was, in a sense, associated with self-identification, with the geometry of the inner self, with points of resistance to false ideology" (Kolymagin 2018: 371).

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It is no coincidence that in *August 1914*, "astrologer" Pavel Ivanovich Varsonofiev describes Russian history as the series of riots of the "unbearable world":

There had probably been moral values before the Mongols, but we keep it the way we started it. And as they started mixing people with the devil's inciter – you may consider this since Grozny, since Peter the Great, or even since Pugachev – all the way to our innkeepers, and do not miss AD 5. What is there on his invisible face now? What is in his concealed heart?" (Solzhenitsyn 2007 Vol. 7: 371).

Within the limits of the "the unbearable world", where everything is mixed with a "devil's inciter", a tavern replaces the church, and a prison replaces the monastery. However, the story itself is of interest to Solzhenitsyn, but only as a background, a space for a character's self-determination. From a *poetics* point of view, the author's key ideas are conveyed through stable mythologemes: tracks (a metaphor for history) and a Russian *troika* rushing alongside. It is necessary to emphasise that *wanderers, jesters, and dziady* – "the poorest of the poor" live in marginal zones, and their encounters with other worlds occur through the chronotope of the road. Motifs of modern man's wingless soul, his angelic patience which borders on insensibility, and a lack of ways that



can open a different perspective for people, permeate Solzhenitsyn's texts (Kovtun 2012: 72–79).

Critics correlate Ivan Denisovich with the characters of "The Overcoat" (1842) by N. Gogol, *The House of the Dead* (Aleinikov 2012: 578), and *Notes from Underground* (1864) by F. Dostoevsky, association of the author's text to *Sakhalin Island* (1891–1894) by A. Chekhov is noted. One of the criteria that form the aforementioned series is the "underground" of existence, voluntary or violent separation from the real world. Features of a "naked person", a prisoner and a culture hero are fused in the image of Ivan Denisovich. He is a "timid person", never contradicts guards, obeys "cell tosses", he even sits only on the edge of a chair so as not to attract attention: "Shukhov sat down on a bench near the wall, on the very edge" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 16). The character's speech is colored with irony (speech repetitions, jokes, pronunciation peculiarities), and so are his portrait and behavior (Shukhov is described in constant motion, he is restless, compared with zoomorphs: a squirrel and a horse). The day of a prisoner is looped through the endlessness of camp everyday life, shading the nonsense of history. However, the type of the classic character in the backspace of a prison camp looks extremely absurd and doomed (the fate of 2<sup>nd</sup> rank captain Buinovsky). It is no coincidence that the author emphasizes the exceptional sobriety and pragmatism of Shukhov, who knows how to distance himself from the situation and survive in the conditions of the "unbearable world". Ivan Denisovich preserves ethical norms within the camp and, like hereditary peasant foreman Andrey Prokofievich Tyurin, is also named by his name and patronymic.

Peasant skills and endurance allowed him to get used to the circumstances, and preserve physically, but his spiritual status is not confirmed by anything. All thoughts of the prisoner are absorbed by the concern for material things and food, and even memories of life before camp are focused on how much and what they ate at that period. The stomach literally replaces the soul: the center of the "unbearable world" of the camp is the canteen, whose image is parodically turned towards the church, which corresponds to the medieval picture of the anti-world, where the tavern replaces the church ("Pub Service", "Kalyazin Petition"). The entrance to the canteen is barred by an orderly named Lame, who was named "prince" – the lord of darkness by the character. F. Dostoevsky described in his "labor camp texts" that even A. Pushkin saw contempt for the prisoners, pride and, at the same time, buffoonery in the executioner (Dolinin 2013: 33–42). The hero of *The House of the Dead* notes that all executioners are "developed and intelligent people,

with extraordinary egoism, and even pride" (Dostoevskii 1972: 156). The camp space in A. Solzhenitsyn's story diverges in concentric circles, and each circle is associated with the loss of signs of personal existence by prisoners, which include underwear and a cross, seized during a search: "Everything Shukhov wears is official, you may touch it, just a chest and a soul" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 24).

The image of Ivan Denisovich is immersed in the details of everyday life, the character keeps in his memory thousands of little things (how to dry felt boots, not to forget old footcloths, towrope, a piece of cloth – a muzzle which protects from the frostbites ...), and every morning he literally collects himself in pieces from oblivion. The author fixes the details of this *self-creation act*, it is not by chance that the labour camp seems to be a place that has nothing to do with *divine* Creation, where a person himself is forced to play the role of the *Demiurge's double*. Hence the character's ironic attitude to the church order bearers. The character recalls a rural priest who "pays alimony to three women in three cities, and lives with a fourth family. And the regional bishop is on his hook, our priest gives a fat paw to the bishop. And he gets rid of all the other priests, despite a number of them sent here, he does not want to share with anyone ..." (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 108). The church which cooperates with the state is formalized, it turns into a kind of tavern, den, and "a sovereign pub." Listening to Alyoshka the Baptist's prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread," interpreting the language of the Holy Scripture into the familiar dialect of prisoners, Ivan Denisovich clarifies: "It means food ration, doesn't it?". It is necessary to emphasize that in the laugher texts of the "rebellious" seventeenth century, representatives of the church and monasticism become one of the main targets, their hypocrisy, greed, and drunkenness are ridiculed.

The camp is a place where God is forgotten, hence the Word has no power here, it loses its original meanings: "Having lived in the camp old Bandera people have abandoned the cross. And Russians forgot the hand for making the sign of a cross" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 12). The sunrise in the "unbearable world" is ironically inscribed by the character into the Soviet government decrees: Ivan Denisovich "did not argue. Does the sun obey their decrees?" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 43). The moving column of prisoners resembles a wriggling monster that "has put its tail on the hill", it knocks down the stars, absorbs people, turning them into "the poorest of the poor", a faceless mass under the supervision of guards – henchmen of darkness. The image refers to the story by E. Zamyatin "Khr Yapalo", where a monster which destroys stars and speaks with its belly, devours people, leaving only "snowdrift excrements"

behind. The surviving peasants hide behind the back of the monster, unable to turn around, and in this way, a resemblance of a procession of the cross is formed. In A. Solzhenitsyn's text, the procession of the column of prisoners is "against the blushing sunrise", symbolizing the act of renewal, resembles a funeral rite: "Holding hands behind, and drooping heads, the column moved, as to a funeral" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 26). The labour camp is immersed in an atmosphere of cold, hunger, darkness and deafness, which became the traditional signs of the "unbearable world" and hell (Tempest 1998: 129). An endless snowy desert, symbolizing the power of nothingness is around the prisoners: "White snow lay everywhere, on the right and on the left, and there was not a single tree in the whole steppe" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 27). In the bylina, the path to the kingdom of death lies through a field strewn with bones, over which crows fly: "The idea of an unknown country, where a long and difficult path leads to, is a most typical motive of the plot about the afterlife wanderings" (Veletskaya 1978: 20).

In A. Solzhenitsyn's story, life in the camp is mirrored by a tragic carnival, the author uses effects of the classical "labour camp prose" traditions, where convicts are turned into dolls and guards and executioners do not have any human feelings towards them (Tunimanov 1980: 119). "From evening to morning everything turns the other way around" for the guards, the laws in the camp are "inverted", aimed at destroying everything human in a person. Labour camp customs are a parody of *church rituals*: every morning begins with a hammer hitting the rail at the headquarters barracks, which travesties the sounds of the church bell. An artist who writes numbers on the prisoners' caps "smears foreheads with myrrh just like a priest"; the daily posting to work is accompanied by the "annoying prisoner prayer" – a reminder of the regime rules; "extensive smoke from Caesar's pipe is like incense in the church" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 53); "holy minutes" for a prisoner are when he holds a bowl of skilly in his hands, "a prisoner lives" for this minute. In the perception of Ivan Denisovich, the labour camp appears to be an absolutely closed, motionless and insurmountable place, the camp stretches from the earth to the sky, from edge to edge, acquiring an existential and metaphysical nature; it is this feature that will be important for the authors of the "new labour camp prose", from S. Dovlatov to G. Yakhina and E. Vodolazkin. Even after serving his term, a prisoner is not free, nothing changes in his fate: "If your ten-year sentence is over, they will say: you have another one. Or you will be sent to exile" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 44). Hence the irrelevance of the categories of time and space: "Shukhov noticed a lot of times that the

days in the camp go very fast, in the blink of an eye. But the term itself does not move at all; it does not become smaller" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 23).

However, the world on the other side of the barbed wire is not much different from the "unbearable world": the same absurdity, poverty, hunger, and dependence on authorities. Peasants do not have land, they are busy with painting "carpets": stencilled images of the road and Russia-Troika, which are key images in the author's work as a whole, appear on white sheets. Reflecting on the fate of the village, Shukhov recalls "free people" – car and excavator drivers – and sees that "the direct road for people was blocked, but people are not lost: they go around and are, thus, alive" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 29). Carpeting, leaving a poor village, and wandering is a trickster technique (Toporov 1987: 13) that allows peasants, deprived of the space of existence, to survive. At the end of *One Day* ... a comprehensive picture of the world as a camp is formed. Its main character is a prisoner – a "naked person", deprived of everything necessary for life, but the country was built through his efforts: the column went past the woodworking enterprise built by convicts, past the residential quarter (the barracks were also built by prisoners, but free people live here), past the new club-house (everything was constructed by prisoners, from the foundation to the murals, and free people watch movies here), and the column went out into the steppe" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 3: 27). The emotional shock that the reader experiences is associated with the paradoxical perception of the story. The "unbearable world" which the character got used to, having learned to be "almost happy" here, evokes not only anger, but also compassion for the "naked person", and it destroys the power of the anti-world. It is interesting that after "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was published, Russian underground community, existing on the terms of the *clandestine*, was most interested in the author: "The attitude of the underground towards Solzhenitsyn was, in a sense, associated with self-identification, with the geometry of the inner self, and with points of resistance to deceitful ideology" (Kolymagin 2018: 371).

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#### MYTHOLOGY OF THE "NAKED PERSON" IN *THE CANCER WARD*

Solzhenitsyn develops the mythology of the "naked person" in his novel *The Cancer Ward* (1968). This is currently one of the most widely read

Solzhenitsyn's works in Europe and America. Unlike the peasant characters, the intellectual Kostoglotov reflects on the value of freedom, prospects for choice, and the nature of evil – the things which Ivan Denisovich touches upon only vaguely. It is no coincidence that literary critics note that "Kostoglotov is the most complex of all of Solzhenitsyn's characters; he is as stubbornly brave and independent as Nerzhin from the novel *In the First Circle*, and as tenacious and full of inner dignity as Ivan Denisovich, although the circle of his interests is wider, he is more inquisitive and thoughtful" (Muchnik 2010: 558). The author of the story is interested in mechanisms of *self-identification* in an extreme situation. *The Cancer Ward* provides an image of the Soviet era society, scholars note the influence of the Menaion tradition (Tereshkina 2015: 253–260) and the chronicles on the author's poetics. *The Cancer Ward* is compared to "The Tale of Bygone Years" (Kolobaeva 2012: 143).

The very image of a *hospital ward* as a model of the universe is present in world and Russian literature, related to the ideas of Antiquity and the Enlightenment, when a parallel between society and the human body was implied: "...Plato already calls a person a *polis* in which opposing forces collide; Alcmaeon of Croton compares bodily health with equality, and illness with monarchy and the tyranny of one element" (Vidal'-Nake 2001: 278). Hence the correlation of illness and health with the political prosperity of a state or its deep ailments. It is no coincidence that Solzhenitsyn emphasizes the art of diagnosticians and surgeons working in a cancer building. They save the sick, cutting out dangerous tumours, the same way society should move towards its recovery, leaving political tyranny and labour camps in the past. Without repentance for committed crimes, closure is impossible. In the same vein, the protagonist of *Doctor Zhivago* (1945–1955) by Boris Pasternak, a unique diagnostician, puts forward a terrible diagnosis of modernity and seeks ways to salvation. This paradigm is continued in Evgeny Vodolazkin's novel *The Aviator* (2016), whose cryopreserved<sup>2</sup> protagonist, is transformed after awakening – from a humiliated, "naked", "underground person" and a prisoner – into a celebrity and "a face on the cover." In the medical ward, Innokenty re-models the world, undergoes initiation (from child to man) and masters the ways of modern culture in which traditional values are replaced by advertisements and simulacra.

<sup>2</sup> Cryonics – the practice of freezing and preserving human body with liquid nitrogen after clinical death.

Typical representatives of the post-war society can be found in Solzhenitsyn's cancer ward: the former prisoner, the labour camp guard, the young scientist, the "little man" crushed by fear, and the *nomenklatura* functionary. The situation in which they meet each other eliminates all ranks and differences. In the ward, they are all "naked persons" placed in extreme circumstances – awaiting death. In this respect, the image of the ward is closely related to the image of the labour camp where the plot culminates in a fatal event, which correlates to the logic of Varlam Shalamov's "new prose" (Zharavina 2014). Kostoglotov admits, "For some minutes it seemed that I have returned to my old life, and there is no end to it. The most oppressive thing is that I am here without a term, until further notice" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 254). When the protagonist is escorting the laughing and cheerful Proshka, who leaves literally without anything, "naked", from the hospital, he recalls, "So, it happened occasionally, but sometimes they were escorted to freedom" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 107). At the same time, the patient does not even suspect that he is doomed. In the same way, the escort from the camp is not told that "now, outside the gates, he will be arrested again" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 107).

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Laughter and clowning in the labour camp, as well as jokes in the hospital, fit into the paradigm of reversible existence (non-existence). The "unbearable world" is reflected in the text: its presence is visible in dialogues, Kostoglotov's memories, details, and assessments of other people which grow into symbolic images. One of the nurses, whose husband is arrested, considers labour camp to be worse than hell, because being there excludes any signs of reality. "All literary tragedies seem ridiculous to me compared to what we are experiencing," Elizaveta Anatolyevna insisted. 'Aida was allowed to go down to her loved one and die with him. And we are not even allowed to get some information about him'" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 407).

Historical events and premonition of the "thaw" form a background against which personal tragedies of patients are developed. For Solzhenitsyn, there is a level of Divine Providence in existence, the meaning of which is hidden from a person, since the strategy of the world is governed by God's Providence. However, at the level of individual life there is freedom of interpretation and self-determination (development of a moral scale of actions). Patients experience their own story in different ways: from horror and fear of the inevitable to gratitude for every day that they have lived, and humility. Humility is one of the key categories of the Menaion code that is important in the text. Kostoglotov recognises his position as a new challenge,

a battle with fate, freed from the vanity of the present, "I don't have a damn thing, and I'm proud of it! And I do not strive to it! And I don't want to have a big salary – I d e s p i s e it!" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 350).

The theme of the "naked person" in the novel *In the First Circle* (1955–1958) follows the same style: it echoes the ideas of the Russian avant-garde, wherein poverty and nudity are indicators of freedom from everyday life. Engineer Bobynin, who refuses to cooperate with the regime, explains the reason for his own fearlessness from Minister Abakumov in the following way:

I have nothing, do you understand? N o t h i n g ! You will not get my wife and child anymore – the bomb took them. My parents are already dead. All that I possess on earth is a handkerchief – my overalls and my underwear without buttons (he bared his chest and showed it) – those are government property. You deprived me of my freedom long ago, but it is not within your power to return it, because you do not have it yourself (Solzhenitsyn 1999 Vol. 2: 562).

If the peasant convicts and Ivan Denisovich are robbed and humiliated by the state and history itself, intellectuals choose the fate of the "naked person" themselves, so as not to cooperate with the criminal government. The novel ends in a symbolic scene – the prisoners are being transported to the labour camp:

Listening to the movement of the car, the prisoners fell silent. Yes, taiga and tundra, the Oymyakon cold pole and the Dzhezkazgan copper mines awaited them. They were awaited again by a pick and a wheelbarrow, a hungry ration of raw bread, a hospital and death. Only the worst awaited them. But in their souls they were in peace with themselves. They were as fearless as people who had lost absolutely e v e r y t h i n g – they had fearlessness, which is substantial, albeit difficult to acquire (Solzhenitsyn 1999 Vol. 2: 827).

In *The Cancer Ward*, a *nomenklatura* functionary Pavel Nikolayevich Rusanov considers his new position of the "naked person" as an absurd fault in fate, distorting his clear and successful path: "He needed support, but they pushed him into a pit. In a few hours Rusanov lost his position, merits, and plans for the future, and became seventy kilograms of a warm white body, not knowing what will happen tomorrow" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 13). His former life, a well-established way of life, "all this separated from him in a few days and turned out to be o n t h e o t h e r s i d e of the tumor" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 18). A worker, Ephraim Podduev, who has been striving for earthly joys (money, women, and change of places) all his life,

and who is also taken aback by the disease, is horrified by the despair of his own situation: "Cancer loves people. If cancer grabs a person with its claw, it leads to death" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 13).

The "female nudity" motif, which is indicated in the story through the labour camp/ hospital parallel, is worth emphasizing. In the labour camp, a young woman is doomed to fear and humiliation, and if she resists – to death:

If she is not raped by bandits somewhere along the way in a hole – although they always have time to do this in the camp – the very first evening, camp parasites, filthy dogs or rations distributors will arrange so that she will be taken naked past them to the bathhouse. And she will be immediately assigned – to somebody (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 149).

The motif of involuntary castration is also connected to motifs of illness and fate. A very young Asya, full of hope until recently, is waiting for an operation to remove her right breast. It is important for her that at least someone remembers her as beautiful as she was before: "She tore off her robe, even though it was barely hanging and, crying or moaning she pulled back the collar of her shirt, and showed her doomed right breast [...]. No one entered, and he kissed this miracle hanging over him. Today it's a miracle, and tomorrow it's in the waste bin" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 341).

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The image of a "girl embroiderer", as a kind of alternative to the humiliated and emasculated Beauty is seen in the nurse with a symbolic name Zoya (life). When she was embroidering, Kostoglotov was admiring her: "She was placing stitch upon stitch, allowing him to admire her work. She was looking at her embroidery, and he was looking at her. Her eyelashes were gleaming gold in the yellow light of the lamp. And the open corner of the dress was gilding as well" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 36). This image is widespread in Russian culture: the myths about the Goddess of fate spinning the thread of life; Sophia-Wisdom which adorns the world and female images of Russian classics. It is worth highlighting that the sophiological context, associating Sophia with an "elevated" Russia which was yet to come, was underway already in the 17th century (Vaiskopf 2003: 113) and is obviously significant in Solzhenitsyn's literary work (Tredgold 2010: 241). In this sense, the portrait of Dr. Vera Gangart (Vega) endowed with amazing graciousness and "fluttering hands" resembling wings, whose concern inspires hope in the protagonist, is particularly interesting. In a conversation with Kostoglotov, setting out the theory of "moral socialism", patient Shulubin refers to Vladimir Solovyov's sophiological ideas: "Vladimir Solovyov, for instance, quite



convincingly proves that it is possible and necessary to build an economy based on morality" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 376).

The hospital is an ambivalent and challenging space, symbolically similar to Purgatory. The cancer ward occupies the middle position between the camp, which is associated with hell, a mousetrap-labyrinth, and the provincial town, which is associated with hopes of freedom. The ward is dark, the air is stale, the moans of the sick are heard, but the garden where they walk and meet with their relatives is reminiscent of a lost paradise. Accordingly, not solely doctors, but other forces are fighting for life and people's souls as well: the devil and the guardian angel. A nurse with a suggestive name – Maria – escorts patients to the ward: "Her olive icon-like face radiated neither a smile nor a greeting. Tall, thin and flat, she was waiting for him like a soldier, and immediately went to the upper vestibule, showing the way" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 11). During rounds she behaves as if "a round for her was what worship is for a deacon" (Solzhenitsyn 1991a Vol. 4: 42). One of the patients "was astutely looking at the doctor, like a child looking at an icon" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 319). The girl sits on the hospital bed like "a yellow-haired melting angel, who you can't touch" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 113). The main theme is developed through poetics of "facing death", which is universal for all world literature (Bogdanov 2005: 23). As Tereshkina argues, "An individual encounter with death becomes the main thematic leitmotif of the Menaion code of the story" (Tereshkina 2015: 258). It is no coincidence that the text is full of intertextual connections, referring to experiences of great authors who address this theme (Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Bunin, and Anton Chekhov, to mention a few).

Various *topoi* are connected to each other as the protagonist, former prisoner Kostoglotov, who comes to the hospital to die, moves through the plot. His path goes not so much between camps, cities, and hospitals, but between eternity. He was walking from the doctor "and thinking he was walking between two eternities. On one side, there is a list of those doomed to die. On the other, an e t e r n a l exile. Eternal like the stars. Like galaxies" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 74). In the earthly dimension, extremes are represented by the labour camp (hell) and the city, the return to which is likened to a resurrection. The dying character is found lying on the hospital's *doorstep*: "... A lanky man in high boots, military faded greatcoat, and fur hat which was too small, but pulled over his head, was lying near the front staircase" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 57).

His lying on the doorstep, similar to being crucified on a cross (a motif often found among Dostoevsky's characters), the lack of personal things

and overall abandonment are symbolic, they make readers remember the image of *akakia* – rags under the feet of the mighty of this world. It is no coincidence that his main personal possession is a "Gogolesque" overcoat. The patient's story polemically reminds us of Maxim Gorky's texts. When the doctor asks, "Who are you?", laid out on the floor Kostoglotov replies, "I am man" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 57), and it does not sound proud, but quiet, indifferent, and hopeless. At the level of narration, the polemic with Maxim Gorky is fundamental, references to the ideas of the "petrel (*burevestnik*) of revolution" are put into mouths of negative characters distinguished by the vulgarity of their judgments: the functionary Rusanov, his daughter – the aspiring poet Avieta, whose name "is associated with 'aviation', which in the early 1930s, when the Rusanovs' girl was born, was a shining symbol of progress" (Nemzer 2018: 147).

Early in the morning, when Kostoglotov, who has now recovered, leaves the cancer ward, he is compared to a new creation of the world: "It was the morning of creation! The world was created again to return to Oleg: go! live!" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 412). Reading books and being attracted to women who live in the hospital represent stages of ascent from "the unbearable world" to the limits of freedom as a personal choice and as a responsibility. *Doctors* whose mercy awards the "naked person" a new, elevated status and *women* who have become loved ones (Zoya – Vega) play a fundamental role here. Escape from the labyrinth (the "mousetrap" in the text) unravels the "death-life" secret which is stored there (Faryno 2005: 150). The "guiding" hand – the wing – of doctor Vega (a bright star) which reaches out to the character is fundamental for defeating the "unbearable world". Hence Kostoglotov's desire to start a family, find a wife who will protect his House which is equalled to life itself, and to transform himself (to heal). While walking around the city, he experiences a *revelation*: the secret of the House – analogous to the soul – is revealed to him: "But Oleg immediately understood and accepted the eastern plan: I don't want to know how you live, and you should not look at my lifestyle! After years in the labour camp, always in the open view, always searched, looked over and spied on – what better way of life could a former prisoner choose?" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 415). Sacralisation of the idea of a path corresponds to the general concept of space in Solzhenitsyn's texts, where the journey "is not an *odyssey*, but a *pilgrimage*. It is not the road that matters, but the roadside revelation" (Nikolson 2005: 275).

## "CURSED QUESTIONS": VARIANTS OF A SOLUTION

Staying in the cancer ward is associated with an answer to the last, "cursed question" – about the meaning of life and death. Context for this is found in Leo Tolstoy's folk story "What Men Live By?", which the patients discuss in the ward. The story narrates the journey of an angel to Earth who was to learn about and understand the deepest questions of existence: "What is found in people, that is not given to people, and that gives people life." A "naked and barefoot" angel who is guilty before God, finds himself in the same position as an outcast, as the "naked person"; he becomes acquainted with fear, loneliness, cold, and hunger. A poor shoemaker finds him in the chapel and shares with him his clothes, shelter and bread. Living among people reveals the secret of their life – love. Following the commandments of the gospel, according to the author, is the way to resurrection and finding your true self.

In *The Red Wheel*, this secret, given to the Angel, is revealed by L. Tolstoy when he meets Sasha Lazhenitsyn, and he instructs the schoolboy that it is necessary to "serve the good. And to create the Kingdom of God on earth in this way". The story "What Men Live By" becomes a moral tuning fork, and the characters compare themselves with it. The text, however, is weakly linked to a specific existential situation; it exists, separately from the plot action, acting as a representation of the author's key idea.

Efrem Podduev understands Tolstoy's story as his own sentence. His life appears in his memory as a series of cruelties and deceptions: "Ephraim could not protect himself from this with anything significant" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 180). The character leaves the hospital and dies on the station platform – at the crossroads, a threshold, a place where amulets and prayers do not work. Sick Rusanov, who gets used to the comfortable life and does not discuss moral questions, dreams about the Last Judgment after discussing the text. He sees the faces of those whom he has betrayed and slandered. Moreover, the character does not remember the reasons for his own crimes, which are the result of his overzealousness for his work. Rusanov calms down only after a conversation with Avieta, who assures her father that the evidence of his guilt has been destroyed. However, through the mouths of doctors as "guardians of the threshold", the author says that impending retribution is inevitable. In this way A. Solzhenitsyn disputes L. Tolstoy's commandment about the primordial kindness of man, namely, Rusanov is mean not due to his ignorance, he does evil consciously.

The polemic with Tolstoy is continued in *The Red Wheel*, Sanya Lazhenitsyn wants to know how applicable L. Tolstoy's maxims are to his contemporary

subjected to an ideological imperative. Note that the prototype of the character was the writer's father – a convinced Tolstoyan in his youth. In the novel, Tolstoy and the schoolboy meet at the turning points of their own fates. For Tolstoy 1910 is characterised by an acute crisis in the family, provoking the subsequent flight from the estate, while Sanya comes to Yasnaya Polyana after deciding to go to the front. His experience is already at odds with Tolstoy's commandment of love for one's neighbour as the basis of civil society. The modern "rebellious man", driven by bureaucratic fanaticism or revolutionary ideas, sows evil with enthusiasm and methodically. The course of history, alas, will confirm the validity of Sanya's observations.

The image of the philosopher Shulubin occupies a specific place in *The Cancer Ward*. He is in a hurry to share his pain with Kostoglotov on the eve of the operation. Shulubin calls himself "a little man", the new Akaki Akakievich, shaping himself "like a sculpture of loss", and hastens to share his pain the day before the operation (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 366). He has been left by his family and friends, for whose sake he has sacrificed everything: "... I saved myself only by bowing and being silent", "I was silent for my wife, then I was silent for my children, then I was silent for my sinful body" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 372). A lonely man on a park bench, resembling a "crazy raven", asserts that his generation went through a historic fiasco. Shulubin's choice, which turns into a series of losses and denials (from fellow scientists, from unwanted books and science), is directly opposite to Kostoglotov's fate, who retains his fearlessness in the camp. It is no coincidence that precisely Oleg listens to Shulubin's last dying breath: "Not everything in me will die [...] Not everything will die."

Following Tolstoy, the author of *The Cancer Ward* forms his view on the relationship between the *past*, *present* and *future* in the fate of man. The future is perceived not as separate events and facts, but as a kind of semantic composition, a unity of connections, symbolically comparable to the image of gold hatching around the icon of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, which Nikolenka sees at the end of *War and Peace* (Isupov 1992: 11–12). The past (memory) faces the space of the future; without memory a person does not exist, a person's action determines the continuity of history. The usual chronology in this instance turns into a sum of "semantic" traces-actions that reveal the providential. Tolstoy's sermon gave Solzhenitsyn an opportunity to demonstrate how the inferiority of existence is overcome by compassion and individual ethical creativity. The evidence for this is the Kadminys family, who survive arrest and labour camps and manage to create a *house-*

ark in exile, where people and animals find shelter from the dominating "unbearable world".

The description of protagonists' lives is similar to techniques used by Gogol (*The Old World Landowners*) and Solzhenitsyn himself. Righteous Matryona with her courtyard-ark and Zakhar-Kalita guarding the Kulikovo field belong to the same context. The motif of the ark penetrates the novel *In the First Circle*: from the image of the castle of the Holy Grail and the vision of a destroyed church over the Moscow River to a stone prison that was transformed into an ark-temple floating above the city at night: "From here, from the ark, which confidently makes its way through darkness, it was easy to see the winding and lost stream of accursed History – all at once, as if from a great height, and it could be seen in detail, up to a stone at the bottom, as if you plunged into it" (Solzhenitsyn 1999 Vol. 2: 426). In *The Cancer Ward*, the village of Ush-Terek, where the Kadminys settle, is emphasised by three poplars that are visible from afar. The uniqueness of the trees (analogous to the "world tree") is emphasised by their antiquity and rarity: "But such trees are no longer allowed" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 229). Blossoming wild apricot, which Kostoglotov sees on his way to the city, and strengthening of his love for the world, mirror the same paradigm.

Describing the Kadminys' living conditions in a "dilapidated dugout with a vegetable garden", the author gives them some attributes common for a manor: a round table and a homemade lampshade that turned "a mud dugout into a luxurious living room of a century before the last." "Music, heavenly for a prisoner's ear" can be heard in the evenings (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 237). "Oleg's constant joy and humorous attitude to life in exile mostly came from the Kadminy spouses" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 234). The owner's energetic concern for the garden resembles the story of "the old prince Bolkonsky with the Bald Hills and specific architecture" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 237). It is symbolic that Kostoglotov also deals with land management, which is related to the fate of Tolstoy's Levin. Both characters' stories are endowed with autobiographical traits of their creators. Cultivation of their land and arrangement of the Home-soul are sacralised in the story. In Tolstoy's writings, they allow protagonists to consolidate and remain in a crumbling reality, to preserve the status of an individual (Tamarchenko 1998: 38–48). The estate of the "old doctor" Oreshnikov where the "bus doesn't drive by" follows the same reasoning. The characters' reflections on the meaning of existence echo Tolstoy's angel's revelation: it is not so much historical activity that is important but the preservation of the image of eternity "implanted in everyone."

## CONCLUSION

The key symbol which organizes Solzhenitsyn's story is a *cave-labyrinth* where people wander in search of the meaning of existence. Everyone encounters "cave idols", traps, monsters and dead ends and, depending on the moral choice they made, either remains a prisoner of the "unbearable world", or acquires the perspective of the Ark. Kostoglotov's path, which starts in hell/labour camp, is conveyed through the metaphor of ascension/flight as liberation (in Gogol's sense). Before walking during a pilgrimage around the city, the protagonist changes into clean clothes and literally straightens up: "It's a pleasure to put on a white shirt at dusk [...] and walk along the main street of the village" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 233). During a conversation with his beloved woman Vega: "Oleg soared and flew along a crazy parabola ... over one desert of his life, over the second desert of his life and transported himself to some ancient land. To the land of childhood!" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 289). Against this background, the figure of Shulubin is symbolic. He looks like "a big bird – with unevenly clipped wings so that he cannot take off" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 278). The dynamics of representation of Efreim Podduev is reduced to a gradual loss of freedom of movement and transformation into a "living corpse", which (apart from his illness) is also explained by moral blindness.

Solzhenitsyn's story is a variation of the classic "non-finito" narrative. After going through trials and overcoming the limits of "the unbearable world", the protagonist moves towards the Kadminys' house-ark. His life is just beginning: "Others did not survive. But he survived. And he did not die of cancer. And exile is already peering through the eggshell. He remembered the warden's advice to get married. Everyone will soon advise to do it" (Solzhenitsyn 1991b Vol. 4: 455). Basically, Solzhenitsyn's text explores the processes of self-identification in horrible history, the most important of which are *moral self-identity*, *will*, *mercy* and *trust in life*.

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