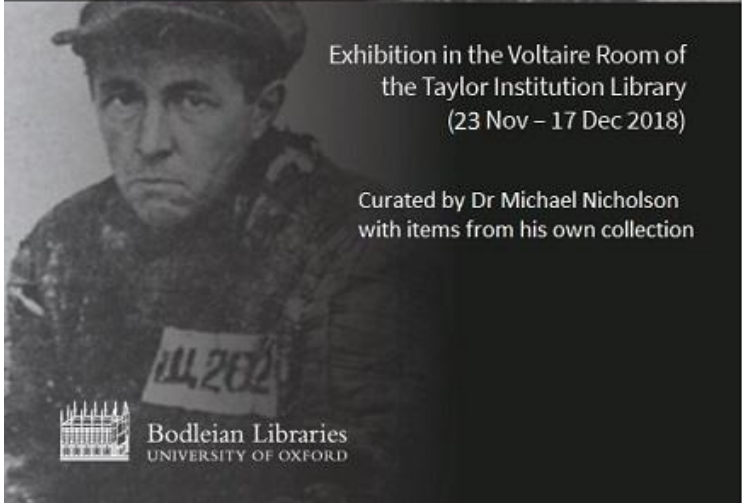




MICHAELMAS TERM 2018

CENTENARY
CELEBRATION
OF
**ALEXANDER
SOLZHENITSYN'S**
BIRTH
11 DECEMBER 1918



Exhibition in the Voltaire Room of
the Taylor Institution Library
(23 Nov – 17 Dec 2018)

Curated by Dr Michael Nicholson
with items from his own collection



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Dates in the Life of Alexander Solzhenitsyn (11 December 1918 – 3 August 2008)

- 1918 Born in Kislovodsk 6 months after his father's death in a hunting accident.
- 1921 Mother moves with him to Rostov-on-Don
- 1929 First reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Beginnings of his literary *juvenilia*.
- 1931 Joins the Pioneers.
- 1936 Conceive the historical epic which, 30 years later, will become *The Red Wheel*. Begins to study Maths at Rostov University. From 1940 simultaneously studies extramurally at Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature & History (MIFLI).
- 1940 Marries Natalya Reshetovskaya.
- 1941 After initial rejection on medical grounds (his incipient tumor), enlists in a horse-drawn transport unit, until
- 1942 able to transfer to Artillery Training College, then serves in and eventually commands a frontline artillery range-finding battery. Wartime stories, verse, fragments of a long narrative *Sixth-Year Studies*.
- 1945 Arrested at the front for anti-Stalinist innuendo in correspondence with a friend.
- 1945-5 Serves in mixed camps (professional criminals as well as political).
- 1946-50 Moved to a special technical prison in the Marfino district of Moscow ('Mavrino' in S's novel *The First Circle*). While there drafts the fragment *History of One Battery* and begins the long verse narrative *The Way*.

- 1950-53 Transferred to labour camp for politicals in Ekibastuz, N. Kazakhstan. Composes in his head and memorizes lyrics, the verse drama *Feast of the Victors*, half of another play, *Captives*, the bulk of the long verse narrative *The Way* — some 12,000 lines in all. He also conceives the idea for his later story of Ivan Denisovich's day. Reshetovskaya files for divorce (1952)
- 1953 Released and sent to 'eternal exile' in village of Kok-Terek in Southern Kazakhstan in time for the death of Stalin. Writes down and buries his memorized verse. Continues writing clandestinely. December: doctor gives him 3 weeks to live. Allowed to enter a Tashkent cancer clinic.
- 1954 Two periods of treatment for testicular cancer (radiation therapy, blood trans-fusions). In between writes play Republic of Labour (now and henceforth in prose).
- 1955 Writes first version of novel *The First Circle*.
- 1956 XX Party Congress. Beginnings of 'de-Stalinization'. Mandatory exile for politicals abolished. S moves to Miltsevo, Vladimir District (setting for 'Matrena's Home').
- 1957 Fully 'rehabilitated'. Re-married to Reshetovskaya. Moves to Ryazan'. Working on revisions of *The First Circle*.
- 1958 First, aborted attempt to write *The Gulag Archipelago* — insufficient material.
- 1959 First versions of 'Matrena's Home', the already understated story of Ivan Denisovich's Day and the literary film-scenario, *Tanks Know the Truth*.
- 1961 XXII Party Congress. Tones down the future *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
- 1961-2 The story passes from S's Gulag friend Lev Kopelev, to Anya Berzer of *Novyi mir*, thence to Editor, Alexander Tvardovsky, who passes it to Khrushchev's assistant Lebedev, who reads it to Khrushchev. Khr informs the Presidium of the Central

- Committee of his decision to authorize publication, which begins in November 1962 (at the time of the Cuban missile crisis).
- 1963 'Matrena's Home' and other stories published. S nominated for Lenin Prize. First attacks in the Soviet press. S begins working overtly on *Cancer Ward*.
- 1964 Lenin Prize candidacy fails. Khrushchev falls from power. S working clandestinely on *Gulag Archipelago*, his fame having elicited a wealth of memoirs and materials.
- 1965 KGB confiscates *The First Circle* and archive materials. (They are aware of the existence *Gulag Archipelago*.) S goes on the offensive, granting interviews, releasing literary works, letters, transcripts into *samizdat*.
- 1966 Last publication in Russia for nearly quarter of a century (story 'Zakhar-Kalita').
- 1967 Begins working on *The Red Wheel*. (Continues with interruptions for 22 years.) Circulates open letter to IV Congress of Soviet Writers, addresses hostile meeting of Board of the Soviet Writers' Union. *Novyi mir* sets up *Cancer Ward* in print, but has to abandon it.
- 1968 Widespread Western publication of *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*.
- 1969 S expelled from the Writers' Union. Empowers a Swiss lawyer to control his lit. affairs in the West. Awarded Nobel Prize for literature. Moves to exile him afoot.
- 1971 Failed attempt to assassinate S in Novocherkassk using ricin. Death of Tvardovsky.
- 1973 Divorces Reshetovskaya, marries Nataliya Svetlova. One of his typists is arrested, under interrogation discloses whereabouts of *Gulag Archipelago*, commits suicide. In December the first vol. of *Gulag* is published in Paris with S's approval.

- 1974 Threats and press campaign culminate in S's arrest and forcible deportation to Germany. Lives for a while in Zurich.
- 1975-6 Warning speeches and interviews in Europe and USA. Settles in Cavendish Vt.
- 1978 Harvard Commencement address arouses critical reaction.
- 1979 Begins publication of a 20-vol. authorized collected works.
- 1980s Various trips and statements, but mainly working in seclusion on *The Red Wheel*. Drops out of the limelight in the West and remains un-personed in the Soviet Union.
- 1987 Stirrings of Gorbachev's *Perestroika*.
- 1988 L Chukovskaya appeals in press for S's citizenship to be returned.
- 1989 After a false start in 1988, *Novyi mir* begins serialization of *Gulag Archipelago*.
- 1990 S's essay "Rebuilding Russia" published in the Soviet press. He refuses a State Prize for *Gulag*. First Soviet publication of *Cancer Ward*. An avalanche of journal publications of his works begins in the Soviet Union ("The Year of Solzhenitsyn"). His citizenship is restored.
- 1991 Treason charge rescinded. December: USSR dismantled.
- 1994 Returns to Russia via Magadan and Vladivostok. Settles in Moscow. Publishes "The Russian Questions at the End of the 20th Century". Meets Yeltsin. For next 15 years continues to address current Russian issues and to court controversy.
- 1993-6 Publishes various new short stories, include a return to the war theme.
- 1996-9 Publishes a cycle of lyrical prose poems.
- 1997 Establishes a literary prize. Starts publishing essays from his "Literary Collection".
- 1998 Publishes "Russia in the Abyss". Begins serialization of *The Little Grain* a memoir of his period in exile.

- 1999 Awarded gold medal of Russian Academy of Sciences. Gives an address on “Science in a Pirate Society.’
- 2000-01 *Two Hundred Years Together*. Controversial book on Russian-Jewish relations. In 2000 S has a meeting at his home with the new President, Vladimir Putin.
- 2007 His worsening health culminates in an operation on his carotid artery. Publishes *Reflections on the October Revolution*. Awarded the State Prize ‘For outstanding achievements in the humanities’. It was accepted on his behalf by his wife, but Putin went back to their home and congratulated a frail S before the cameras, attracting much criticism of the author for his perceived endorsement of Putin.
- 3 August. S dies at his home in Troitse-Lykovo, aged 89. He had been working on revisions to his 30-vol. collected works The former “Great Communist Street” was renamed in his honour— not without controversy.

The Sequence of Exhibits

There are five cases, encompassing between them 13 frames or sections. The sequence is broadly chronological with one marked exception. The exhibits are, of course, overwhelmingly published books, tangible reminders of familiar stages of Solzhenitsyn’s career. At the same time, illustrations are occasionally used, one or two items tend towards the whimsical, and a subdued bias towards things Oxonian may even be detected.

- CASE 1** (nearest to the entrance, at right-angles to St Giles'). The three panels of this case illustrate aspects of Solzhenitsyn's literary début in November 1962. They include examples of some of the six English-language translations of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and the scores of renderings into other languages. The themes of reception and adaptation are adumbrated.
- CASE 2** is a double-panelled one (parallel to St Giles'). This is the anachronistic insertion alluded to above. The utterly improbable publication of *Ivan Denisovich* in 1962 is the only reason we may have heard of Solzhenitsyn. It was, however, not at all the beginning of his literary endeavours, and it reflects them only partially and specifically. This case is intended as at least a hint at his considerable, sustained literary apprenticeship from the 1930s on, as well as raising the question of how this prose-writer emerged from Ekibastuz labour camp in 1953 with 12,000 lines of verse secured in his memory. Much of what the West would eventually perceive as a later, post-Ivan-Denisovich Solzhenitsyn was alive and well in the decade before that work was even begun and before ever he left the confines of his labour camp.
- CASE 3** runs at right angles to CASE 2 towards St Giles'. Its four sections are arranged in two pairs, back to back. They offer a visual reminder of some of the works with which Solzhenitsyn's reputation became closely associated in the late sixties and the seventies (*The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, *The Gulag Archipelago*). The fourth panel marks the point when the last of those texts proved also to be the last straw. The

official campaign against Solzhenitsyn turned to undermining his reputation and dulling his impact abroad.

CASE 4 is the first of two in the far right-hand corner of the Voltaire Room. Its two panels illustrate aspects of Solzhenitsyn's reception in exile, from the academically respectful to the semi-pornographic. He was, in the 1970s, little short of a household name in the West (albeit one largely unpronounceable). Assumptions that he must be, at heart, a humanist liberal democrat, or Prague Spring socialist, were abruptly dispelled. Mythopoetic novelistic versions of Solzhenitsyn crept in to fill the breach. The far right of this case illustrates sterner forms of disagreement or outright obloquy.

CASE 5 takes a few publications and motifs from the nineties and Solzhenitsyn's final years in Russia, including a return to short-story writing. Trammelled by his reputation as octogenarian modern classic and damaged by the hopes he initially placed in Putin, Solzhenitsyn, nevertheless, continued to write and to provoke until his death in 2008.