

I. *Solzhenitsyn:*

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

I.

THE AESTHETIC relationship between the novella and the novel has often been examined. Much less has been said about their historical connection and their interrelationship throughout the course of literary development. Yet here a most interesting and instructive problem is at hand, one which casts a particularly discerning light on the present-day situation. I am thinking of the fact that the novella frequently appears either as a precursor to a conquest of reality by the great epic and dramatic forms, or as a rearguard, a termination at the end of a period; that is, it appears either in the phase of a Not-Yet (*Nochnicht*) in the artistically universal mastery of the given social world, or in the phase of the No-Longer (*Nichtmehr*).

From this viewpoint, Boccaccio and the Italian novella appear as forerunners of the modern bourgeois novel. They depict the world in an era in which bourgeois forms of life were advancing victoriously and were increasingly beginning to destroy the medieval forms in the most diverse areas of life, and to replace these with their own forms. In this world, however, there could not yet be a totality of objects, nor could there be a totality of human relations and behaviour as interpreted by bourgeois society. On the other hand, Maupassant's novella appears as a kind of *Abgesang** of that world whose origin Balzac and Stendhal have depicted and whose extremely

*The third and last section of the strophe in the *Meistersang* (of the *Meistersinger*)—*Trans.*

problematical consummation Flaubert and Zola have portrayed.

Such an historical connection can arise only on the foundation of peculiarities of genre. We have already pointed out that the totality of objects is the characteristic trait of the extensive universality of the novel; the totality of the drama has a different content and structure, but both aim at a comprehensive entirety of the activity depicted, and in both a manifold human pro and contra *vis à vis* the central questions of the era results in a totality of types which, contrasting and complementing each other, occupy the appropriate places in the progression of time. By contrast, the novella is based on a single situation and—on the level of plot and characters—remains there. It does not claim to shape the whole of social reality, nor even to depict that whole as it appears from the vantage point of a fundamental and topical problem. Its truth rests on the fact that an individual situation—usually an extreme one—is possible in a certain society at a certain level of development, and, just because it is possible, is characteristic of this society and this level. For this reason the novella can omit the social genesis of the characters, their relationships, the situations in which they act. Also for this reason, it needs no agencies to set these situations in motion and can forgo concrete perspectives. This peculiarity of the novella, which to be sure permits an infinite internal variety from Boccaccio to Chekhov, enables it to appear historically both as a forerunner and rearguard of the great forms; it can be the artistic representative of the Not-Yet or of the No-Longer, of a totality which can be portrayed.

Naturally we do not aspire to explain, nor even to suggest this historical dialectic here. However, to prevent any misunderstanding it must be said that the alternatives of Not-Yet and No-Longer here described, which are extremely important for the following reflections, by no means exhaust the historical connections between the novel and the novella. There is

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a great number of others which we shall tacitly pass over this time. Just to suggest the diversity of the connections possible here, we might mention Gottfried Keller. *Green Henry* had to leave the Switzerland of the young Keller in order to develop into a total novel. In the cycle *The People of Seldwyla*, the individual novellas, contrasting and complementing each other, produce a view of totality not portrayable in a novel. And the homeland, which has become capitalist, cannot, according to Keller's vision of man, produce a rich and effortlessly organized totality. But the "epigrammatical" novellas, considered as stories-within-stories carrying on controversies with each other, are able to present the ups and downs, the pros and cons of the development of a couple maturing to a genuine love. The immediate substance of the world accessible to Keller would have been incapable of this in a centralized novel. We find here, then, a unique interweaving of the Not-Yet and the No-Longer, which admittedly does not do away radically with the above-mentioned historical connection between the novel and novella, but which can by no means be directly classified within it. And literary history frequently demonstrates quite different interrelations which we cannot enter into here.

With this reservation, one can say of contemporary and near-contemporary fiction that it often withdraws from the novel into the novella in its attempt to provide proof of man's moral stature. I am referring to masterworks such as Conrad's *Typhoon* or *The Shadow Line* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. The withdrawal is already evident in the fact that the social basis, the social milieu of the novel disappears, and the central figure must hold his own against a pure natural occurrence. This duel in which the lonely hero left to his own devices struggles against nature, say against a storm or calm, can even end with the victory of man, as in Conrad; but even when it ends in defeat, as in Hemingway, the moral qualities of its heroes are the essential content of

the novella. The contrast with the novels of these writers (and not only with theirs) is blatant: the social relationships devour, crush, mutilate, falsify, etc. the characters. It appears that there is no effective counter-force, not even one condemned to a tragic fall, to be found in this milieu. And since significant writers cannot possibly forgo all human integrity and inner greatness, novellas of the type just mentioned occur in their works as a rearguard action in their struggles for the deliverance of man.

In Soviet literature too, the forces of progress are concentrated—apart from lyric poetry—around the novella. Solzhenitsyn is surely not the only, but as far as we know *the* one who has succeeded in really breaking through the ideological bulwarks of the Stalinist tradition. It is the task of the following exposition to show that for Solzhenitsyn—and for those striving in a similar direction—it is a question of a beginning, an exploration of the new reality, and not, as in the works of the important bourgeois writers mentioned, the conclusion of a period.

2.

The central problem of socialist realism today is to come to terms critically with the Stalin era. Naturally this is the major task of all socialist ideology. Here I will confine myself to the field of literature. If socialist realism—which in consequence of the Stalinist period became at times a disdainful term of abuse, even in the socialist countries—desires to regain the level it had reached in the nineteen-twenties, then it must rediscover the way to depict contemporary man as he actually is. However, this way necessarily leads through a faithful portrayal of the Stalinist decades with all their inhumanities. Against this, the sectarian bureaucrats raise the objection that one should not rake up the past, but only describe the present. The past is said to be done, already