Abstract

This article compares two novels first submitted for Soviet publication in the mid-1960s, but only published during glasnost: Aleksandr Bek's *New Appointment* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*. The latter, though, well known, has not been analysed in terms of its illness imagery; it has also never been compared with Bek's less-studied but strikingly similar work, in terms of the illness imagery in the texts and in their reception by several generations of Soviet readers. The article uses medical humanities approaches to disease literature and conceptual metaphor theory to trace the complexity of both novels' treatment of mental and physical illness. It argues that they compel us to reconsider cancer as a political metaphor, and Soviet illness rhetoric, suggesting that both can be used for more polyvalent and moderate critique than is usually assumed.

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Diagnosing the Stalinist Sickness. Images of illness in Aleksandr Bek and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.[1]

In the mid-1960s, two novels about Stalinist functionaries suffering from cancer were very nearly published in the Soviet Union. By the early 1970s, their Soviet publication chances reduced to nil after several more near-misses, they were widely circulating in samizdat and tamizdat; domestic editions of both texts only appeared during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The two works in question were Aleksandr Bek's *The New Appointment* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*.[2] Although their virtually simultaneous and strikingly similar journeys to publication across the Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras have been considered in tandem, these texts have not been compared in terms of their themes and imagery, even though their depictions of disease resemble one another in several respects.[3] Each revolves around illness,

[1] The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and Katharine Hodgson at MLR, and also Miriam Dobson, Dan Healey, Susan Morrissey and Andrei Zorin for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[2] Aleksandr Bek, *Novoe naznachenie* (Frankfurt am Main: Posev, 1971); Aleksandr Bek, 'Novoe naznachenie,' *Znamia*, no. 10–11 (1986); Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968); Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, 'Rakovyi korpus,' *Novyi Mir*, no. 6–8 (1990), 4–116, 7–89, 21–207. On samizdat, see Zhores A. Medvedev, *10 Years after Ivan Denisovich* (London: Macmillan, 1973)., p. 72-76, which claims that there were hundreds of copies of *Cancer Ward*. Bek's manuscript was also circulated in multiple copies around literary organizations and party organs, and also proliferated in samizdat (see below, and Aleksei Kondratovich, *Novomirskii dnevnik, 1967-1970* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel′, 1991).: 168-69).

[3] Comparison of publication history in Medvedev, *10 Years after Ivan Denisovich*., p. 62 (for a pithy account of Solzhenitsyn's publication saga see pp. 72-76), and Grigorii Svirskii, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981)., who praises both authors' uncompromising refusal to alter their works (though both in fact strategically highlighted aspects of their texts to make them seem less dangerous). Solzhenitsyn is widely cited in studies of medical narratives (Jeffrey Meyers, *Disease and the Novel, 1880-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Literature and Medicine : An Annotated Bibliography*, Rev. ed.. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press ; London, 1982); L. E. Böttiger, 'Reading For Pleasure: "Cancer Ward" And Modern Medicine', *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 288, no. 6413 (January 28, 1984): 315–16.), but Bek's novel is not treated as an illness text, even within Russian literary studies (also see note 3). I have found only one brief comparison of the two texts' illness themes (Sokolova notes that one of

featuring a central hero whose sickness is connected to his past complicity in Stalinism and his inability to 'cure' his Stalinist mentality. Both texts, especially the gallery of cancer patients in Solzhenitsyn's eponymous ward, also hint at a malady affecting Soviet society and requiring treatment in the early post-Stalin era, when the novels are set. Yet, as suggested by the very broad range of critical interpretations of both (especially Solzhenitsyn, much the better known), their representation of illness is complex. As this article will argue, the meanings of their disease imagery remained unstable and contested for Soviet readers and critics throughout the two key decades of the texts' reception, first as manuscripts in the 1960s and much later as published books, during glasnost.[4]

This persistent contestation over the texts' illness imagery, I contend, was fuelled by broader disagreements about systemic reform and collective and personal morality within the Soviet literary intelligentsia. During the slow retraction of Soviet de-Stalinization in the early Brezhnev era, the status of Stalinism as a sickness, and literature's prerogative to diagnose and cure it, was unclear to writers, critics and Soviet officials. This left both works in prolonged limbo, fuelling contestation between different scenarios of the cure for Stalinism, and of literature's helpful or

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the earlier titles of *The New Appointment*, 'The History of Illness number….', was 'polyvalent' and 'curiously resonates with the title of *Cancer Ward*', but does not pursue the comparison: Natal'ia Sokolova, 'Aleksandr Bek. Pisatel' i chelovek', *Voprosy literatury*, no. 5 (1995), 299–312.)

[4] For the range of interpretations of Solzhenitsyn's illness imagery, see note 3 above and note 46 below. Bek's novel has attracted far less scholarly attention, partly because it has not been widely translated, with only a handful of analyses in English and Russian (on Russian journal responses, see final section of this article). These have treated Bek's novel either as a historical portrait of Stalin-era industry (Alexis Berelowitch, 'De Listopad À Onisimov : Deux Visions Du Responsable Stalinien', *Cahiers Du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 32: 4 (1991), 627–37; Jenny Woodhouse, 'Stalin's Soldier: Aleksandr Bek's "Novoe naznachenie"', *Slavonic and East European Review* 69: 4 (1991), 601–20; Rosalind J. Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Science, Politics, and Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).) or assessed the realism of his portrait of Stalin, with less focus on the hero Onisimov (Rosalind J. Marsh, *Images of Dictatorship : Portraits of Stalin in Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 113-14; Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin*: 33; Margaret Ziolkowski, *Literary Exorcisms of Stalinism : Russian Writers and the Soviet Past* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998)., pp. 24-34) Mentions of Onisimov's illness are brief and vague, with Marsh (*Soviet Fiction since Stalin*, p. 72) diagnosing it as heart failure caused by the stress of de-Stalinization and Svirsky deeming it psychological (i.e. a split between head and heart eventually destroys Onisimov's personality). No one to my knowledge has considered Bek's depiction of cancer in detail.

harmful contribution to post-Stalinist recovery. Diagnoses of Stalinist and Soviet sickness(es) were more openly undertaken when both works were published in the Gorbachev era, as part of a broad public debate about curing the system's chronic ailments. Yet they were ambiguous and contested then too, reflecting broader uncertainties and disagreements about the 'health' of the Soviet system and the feasibility of 'curing' it through reform.

Political systems are often metaphorized in physical terms, 'mapping' abstract concepts of politics and society on to the more tangible 'target domain' of the body.[5] Especially in the modern period, with its growing knowledge of anatomy and medicine (including at the cellular level), such 'mappings' often generate elaborate and contested scenarios of illness, health and cure: diagnoses and prognoses of the ailments of the body politic can range from the chronic to the acute and from the curable to the terminal, while seemingly mild and optimistic diagnoses may also mask 'dissident', more radical critiques.[6] Illness symbolism may be further complicated in literary usage, which often combines or complicates metaphors, or makes the very

[5] George Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live by*, [Updated ed.].. (Chicago, Ill; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust: The Concept of the Body Politic* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[6] Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997); Takashi Shogimen, 'Treating the Body Politic: The Medical Metaphor of Political Rule in Late Medieval Europe and Tokugawa Japan', *The Review of Politics* 70: 1 (January 1, 2008), 77–104; Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust*; A. Musolff et al., 'Ideological Functions of Metaphor: The Conceptual Metaphors of Health and Illness in Public Discourse', *COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS RESEARCH*. 24 (2003); Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991)., especially pp. 73-80.; T. Leng, 'Reflections on Malignancy: Mobilisation and the Political Language of Enmity in the English Civil War | The Comparative History of Political Engagement in Western and African Societies' (http://www.historyofpoliticalengagement.dept.shef.ac.uk/2011/03/03/reflections-on-malignancy-mobilisation-and-the-political-language-of-enmity-in-england-1640s-1650s/).

status of metaphor ambiguous; such complexities are apparent in both novels' extended exploration of illness, explored in the first section of this article.[7]

Soviet illness imagery is usually, however, assumed to inhabit the radical end of the spectrum of body politic metaphors, only used to stigmatize enemies, pathologise political systems (and hence justify their elimination) or incite to violence, rather than for more moderate critique or pluralist debate.[8] Yet the readings of these two illness novels in the Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras, explored in subsequent sections of this article, stretched across a broad spectrum of scenarios, and only rarely escalated into rhetoric of terminal illness or surgical excision. This was partly due to the fact that the two texts' imagery of illness was sophisticated and multi-layered, and thus less reducible to a crude diagnosis. However, this plurality of interpretations can also, I argue, be linked to the durability of hopes for reform, and for public discussion of such reform, throughout the early Brezhnev era and for much of the Gorbachev era as well. These two complex illness narratives kept alive debate over topics that were otherwise being pushed off the public agenda in the late 1960s, and they also helped readers to think through the multiple ailments of the Soviet system when these could finally be discussed more openly in the late 1980s. They therefore illustrate the important and distinctive role that such literature played in reform discussions throughout late socialism: at times, adding nuance and ambiguity, but at others providing vivid imagery, characters and plots for irreconcilable, polarised scenarios of the system's recovery or collapse.

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[7] Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*; Kövecses, *Metaphor*; Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust*.; George Lakoff, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), especially pp. 68-70; Paul Werth, 'Extended Metaphor—a Text-World Account', *Language and Literature* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 1994), 79–103; Max Black, 'Metaphor', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1955), 273–94.

[8] Susan Sontag, 'Disease as Political Metaphor', *New York Review of Books*, February 23, 1978; Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust*.

This prolonged and multi-faceted debate seems all the more surprising in light of the centrality of cancer within the texts (though both, as explored below, also diagnose a number of other illnesses, including mental disorders). Like Soviet illness rhetoric, cancer imagery is rarely associated with moderate or nuanced commentary. Susan Sontag has posited that cancer is 'the most radical of disease metaphors', and other analyses of cancer imagery largely concur.[9] Seemingly permitting neither ambiguity nor optimism, the trope is usually associated with revolutionary rhetoric, dire predictions and extreme hostility, and only rarely features in pluralistic or moderate reform discussion.[10] However, these two deeply ambiguous and highly contested illness narratives compel us to re-examine assumptions about the radicalism both of Soviet illness rhetoric and also of cancer metaphor.

The Stalinist Sickness: Illness Imagery in Cancer Ward and The New Appointment

Illness literature is rarely just physiological. Research at the intersection of medicine and literature has explored how literary representations of disease and medicine often dramatize personal dramas of morality and spirituality, or allegorize broader crises of social, political and moral health.[11] In fact, one of the key disputes in this medical humanities scholarship concerns whether disease should be used to explore anything

[9] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*., 86. Edwin Black, 'The Second Persona', ed. Thomas Benson, n.d., pp.161–73; Michael Stolberg, 'Metaphors and Images of Cancer in Early Modern Europe', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 88: 1 (2014), 48–74.; Meira Weiss, 'Signifying the Pandemics: Metaphors of AIDS, Cancer, and Heart Disease', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 11: 4 (December 1, 1997), 456–76.

[10] Musolff et al., 'Ideological Functions of Metaphor'; Edwin Black, 'The Second Persona'; Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 63, 69, 73, 77, 80-85, 110; James T. Patterson, *The Dread Disease: Cancer and Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 307-08; 'Wide Asleep in America: Iranian Rhetoric and the History of the Cancer Analogy': http://www.wideasleepinamerica.com/2012/08/iranian-rhetoric-and-history-of-cancer.html.

[11] Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield, Mass: Paris Press, 2002); Meyers, *Disease and the Novel, 1880-1960*; Gian-Paolo Biasin, *Literary Diseases: Theme and Metaphor in the Italian Novel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975); Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Literature and Medicine*; Weller Embler, *Metaphor and Meaning.* (DeLand, Fla: Everett/Edwards, 1966), pp. 71-75.

other than patients' raw physical and psychological experience. Some clinicians and patients, most famously Susan Sontag, have appealed for it to be stripped of any metaphorical trappings, but others point to the 'inherent polysemy' of illness and instead point to the frequent alternation and intertwining of its realist and metaphorical treatments across and within texts.[12]

By the time that Solzhenitsyn and Bek embarked on their novels in the early 1960s, Russian literature had evinced varied approaches to illness and a variety of balances between realism and symbolism. These ranged from Tolstoi's dramatization of the spiritual and social crisis around Ivan Il'ich's terminal illness (a clear influence on Solzhenitsyn), to Chekhov's allegory of the diseases of late imperial society in *Ward number Six* (the closest Russian parallel to Thomas Mann's later *Magic Mountain*, a text also often compared to *Cancer Ward*, though Solzhenitsyn had not read Mann) and Bulgakov's exploration of medical-moral dilemmas in *A Young Doctor's Notebook.*[13] Less well known, but chronologically and thematically closer than any of these to Bek and Solzhenitsyn's works, was Samuil Aleshin's play *The Ward.*[14] Premiered in 1962, the peak of de-Stalinization, it dramatized a clash in a hospital between a 'Stalinist' character with appendicitis and an anti-Stalinist *intelligent* suffering from a graver disease, in order to alert citizens to the survival of

[12] Examples of the former include Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*; Brody, *Stories of Sickness.* On 'polysemy', see Biasin, *Literary Diseases*, p. 32 (and on the increasingly 'elusive' and suggestive imagery of illness in modern illness literature, pp. 3-35). On the intermingling of realism and symbolism, see Meyers, *Disease and the Novel, 1880-1960*; Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Literature and Medicine*; Biasin, *Literary Diseases*.

[13] To my knowledge, the more recent major work featuring a doctor hero, *Dr Zhivago*, has not been analysed from a medical point of view. On Chekhov's story and *Cancer ward*, see 'The Irony of the Doctor as Patient in Chekhov's "Ward No. 6" and in Solzhenitsyn's "Cancer Ward"', in *Chekhov's Art of Writing: A Collection of Critical Essays*, by Paul Debreczeny (Slavica, 1977)., and on the story more generally, see e.g. L. Knapp, 'Fear and pity in ward six: Chekhovian catharsis', in Jackson. On comparisons between Tolstoi's story and Solzhenitsyn, see e.g. Barend W. Florijn and Ad A. Kaptein, 'How Tolstoy and Solzhenitsyn Define Life and Death in Cancer: Patient Perceptions in Oncology', *The American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Care* 30, no. 5 (August 2013), 507–11; Jeffrey Meyers, 'Cancer Ward and the Literature of Disease', *Twentieth Century Literature* 29: 1 (April 1, 1983), 54–68.

[14] Samuil Aleshin, *6 p'es* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968).

Stalinist mentalities and the need to achieve the full recovery of post-Stalinist society.[15]

However, cancer as a literary theme was still at a very early stage of development by the 1960s, lacking canonical tropes or clichéd interpretations. Indeed, cancer is inherently difficult to aestheticize, meaning that literary representations of cancer still lag behind documentary accounts, which have have recently ballooned in popularity, in many literatures.[16] Yet it was in this time of very limited Soviet public discussion or understanding of cancer that these two authors, initially unbeknownst to each other, converged on the theme and brought it into unprecedented focus. By this time, Russian literary criticism had also developed a robust tradition of diagnosing personal and social diseases through literature, such as Dobroliubov's diagnosis of Oblomovitis.[17] This literary and literary-critical tradition, as well as the prevalence of illness and health metaphors in the recent discourse of de-Stalinization, prepared the ground for post-Stalinist literature about medicine and disease to be read diagnostically, for symptoms of a personal or societal crisis linked to Stalinism.

Nonetheless, Bek and Solzhenitsyn were at this stage both predominantly realist writers, their previously published fiction renowned for its documentary, sometimes autobiographical, foundation.[18]Where their two novels shifted toward the

[15] There is no evidence that either author was directly inspired by the play, but it seems likely that both, especially Bek, would have been familiar with it as one of the most famous Soviet plays of the late 'thaw'. See Polly Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw', *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 346–71.

[16] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 20. A major bibliography of illness literature contains fewer than five works concentrating on cancer in the last three centuries (Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Literature and Medicine*.)

[17] On the diagnosis of psychological and physical illness through literature, see Andrew Wachtel, 'Psychology and Society', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 130–49; Irina Sirotkina, *Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880-1930* (Baltimore ; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Rufus W. Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 2d ed.. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1975).: on Oblomovitis, pp. 46-62.

[18] Bek consistently emphasized his attachment to documentary genres, describing his move into novel-writing (in the 1940s) and the embrace of imagination as a slow and never complete transformation. He

metaphorical and allegorical, they did so in a more elusive and suggestive way than Tolstoi or even Chekhov. *Cancer Ward* originated in the autobiographical (as so often in Solzhenitsyn's preceding short stories): the author's near-death experience and almost miraculous cure in a Tashkent hospital in 1953-54 (after an earlier bout of cancer in the camps).[19] For Bek, the theme arose later in the creative process and was more distant from personal experience, though it was grounded in the thorough empirical research that had been his hallmark since the early 1930s.[20] *The New Appointment* was originally intended to celebrate post-Stalinist industrial innovation—continuing Bek's long-standing interest in Soviet industry—and thus to centre on the figure of an inventor, Petr Golovnia, but it transformed during drafting into the story of the post-Stalinist sickness of Golovnia's nemesis, Aleksandr Onisimov (a fictional, though composite, Stalin-era industrial manager).[21]

In Solzhenitsyn's text, the theme of cancer is signalled from the outset, both by the title (which to *Novyi mir* already 'smacked of allegory') and the first sentence's crossing of the threshold into oncology ward number 13; the reader is then confronted with an onslaught of pain and physiological detail to test if (s)he can withstand the ugly truth of cancer better than the ward's newest arrival, Stalinist bureaucrat Pavel

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always based characters on real-life people and on extensive interviews with their colleagues and acquaintances (Aleksandr Bek, *Pochtovaia proza: pis'ma, dnevniki, vstrechi, zametki, nabliudeniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel′, 1968)., pp. 7-18, 278-81). By the start of the 1960s, he had written a number of novels, as well as extensive journalism, the most famous and best-loved of his works being the World War II novel, *Volokolamsk Highway* (1943): see Ol'ga Grudtsova, *Aleksandr Bek. Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Moscow, 1967). Solzhenitsyn's use of autobiographical material for his Gulag prose is especially well known, though his other published works of the 1960s also drew on different phases of his life before and after prison, including his time as a soldier in World War II (e.g. *Sluchai na stantsii Krechetovka*).

[19] Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1984)., pp. 333-45.

[20] Bek, *Pochtovaia proza*., pp. 278-81. His research included multiple interviews with industry managers (including about Tevosian), and also thorough newspaper research (his notebooks of the time have large amounts of transcription from 1930s newspapers about industrial affairs: RGALI, 2863/1).

[21] Bek had previously written for the *History of Factories* series, as well as a project on the early Five Year Plans; his fictional works *Kurako* and *The Life of Berezhkov* were also set in Stalin-era industry (Bek, *Pochtovaia proza*, pp. 7-18).

Rusanov.[22] Much of the novel thereafter concerns the symptoms of the different cancers afflicting Rusanov, the Gulag returnee Kostoglotov and other characters, their soul-searching as they confront mortality (this Tolstoyan theme is acknowledged, albeit rather ironically, when Efrem Podduev seeks spiritual comfort in Tolstoi's works), and the scientific and ethical dilemmas of their treatment.

Bek's text also immediately emphasises the physical, and then maintains a relentless focus on Onisimov's prematurely ageing and mysteriously failing body, despite his desire to be viewed as a 'man without flaws'.[23] As the novel goes on, symptoms of his 'strange illness' pile up, similarly to those in Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*: trembling fingers, insomnia, jaundice, coughing, and finally lung and skin tumours.[24] However, as if to parallel his denial of physical decline, the narrative only slowly reveals the full extent of his illness(es). Only in the final third is the diagnosis of terminal lung cancer reached, and even then the patient fails to comprehend his illness fully, and his doctors—because they are Kremlin-trained—shield him from it.

Studies of illness literature highlight the central trope of estrangement: illness instantly separates the victim from his previous life, and from 'healthy' society.[25] This sense of rupture pervades both texts, becoming intricately intertwined with the presentation of illness as a personal crisis for Stalinist functionaries. We have already seen how Rusanov crosses a rubicon when crossing into the cancer ward; at many subsequent moments, he is incredulous at how his tumour has 'overshadowed' his previous life and work.[26] 'Isolated' from the economic, political and social hierarchy

[22] Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf : Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union* (London: Collins and Harvill, 1980)., p. 70.
[23] Aleksandr Bek, *Novoe naznachenie* (Moscow: Izd-vo Knizhnaia palata, 1987)., p. 149 (all translations my own).
[24] Ibid., pp. 10, 89.
[25] Woolf, *On Being Ill*: 8; Brody, *Stories of Sickness*; Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation : Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1988).
[26] Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus*, pp.19, 21.

of Soviet society and stripped of his illusions of infallibility and immortality, Rusanov strives in vain (for most of the novel) to return to the 'other side' of his diagnosis.[27]

For Bek's hero, meanwhile, it is the humiliating 'new appointment' to a less prestigious, distant diplomatic post, which leads to total mental and physical collapse. More than Rusanov, Onisimov cannot function outside the time and institutional spaces of Stalinism. The post-Stalinist era unleashes an onslaught of symptoms, although it gradually emerges that many of them—cardiologic, nervous and mental—dated back to the stresses of the Stalin era. These worsening symptoms further estrange him from Soviet politics, preventing him from managing even the peripheral territory to which he has been consigned for resisting post-Stalinist industrial reform.

The intertwining of mental and physical suffering that results from this transition into this 'other world' of illness is another point in common between the novels, which both explore how illness exposes Stalinist mentalities. Several critics have noted the increasing dominance of mental illness in modern literary narratives of disease; where physical ailments are still depicted, they are now often intertwined with mental problems.[28] For both Rusanov and Onisimov, physical illness and medical treatment stimulate thoughts, memories and emotions that prove difficult to control, more so than their bodily symptoms, and that seem rooted in their complicity with Stalinist terror.

Treatment of Rusanov's shamefully ugly tumour, for example, is often accompanied by the involuntary surfacing of memories of his immoral conduct in the Stalin era. One injection follows directly upon Rusanov's alarming discovery of court reforms that might facilitate mass amnesties: the side effects of the injection and the anxiety caused by the news stimulate a hallucinatory dream stretching over a whole

[27] Ibid., pp. 21, 18.
[28] Sontag, *Illness and its Metaphors*; Biasin, *Literary Diseases*, pp. 3-35.

chapter, in which Rusanov subliminally confronts his guilt about Stalinist terror. On another occasion, panic at hearing of Malenkov's dismissal—another sign of accelerating reforms—segues into anxiety about having to endure yet another injection.[29] Repeatedly, therefore, Rusanov's illness and attempted cure are linked to confrontation of his shame and guilt.

In *The New Appointment*, meanwhile, Onisimov's illness forces him into a state of inactivity that initially seems torturous because it prevents him from working, but later evolves into even more painful psychological and moral retrospection and (partial) remorse. In trying to solve the successive mysteries of his demotion and his illness (as this quest intensifies, the question 'what was he sick with?' recurs more frequently, especially at the end of chapters), Onisimov is gradually forced to confront the errors and sins of his past.[30] Relentlessly penetrating his inner world even as he continues to refuse x-rays, the use of diaries and confessions reveals that Onisimov had consistently quashed invention, and colluded in persecuting inventors and dissenters: from Ordzhonikidze, whose betrayal features in one of Onisimov's first flashbacks, to closer associates such as Golovnia, whose mistreatment is the last and most difficult memory for Onisimov to confront towards the end of the novel.

The worsening of Onisimov's physical condition therefore runs alongside a deepening psychological and moral crisis. The progress towards the final cancer diagnosis is ultimately secondary to Onisimov's halting movement towards understanding the psychological and moral sickness rooted in his past. By the end of the novel, Onisimov has largely grasped the diagnosis of *sshibka* (a Pavlovian term for a psychological split between conscience and duty, used as one of the first draft titles of the novel), which his doctors first suggested in the late 1930s, after the

[29] Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus,* pp. 192-99; 234-38; 169-81. The lack of commemoration on Stalin's death anniversary also reminds him of his as-yet-uncured cancer (p. 281).
[30] Bek, *Novoe naznachenie*, pp. 136, 158.

betrayal of his brother and Ordzhonikidze, and the 'first manifestation of the strange illness' (his trembling fingers and smoking).[31] Finally, the mystery of this illness, 'or even series of illnesses', is solved: the bewildering physical symptoms are linked to guilt.[32] Cancer will kill him in the post-Stalin era, but the broader malaise is rooted in his behaviour before Stalin's death.

The two texts therefore ultimately depict Stalinism as a mental and moral sickness, more than a physical disease, one characterized by the degradation of conscience and an epidemic mentality of hypocrisy and doublethink.[33] Nonetheless, cancer remains central to the exploration of this mental and moral disorder. Despite major advances in oncology in the Soviet Union and the West in the 1950s and 1960s (when a major Soviet-American cancer agreement was signed), cancer remained—and arguably remains to this day—a mysterious and sinister disease, fuelling 'cancerphobia'.[34] Its stealthy and often undetectable growth inside the body has often been poorly understood outside medical science (though Solzhenitsyn, like Kostoglotov, carried out his own oncological research).[35] In both Solzhenitsyn and Bek, it is this mysterious aetiology of cancer that forces its victims to ponder whether the disease is linked to past mistakes (a punitive understanding of cancer with ancient

[31] Ibid., pp. 83. On the title, see manuscript of draft of novel at FSO-Archiv, Bremen, bearing title *Sshibka* (and in same file, description of novel in undated letter to *Novyi mir* justifying his decision to submit the novel to *Znamia* after being turned down by the first journal). The manuscript held in Bek's archive in Moscow has the title *Onisimov*, crossed out and replaced by *Novoe naznachenie* (RGALI, 2863/1/75). On other titles considered, Aleksandr Bek, 'Roman o romane. Iz dnevnikov (1964-1972)', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1993), pp. 491–562. (here, 492-93). On *sshibka*, see the BSE entry http://enc-dic.com/enc_sovet/Sshibka-86694.html, which describes it as 'close to stress'.
[32] Bek, *Novoe naznachenie*, p. 19.
[33] On doublethink/*dvoedushie*, see Ibid., pp. 99-100 (Onisimov's colleague's Lesnykh suffers a heart attack and brain bleed that are caused by similar strains).
[34] Patterson, *The Dread Disease*; N.N Blokhin, '50 let sovetskoi onkologii', *Khirurgiia* 10 (1967), 3–8; Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* (Simon and Schuster, 2011); B. B. Gallucci, 'Selected Concepts of Cancer as a Disease: From the Greeks to 1900', *Oncology Nursing Forum* 12: 4 (August 1985), 67–71; C. G. Kardinal and J. W. Yarbro, 'A Conceptual History of Cancer', *Seminars in Oncology*, 4 (December 1979), 396–408.
[35] Patterson, *The Dread Disease*; Weiss, 'Signifying the Pandemics'; Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*.; Stolberg, 'Metaphors and Images of Cancer in Early Modern Europe".

roots).[36] As a disease assumed and feared to be fatal (as it still often was in the 1960s), cancer also compels victims to confront their mortality once the diagnosis is revealed, but equally encourages secrecy and cover-ups.[37] In both novels, the 'Stalinist' characters alternate between comfortable delusions about the gravity of their situation—a mindset for which the Stalin era prepared them well—and frustration at the irony of being subjected to the same secrecy and deception that they cultivated in their careers. By contrast, the 'anti-Stalinist' characters in both texts confront cancer more directly: in *The New Appointment*, Onisimov's son and the inventor Chelyshev are the only characters to apprehend the truth about his illness (the latter confirms that Onisimov is incurably ill on the novel's last page).[38] In *Cancer Ward*, Kostoglotov forces doctors and patients to be open about cancer and treatment, trying to become an equal participant in his own treatment in a way that far outstrips Soviet doctor-patient relationships of the time, much as he goads them to discuss terror and the Gulag (this is one of several comparisons between cancer and Stalinism, further explored below).

The key distinction between the two texts, however, is that Onisimov dies from cancer, becoming fatally ill at the same time that the 1956-57 reforms start to kill off Stalinism, whereas Rusanov's tumour is treated so successfully that he leaves the hospital and, with it, any remorse or regret for the past (though we are told that his tumours may return, and he may become fatally ill as de-Stalinization takes hold, like Onisimov).[39] The 'health' of anti-Stalinist forces is also much more clearly emphasized by Bek than by Solzhenitsyn. *The New Appointment* ends with energetic inventors of both generations heading for the factory and an industrial innovation

[36] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*., pp. 41-60; Patterson, *The Dread Disease*.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Bek, *Novoe naznachenie*, p. 185.
[39] Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus*, p. 405. By contrast, when Onisimov is granted permission to leave the hospital, even he realises that this means that the doctors can do no more for him.

conference, and Onisimov's son also seems immune from his father's Stalinist mindset.[40] By contrast, *Cancer Ward* depicts the often acute suffering of its anti-Stalinist figures, including the patients Kostoglotov and Shulubin, and also shows Rusanov's heirs as split between the sporadic liberalism of his son Iurii (working on judicial rehabilitations) and the dogmatism of his daughter, Avietta: overall, then, its anti-Stalinist forces seem less healthy than in *The New Appointment*. Though *Cancer Ward* ends with Kostoglotov's departure from the hospital, paralleling Rusanov's triumphant release, it still seems rather pessimistic about his long-term physical and mental health in a society that has not excised Stalinist injustice and stigmatization.[41]

This ambiguous concluding imagery of survival and recovery in *Cancer Ward* is prepared by a complex network of symbols and metaphors woven through the preceding chapters, which have been much analyzed and debated in the extensive scholarship. The novel is replete with analogies—most voiced by Kostoglotov and the handful of other anti-Stalinists—between deprivations of freedom in hospital and in prison, and between medical treatment and state paternalism (making the right to know about one's own illness and decide treatment, stubbornly asserted by Kostoglotov, symbolic of human rights).[42] The novel also weaves a complex network of animal and weather imagery, especially in the conclusion, intensifying the ambiguities of its transitional time period. Much more rare are comparisons between metastasis of cancer and the proliferation of labour camps.[43]

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[40] Bek, *Novoe naznachenie*, p. 48.

[41] However, Kostoglotov's inexorable loss of optimism and gaining of clarity about Soviet life during this 'first day' outside the camps and the hospital are associated with existential freedom, and thus seem somewhat positive: Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus*, p. 448.

[42] E.g. Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus*, pp. 71-74, 265-69 (the longest elaboration of the parallels comes appropriately in a letter to his friends, the Kadmins, presented throughout as an ideal of glasnost and goodness), p. 435.

[43] The text more often segues from discussion of illness and treatment to discussion of the camps (and vice versa), more subtly suggesting parallels (e.g. Ibid., pp. 158-59, 203, 348-49).

Many critical interpretations of the novel have seen this imagery and symbolism as cumulative, adding up to a comprehensive and unmistakable allegory of the sicknesses of the Soviet system.[44] Others have claimed that the symbolism, however pervasive, does not prevail over the dense realism of the portrayal of cancer and the characters' stark confrontation of illness and death; indeed, some readings, including direct applications of the novel to clinical practice, deny the existence of any symbolism in its approach to cancer.[45] Some critics have tried to reconcile these conflicting interpretations, by arguing that the novel is both symbolic *and* realist, or by emphasizing the text's problematization of symbol and analogy and ultimately of definitive interpretation (this latter, and perhaps most persuasive, reading fits with Solzhenitsyn's self-described polyphonic method in the 1960s, which has rarely been applied to his metaphors).[46]

As will be argued below, all of these varied interpretations of *Cancer Ward*—symbolism, realism, symbolic-realist and problematization of symbolism itself–can be traced back to the Soviet discussions that took place before the novel's first publication (in the US in 1968), and well before this scholarly debate got underway. Indeed, this polyvalence was more broadly typical of the era when both manuscripts were up for publication, and such uncertainty also surrounded Bek's novel and its depiction of the Stalinist sickness(es) when it too was being considered for publication in the second half of the 1960s.

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[44] Kevin Windle, 'Symbolism and Analogy in Solzhenitsyn's Cancer Ward', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 13, no. 2–3 (1971), 193–207; David Gillespie, *The Twentieth-Century Russian Novel: An Introduction* (Berg, 1996).
[45] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*; Brody, *Stories of Sickness*; Böttiger, 'Reading For Pleasure."
[46] Meyers, 'Cancer Ward and the Literature of Disease'; Raymond J. Wilson III, 'The Misreading of Solzhenitsyn's "Cancer Ward": Narrative and Interpretive Strategies in the Context of Censorship', *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1989), 175–96; Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Literature and Medicine*; David A. Sloane, 'Cancer Ward Revisited: Analogical Models and the Theme of Reassessment', *The Slavic and East European Journal* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 1982), 403–18; Vladislav Krasnov, *Solzhenitsyn and Dostoevsky: A Study in the Polyphonic Novel* (London, 1980); Francis Barker, *Solzhenitsyn: Politics and Form* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

The Khrushchev-era party's metaphors of de-Stalinization advertised that 'exposing the cult of personality' would allow post-Stalinist society to recover its health and to stride forward into the communist future.[47] However, literature of the thaw period was often criticised for writing about Stalinism and de-Stalinization in 'unhealthy' or 'pathological' ways, including the misuse of metaphors and metonyms.[48] One of the earliest examples of this distrust of the intertwining of metaphors of Stalinism and health came in the reception of Aleksandr Iashin's story *Levers* in the controversial 1956 almanac *Literaturnaia Moskva*, which dramatized the transition of *kolkhoz* activists from 'levers' of the state (a twist on Stalin's *vintik* metaphor) to fully-fledged citizens; the eponymous extended metaphor was reinforced in the conclusion by a move from a stuffy, dark party meeting, where no real discussion was possible, to an outside space where the characters could breathe easier, a transition linked to the imminent 20th Party congress.[49] However, though the story echoed the imagery of personality and health central to the party's own discourse, its claims about the ubiquitous and harmful 'lever' mentality were deemed too pessimistic, creating difficulties for both the author and the almanac, which was closed down soon afterwards.[50]

Solzhenitsyn and Bek both first offered their novels to *Novyi mir* in the midst of the acute struggle over de-Stalinization in the mid-1960s after Khrushchev's fall, which intensified anxieties about Soviet literature that were already palpable in the

[47] Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories?"
[48] Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma : Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), esp. Ch. 4.
[49] A. Iashin, 'Rychagi', in *Literaturnaia Moskva: literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik moskovskikh pisatelei* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1956).
[50] George Gibian, *Interval of Freedom: Soviet Literature during the Thaw, 1954-1957* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1960): 15-16; Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin*., p. 216.

thaw.[51] The two texts' slow, parallel journeys to prohibition thereafter were shaped on the one hand by the thaw's lingering, but now contested, belief in the need to 'diagnose' and 'cure' Stalinism in order to move forward towards a healthy future. On the other hand, they also illustrate the intensifying and intertwined distrust of metaphor and metonym, and of literature about Stalinism, in the mid to late 1960s. At this time, fuelled by anxiety about the literary freedoms and aesthetic experimentation of the recent thaw and faced with intensifying ideological threats within and outside the Soviet Union, officials became more preoccupied both with fixing the political meaning of metaphors in literary texts (and extrapolating from them the political attitudes of their authors) and also with curtailing literature's focus on Stalinism, in line with the nationwide rollback of de-Stalinization after Khrushchev's fall.[52] The most intensive discussion of both novels' chances of publication unfolded during and after the arrest and trial of the writers Siniavskii and Daniel (1965-66), whose prosecutors insisted on literal and political readings of artistic images to uncover their anti-Soviet attitude to the 'cult of personality', exacting a heavy 'price of metaphor' from the authors despite their (and their supporters') defence of literary images' inherent complexity.[53] The discussions of Solzhenitsyn and Bek were more protracted and more pluralist than these judgements, with arguments for or against their publication emphasizing different facets of the novels' illness imagery and their contribution to systemic health or harm.

[51] Bek submitted his manuscript on the day that Khrushchev fell (Bek, 'Roman o romane', pp. 493-94). Solzhenitsyn gave in part one of *Cancer Ward* soon after writing, in spring 1966 (Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn*., pp. 566-68).

[52] See for example the scandal surrounding Bulat Okudzhava's 1966 song, *Black Tomcat*, seen as an allegory for Stalinist surveillance (and thus causing the firing of the editor who published it): Gerald Stanton Smith, *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song"* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1984)., p. 118. Guitar poetry has been analysed productively in terms of its marginality, this ambiguous positioning being almost as worrying to the authorities as explicit opposition (Rachel S. Platonov, *Singing the Self: Guitar Poetry, Community, and Identity in the Post-Stalin Period* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2012).)

[53] E. M. Velikanova and L. S. Eremina, *Tsena metafory, ili, Prestuplenie i nakazanie Siniavskogo i Danielia* (Moscow: kniga, 1989), especially pp. 29-36, 44-49, 474-79, 485, 499.

Each of the novels alternated between hope for publication and setbacks in the first half-decade of Brezhnev's leadership, generating complex sagas that have often been taken together to typify the transition from the 'thaw' to the Brezhnev era.[54] Bek's novel was several times passed for publication in *Novyi mir* between 1965 and 1971, but banned on each occasion, sometimes at proof or even printing stage; the novel's foreign publication occurred in 1971, when the author was already terminally ill.[55] In each of these prohibition decisions, accusations of slander (from the widow of the alleged prototype for Onisimov, industry minister Petr Tevosian) were significant, but not the only decisive factors: also important was the novel's negative view of Stalinist functionaries, and Stalinism, more broadly.[56] Roughly a year after the start of Bek's saga, Solzhenitsyn offered a draft of the first half of *Cancer Ward* to *Novyi mir*, as a follow-up to his shorter works published in the journal and as a replacement for *The First Circle*, which had earlier been considered for publication.[57] Despite coming close to being approved on a number of occasions, much like Bek's novel, the work was banned after escalating criticism (and tamizdat publication) in 1968, and Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the local and all-union Writers' Unions the following year.[58]

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[54] E.g. Svirskii, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing*. See also note 3 above.

[55] Bek's personal archive at RGALI contains notes for a speech apparently performed at the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union on 13 March 1968 in which he recapitulates the entire saga of the novel including Khvalebnova's repeated complaints (RGALI, 2863/1/177).

[56] *Novyi mir* had approved the novel for publication by early 1965, but then Khvalebnova's protest became known (Bek, 'Roman o romane', pp. 501-02). She and her husband's colleagues successfully protested publication of the reworked novel again in 1966 (when it had already been typeset), 1967 and the early 1970s (see Ibid., passim.). Letters of protest: RGANI, 5/36/148/62-69, 133-37. On the various arguments for and against publication in correspondence between the party authorities, the author and Kvalebnova's supporters, see also: Bek, 'Roman o romane', pp. 503, 506, 515-16 and passim.; A. Beliaev, 'Na staroi ploshchadi: pozdnie zametki', *Voprosy literatury*, no. 3 (2002), 243–70.; Iurii Burtin, 'Vlast' protiv literatury (60-e gody)', *Voprosy literatury*, no. 2 (1994), 223–306. See December 1964 letter to Dementiev at *Novyi mir* outlining 'biographical' differences between Onisimov and Tevosian in great detail (held in Bek's archive at FSO-Archiv, Bremen).

[57] Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn*: 566-68.

[58] Solzhenitsyn's transformation from star of 'thaw' literature to enemy of the Soviet state, via increasing persecution, has been extensively documented (e.g. Labedz, *Solzhenitsyn*; Michael Scammell and Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, *The Solzhenitsyn Files: Secret Soviet Documents Reveal One*

While these publication decisions are well known, less attention has been paid to the discussions that accompanied them. Largely viewed as catalysts for these prohibition decisions, the debates and the intricate ways in which they linked illness, literature and the body politic have not been much analysed in their own right. Yet, beyond the clear parallels in the decisions taken on the two novels, there were some notable structural and thematic commonalities, as well as important contrasts, in the discussions around them.

Most obviously, both novels, in rapid succession, mobilized the largely liberal Moscow Writers' Union to try to break the deadlock surrounding them: major debates about the manuscripts by Bek and Solzhenitsyn were held in December 1965 and September 1966. While ultimately unsuccessful in achieving publication, these discussions were productive of arguments about the right (and indeed obligation) of writers to contribute to the health of the Soviet system by diagnosing its sicknesses. For example, the defence of Bek's novel at the Moscow Writers' Union at the end of 1965 was the fullest expression of metonymic and metaphorical readings of Onisimov's illness until the novel's publication two decades later.[59] In probing the causes of Onisimov's illness, the writers present concluded that they were fundamentally psychological and moral, rather than physical: Onisimov's nervous collapse and death epitomized, according to Georgii Berezko, the 'moral trauma' and 'the tragedy of a person who in the name of a falsely understood sense of duty went

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Man's Fight against the Monolith (Chicago: Edition q, 1995); Vladimir Glotser, Lidiia Korneevna Chukovskaia, and E. Ts. Chukovskaia, *Slovo probivaet sebe dorogu : sbornik statei i dokumentov ob A.I. Solzhenitsyne 1962-1974* (Moscow: Russkii put', 1998); *Delo Solzhenitsyna.*, 2. izd. (Paris: Editions de la Seine, 197--, 1970).)

[59] RGALI, 2464/3/512. On supporters, see Bek, 'Roman o romane'; on Moscow Writers' Union, see below; RSFSR Union and Moscow Union support for reworked novel affirmed in November 1966 (FSO-Archiv, Bremen), Beliaev claims that by 1971 everyone supported the novel except metal industry leaders, but that the latter had enough clout with Brezhnev to keep the novel unpublished (Beliaev, 'Na staroi ploshchadi: pozdnie zametki").

down the wrong, harmful path', by disregarding 'the indivisibility of conscience'.[60] Or, in Veniamin Kaverin's blunter formulation, Onisimov's 'psychological deformations' had led to his 'moral fall'.[61] These interpretations also more broadly defended Soviet literature's right to write what Anatolii Rybakov called 'the history of morals', and posited the individual body and mind as the site of post-Stalinist moral repentance and spiritual recovery (or, conversely, denial and punishment).[62] At the same time, they linked individual illnesses and cures to systemic health, asserting an important role for literature in identifying all the 'monstrous phenomena' of Stalinism and excising them from the Soviet body politic.[63] Bek's own early defence of the novel in the initial correspondence with Soviet officials had at times been similarly ambitious; alongside specific refutations of the slander of Tevosian, he also made normative claims about diagnostic literature, asserting that Onisimov's propensity to 'blind belief' and obedience had to be dissected because it also afflicted 'thousands' of his contemporaries.[64] Moreover, this defective mentality underpinned the entire 'sclerotic system of management under Stalin', which now should be cured through literary exposure.[65]

Having defended Bek's novel the year before, the Moscow Writers' Union used broadly the same strategy the next year to argue for *Cancer Ward*'s publication, (re)asserting literature's prerogative (and indeed duty) to diagnose the illnesses of the Soviet system. This 1966 meeting seemed to the author symptomatic of the 'healthy and unsullied stalks' overgrowing the 'diseased, rotten body' of Soviet literature, and

[60] RGALI, 2464/3/512/10.
[61] RGALI, 2464/3/512/11-12.
[62] Ibid., l. 17.
[63] Ibid., l. 7.
[64] Bek, 'Roman o romane', pp. 507-08. At *Novyi mir*, Onisimov had also been viewed as a 'type', one who 'even slavishly' obeyed and fulfilled the wishes of those higher up the Stalinist hierarchy (Ibid., p. 495)
[65] Ibid.

featured many of the same writers as the discussion of *The New Appointment*, as well as frequent comparisons with that manuscript's fate.[66] Once again, writers pushed for publication of a stalled manuscript chiefly on the grounds that it exposed—and thus started to heal— the hidden illnesses of the Soviet system. Some described the camps metaphorically as 'a cancerous tumour on our society'. [67] Others, more metonymically, praised the novel's 'vivisection in the precise pathological-anatomical sense of the word', of 'the fearsome void' within Rusanov, and its probing of the 'biographical origins' of his—and the system's—descent into 'moral monstrousness'. [68] In the latter scenario, emphasis shifted from metastasis to remission: such figures, ominously claimed Iurii Kariakin, were 'not yesterday's danger…they're alive, they dream of another day in the sun'.[69] Scientific and medical discourse here intermingled with claims of moral pollution and calls to judgment.[70]

Despite the structural and thematic similarities between these consecutive discussions, there were significant divergences in the discussion of their illness tropes thereafter. After the public show of support for Bek's novel at the end of 1965, most of the subsequent discussion of the fate of *The New Appointment* took place in private correspondence. Moreover, the persistently personal dimension of the complaints meant that discussion became more narrowly focused on the issue of real-life resemblance (and personal offence) than it had been in the wide-ranging writers' discussion. By contrast, Solzhenitsyn's novel—like Solzhenitsyn himself—came to symbolize the fate of the thaw and de-Stalinization much more broadly, featuring in

[66] Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*., p. 139.
[67] *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 13.
[68] Ibid., p. 11.
[69] Ibid., p. 27 (c.f. p. 11: Rusanovs described as 'living remnants' of Stalinism).
[70] Compare the more private discussion with *Novyi mir* when Tvardovskii described the novel as 'topical, in that it presents a moral reckoning on behalf of a newly awakened people' (Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*., p. 133), and Solzhenitsyn's refusal at the same meeting to change the critical portrayal of Rusanov and his daughter since 'there were millions of Rusanovs and they would never be tried in court, so that it was all the more important for them to be tried by literature and public opinion' (Ibid., p. 134).

high-profile and high-stakes discussions at the more conservative union-level Writers' Union and the CC secretariat over the following years.

Indeed, even at the initial 1966 Moscow Writers' Union meeting, the greater wariness felt by those present with regard to Solzhenitsyn might be detected in the fact that the discussion was less unanimous than in the case of Bek. The conservative writer Nikolai Asanov claimed there, for example, that the work was dangerous because readers might instinctively transfer the patients' apparently incurable disease to Soviet society; yet the latter *was* clearly curable.[71] The writer Elizar Mal'tsev, author of a Khrushchev-era novel about the 'cult of personality', likewise suspected that cancer was a symbol of social malaise, and objected that 'if our society was incurably ill, we wouldn't all be sitting here, discussing this work'.[72] Both clearly assumed that cancer was incurable, and the Soviet system might seem so too if allegorized through depictions of the disease. The most forceful denial of such systemic illness—and of literature that tried to diagnose it—came from Zoia Kedrina, author of a recent notorious invective against Siniavskii and Daniel, which had diagnosed them as suffering from the same pathological sickness as Dostoevskii's villain, Smerdiakov; at this meeting, she denounced Solzhenitsyn for failing to show the 'healthy world' beyond the ward, though received little support.[73] Solzhenitsyn himself, cautious throughout the 1960s about the political hazards of writing about Stalinism, seemed more sensitive to the presence of these minority views than many of his colleagues. Although he privately described the cult of personality as a

[71] *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 14. On the almost complete absence of conservative writers (except Asanov and Kedrina), see Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, p. 141.
[72] *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 28.
[73] Ibid., pp. 15, 19. Zoia Kedrina, 'Nasledniki Smerdiakova,' *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 1, 1966. Note the contrast to Evtushenko's similarly titled 'Nasledniki Stalina' (1962), published at a much more liberal time. *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, pp. 20, 31, 33, 42. Kedrina's speech also provoked a walk-out, in protest at her behavior both here and in relation to Siniavskii and Daniel (Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, p. 141). The official record of the meeting criticized those who had attacked Kedrina and Asanov (RGALI, 2464/3/520).

'luxuriant growth not yet eradicated' from the Soviet body politic and the Gulag as 'a tumour', he claimed publicly here that anyone with real experience of cancer could never metaphorize it. [74]

In other institutions with a greater preponderance of conservative writers, criticism of the text's potentially harmful symbolism became more confident, as counter-arguments to the Moscow union's rhetoric of diagnosis and cure emerged in 1967-68 in the highest echelons of the union-level Writers' Union and the party.[75] For Vadim Kozhevnikov, at a September 1967 meeting of the former, Solzhenitsyn's depiction of cancer was clearly 'not medical but social, and therefore unacceptable'.[76] Aleksei Surkov likewise categorically claimed that 'the story isn't physiological, it's a political story', and condemned the anti-Soviet nature of the character Shulubin's advocacy of 'ethical socialism'. [77] The identification and prioritization of a damaging political subtext had dominated the recent Siniavskii-Daniel trial and it was perhaps with this ominous precedent in mind that Solzhenitsyn here articulated his most forceful defence yet of the realism and density of his depiction of cancer, and his strongest denial that it was a symbol of any sort.[78] Tvardovskii's final attempts to publish the novel in 1967-68 sought to remove political symbolism (such as references to metastasis of the camps), while encouraging Soviet officials to cease 'seeking out "subtexts" and "symbols"' in the depiction of cancer, and instead to notice the 'courageous symbolism' of recovery at the conclusion.[79]

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[74] Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*., pp. 84, 157. Compare with Sontag's polemical call not to metaphorize illness, but to confront its physical and mental toll (Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, pp. 99-100. 179-80.)
[75] *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, pp. 63-95; *Posev*, 8 (1968).
[76] *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 76.
[77] Ibid., p. 78.
[78] *Posev*, 8 (1968): 8-13.
[79] Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*., pp. 174-76; *Oktiabr'*, 2 (1990), 184-93.

These final attempts to assert the political healthiness and curative powers of the novel against the increasingly powerful allegations of harmful political allegory were abruptly curtailed by the novel's tamizdat publication in 1968 and its Western reception as a damning allegory of the Soviet system's sickness.[80] Now the novel's preoccupation with illness became, in the eyes of Soviet officials, a pathological and dangerously infectious obsession with the 'ulcers' and 'cancerous tumours' of Soviet life, which itself generated 'large ulcers' in healthy Soviet literature.[81] The radical metaphors in this final Soviet critique of Solzhenitsyn's novel and the irreversible pathologization of Solzhenitsyn contrasted sharply to the ambiguity that had earlier surrounded both the author and his illness narrative.

These two novels' long slide into samizdat and tamizdat illustrates an important yet overlooked facet of this transitional period in Soviet literature and in literary institutions. This small but (in)famous cluster of texts about physical, mental and moral sickness remained in publication limbo for longer than prohibited documentary, memoiristic or more conventionally historical narratives of Stalinism (such as Konstantin Simonov's war memoirs, Aleksandr Nekrich's *July 1941* or Lidiia Ginzburg's *Into the Whirlwind*). Thanks to these longer spells in publication purgatory and to their richly suggestive imagery, these two novels generated a variety of literal and metaphorical readings, and of scenarios of illness, health and cure. Notably, while failing to persuade the authorities to authorize publication, they served an important function in honing the liberal intelligentsia's rhetoric of their right to diagnose and cure social problems. At the same time, the critique and eventual prohibition of these two manuscripts highlight the growing official intolerance of this view of Stalinism as an illness, and also point to the resurgent tendency for Soviet

[80] e.g. Patricia Blake, 'A Diseased Body Politic', *New York Times*, October 27, 1968.
[81] *Posev*, 3 (1968): 19; *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 140; *Oktiabr'*, 10 (1990).

officials to read texts as treatments (albeit veiled in symbolism and allegory) of political issues, and as expressions of personal political views, harmful to the party-state.

In the wake of the failed publication of their novels, both authors deepened still further their consideration of Stalinism. Bek started work on a new work of historical fiction, *On the Next Day*, which would turn out to be his last work before his death, not published until many years after it. It offered a more realist and literal picture of Stalin and Stalinism, abandoning the illness imagery of *The New Appointment*. Solzhenitsyn by contrast continued to develop his illness imagery in his next works, transforming cancer in particular into the kind of radical metaphor identified by Sontag and others. This definitive and irreversible shift into radical and pessimistic critique of the illnesses plaguing the Soviet system serves to highlight still further the much more nuanced and elusive symbolism of his earlier *Cancer Ward*, and indeed of Bek's novel too.

Solzhenitsyn's writings at the peak of the authorities' attacks in 1968-69, and then in the years before his 1974 deportation, elaborated a terminal diagnosis of the moral and spiritual sickness of the Soviet system and, in *Gulag Archipelago*, used radical and polemical cancer imagery. In his *publitsistika* of the late 1960s and early 1970s, generic images of health and illness delineated categorical moral, spiritual and political imperatives and binary choices: the only way for the individual to 'stand up straight', to breathe freely and to attain 'clear sight'—all signs of true 'health'—was to reject outright the 'lies' and immorality of the Soviet system and to embrace truth and openness.[82] 'In this time of crisis, you propose nothing constructive for our

[82] A. Solzhenitsyn, 'Na vozvrate dykhaniia i sovesti', in *Publitsistika. Stat'i i rechi* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1981), pp. 24–45. This 1969 letter was intended to expose Andrei Sakharov's more moderate stance on morality and socialism. In a 1973 addendum, he further denounced the 'degradation of the

gravely ill society', he railed at the RSFSR Writers' Union in November 1969. For this societal sickness and lack of effective medicine, there was a simple but essential cure: 'glasnost, honest and full glasnost—that's the first condition of health of any society…anyone who doesn't want glasnost for their society does not want to purify it of its illness, but wants to push it inside, so it rots there'.[83] This totalizing view of health outside the system, and disability and deformity within it, dictated similarly stark imagery in numerous other analyses that Solzhenitsyn circulated in samizdat and tamizdat as his relations with the Soviet authorities worsened in 1973-74.[84] The impact of such appeals for political change depended on their imagery's broad applicability and moral clarity, like other contemporary dissident discourses of purity and pollution.[85]

Meanwhile, *Gulag Archipelago*, the work that followed *Cancer Ward*'s writing and its tamizdat publication, was permeated with cancer imagery that was much more explicitly metaphorical and politically radical than *Cancer Ward*.[86]

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soul and spiritual enslavement' caused by living in the system, and proposed 'freeing our soul from participation in the lies imposed on us' (p. 43). *Delo Solzhenitsyna*, p. 145.

[83] *Posev*, 12 (1969): 5.

[84] E.g. Solzhenitsyn, 'Zhit' ne po lzhi' (1974): http://www.solzhenicyn.ru/modules/myarticles/article_storyid_315.html; Solzhenitsyn, 'Pis'mo vozhdiam sovetskogo soiuza' (1974): http://lib.ru/PROZA/SOLZHENICYN/s_letter.txt.

[85] C.f. January 1974 interview with *Time*: only 'repentance…can purify the atmosphere' (Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, p. 534). On purity and pollution discourses in dissent, see Barbara Walker, 'Pollution and Purification in the Moscow Human Rights Networks of the 1960s and 1970s,' *Slavic Review* 68: 2 (2009), 376–95.; Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2005)., especially 89-91 (on broad appeal and impact of the simplicity and clarity of 'Live not by the Lie'). The resonance of such imagery is suggested by the language of one protest against Solzhenitsyn's 1974 emigration, claiming that 'Solzhenitsyn's books…are as necessary as air for Russia'.

[86] On research and writing, see e.g. Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn*., pp. 511, 559-60. Analyses of the literary techniques of *Gulag Archipelago* include: 'Observations on the Narrative Structure of Gulag Archipelago,' by John Dunlop and Michael Nicholson (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Press, 1974), pp. 176–89; 'The Gulag Archipelago as Literary Documentary,' in *Solzhenitsyn in Exile*, by John Dunlop and Michael Nicholson (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Press, 1974), pp. 145–64; Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 101-22; Natalia Pervukhin, 'The "Experiment in Literary Investigation" (Čexov's Saxalin and Solženicyn's Gulag),' *The Slavic and East European Journal* 35: 4 (December 1, 1991), 489–502.; D. A. (Dmitrii Aleksandrovich) Shumilin, *"Arkhipelag GULag" A.I. Solzhenitsyna kak khudozhestvennoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Megatron, 1999). However, none of these studies examines metaphor in detail (though Shumilin traces some image clusters), and none pays attention to cancer imagery specifically.

Cancer imagery here dramatizes and condemns the growth of the Gulag and the Stalinist state's moral decline, more closely approximating Sontag's claims about the radicalism of the metaphor. In the first volume of the monumental text, the earliest Soviet prison camp Solovki is described as the start of the spread of 'malignant tumours'; two volumes later, the same camp is again diagnosed as the 'originary tumour' for systemic cancer.[87] The subsequent narrative of the development of the Gulag over time and space depends crucially on the symbolism of cancer and, especially, metastasis. Sontag observes that cancer is often a spatial metaphor, connoting spread and colonization.[88] In *Gulag Archipelago*, such connotations of inexorable spatial spread intertwine with cancer's associations of stealthy, undetectable growth over time, in order to serve the twin aims of mapping the camps' archipelago and militantly exposing the truth about its intensifying horrors. This metaphor is developed most consistently in the third volume, one section of which is even entitled 'the Gulag gives off metastases'.[89] Throughout the volume, the opening of new outposts of the Gulag is described in terms of metastasis; by its end, the terminology is so established that the narrator uses 'the time of metastasis' as shorthand for the period of the Gulag's most intensive development.[90] While the author's real experience of cancer still features in *Gulag Archipelago*, contributing to its critique of Soviet inhumanity, it is now decisively secondary to his exploitation of multiple, interlocking facets of cancer imagery to reinforce his hostility to Soviet power past and present.[91]

[87] A. Solzhenitysyn, *Arkhipelag GULAG*, 3 vols. (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2013)., vol. 1, p. 61; vol. 2, p. 68.
[88] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*., pp. 12, 15 ('its principal metaphors refer to topography'), 108 ('cancer is first of all a disease of the body's geography').
[89] Solzhenitysyn, *Arkhipelag GULAG*., vol. 2, p. 70.
[90] Ibid., p. 363.
[91] E.g. Solzhenitysyn, *Arkhipelag GULAG*., vol. 2, pp. 609-10; vol. 3, p. 283. Negligent and delayed treatment of cancer is described as particularly unconscionable, given that the disease inexorably worsens if left untreated.

The contrast to the unstable and ambivalent imagery of illness in both Solzhenitsyn's earlier work, and in Bek's novel, is clear: cancer imagery now evinced a radical political critique as well as an explicit admission of its own status *as* political metaphor. Yet Sontag's and others' observations of the genocidal and radical force of cancer imagery only hold true for these later, dissident texts about Stalinism, and not for the more ambivalent and unstable illness imagery in the earlier novels and in the debates around them, as they hovered at the margins of late 1960s Soviet literature. During those negotiations, illness metaphors had been deeply contested, helping not only to delay the final publication decision on both texts but also to perpetuate debate about Stalinist sickness(es). However, such uncertainty and contestation was itself considered too dangerous for the works to be authorized for Soviet publication until glasnost.

Differing Diagnoses and Metastasizing Metaphors in glasnost

Bek did not live to see his novel's publication in his homeland, dying a decade and a half before *The New Appointment* was published in *Znamia* in 1986; Solzhenitsyn was still far from Russia when his novel came out there, in *Novyi mir* in 1990 (indeed, his continued residence in the US was a major factor in the delays in publishing Soviet editions of *Cancer Ward* and *Gulag Archipelago*).[92] Yet these belatedly published novels—especially Bek—possessed considerable relevance and resonance in the contemporary domestic debate over Stalinism and glasnost. Competing readings of the texts in the late 1980s and early 1990s exposed the differing expectations of recovery and cure embedded in the contemporary processes

[92] Julian Graffy, 'The Arts', in *Glasnost and Perestroika*, by Martin McCauley (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 189–207. (here, pp.194-95). *Cancer Ward* was first rumoured to be on the brink of publication in 1988.

of reform: in these discussions of the ailing Soviet body politic through this newly published illness literature, diagnoses oscillated between the mental and physical, the curable and terminal.

The renewed attempt to publish *The New Appointment* in the mid-1980s elicited one last gasp of the literalism that had plagued its publication chances in the Brezhnev era, with surviving colleagues of Tevosian besieging the Soviet authorities with accusations of slander.[93] However, these objections could now be over-ridden, especially given the new party commitment to open discussion of past and present problems. The novel therefore became one of the very first glasnost texts about Stalinism, setting off a wave of belated publications in thick journals, fuelling an unprecedented public discussion of Stalinism and initiating a 'vast upheaval in Soviet historical consciousness'. [94] Billed by its editors as 'an unusually penetrating investigation' of a man 'formed by the epoch' of Stalinism, *The New Appointment* invited its readers to probe Onisimov's illnesses and his era's dysfunctions.[95] Their readings of the novel now took it for granted that the hero and his illness were both metonymic and metaphorical; nevertheless, their interpretations varied over time, and across the emerging political spectrum.

In the early years of glasnost and perestroika, illness imagery featured in party discourse in exhortations to address serious, but localised, 'diseases' of the system (at the 27th Party Congress in 1986, for example, among such 'illnesses' were 'storming' in industry and social 'parasitism', though nothing directly linked to Stalinism yet,

[93] Grigorii Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarennaia dvazhdy* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999)., pp. 335-39.
[94] Ibid., where the editor claims that this was the first issue of the journal that felt like a glasnost publication. Quotation from R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 8). Ziolkowski calls it 'one of the early beneficiaries of glasnost' (Ziolkowski, *Literary Exorcisms of Stalinism*. p.13).
[95] *Znamia*, 10 (1986), 3.

still less to Leninism).[96] The twin goals of such reforms were individual physical-psychological-moral health, and the revitalization of the body politic after chronic stagnation and sclerosis. However, as public discussion of Stalinism broadened and intensified, illness diagnoses became bolder and more explicit. For example, Aleksandr Tsipko's highly influential 1988-89 essay on Stalinism claimed that 'the tragedy of 1937 lies in the fact that the executioners and the victims thought in the same way, and were struck by one and the same *illness*—a thirst for violence, a striving to shore up the foundations of the victorious revolution with blood, like cement'.[97] *The New Appointment* functioned as a key text throughout this glasnost discussion, its critiques articulating a similar range of perspectives on the urgency and scope of de-Stalinization and of 'curative' reform.

Firstly, as in the manuscript discussions, Onisimov's illness catalysed diagnosis of the moral and psychological defects bred by Stalinism, seen as directly relevant to contemporary attempts to revitalise and purify socialism.[98] The earliest review was typical of this embryonic stage of glasnost, praising the achievements of the Five Year Plans and Onisimov's Stalinist virtues of self-sacrifice and modesty; however, it also probed into his body and mind via the twin metaphors of illness, and metallic 'flaws'.[99] Onisimov exhibited the 'flaws of soullessness and formalism' in his management of industry, and his illness was rooted in the rifts with conscience demanded of him by work under Stalin: 'the real reason for the illness', concluded the reviewer, 'lies in that assignment [*naznachenie*] to be a screw in the system [*vintik*],

[96] *27-yi s''ezd kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1986).:, pp. 63, 167.
[97] A. Tsipko, 'Istoki Stalinizma', *Nauka i zhizn'*, 11, 12 (1988), 1, 2 (1989). On Tsipko, see Nove, *Glasnost in Action*: 35, and on the Stalinism discussion more broadly, pp. 15-36.
[98] Claims of relevance in many reviews, including Vsevolod Surganov, 'I vnov' prodolzhaetsia boi. O romane Aleksandra Beka "Novoe naznachenie" I ne tol'ko o nem', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 4 (1987), 9–14.. Marsh also points out how closely the novel was connected to contemporary goals of perestroika (Marsh, *Images of Dictatorship*., p. 76).
[99] A. Gorlovskii, 'Naznachenie cheloveka', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, December 19, 1986. Gorbachev's public speeches about Stalin and Stalinism were still cautious at this time, not yet exceeding the criticisms of the Secret Speech.

which the hero voluntarily took upon himself, renouncing the sole assignment to be a person: that is, a being to whom it is given to be free'. The diagnosis intertwined the limited early glasnost criticisms of Stalinism with the embryonic reforms' vague discourses of humanity and freedom.

A slew of diagnoses quickly followed, offering the deepest investigation to date of the novel's illness imagery and further elaborating these ideas of psychology and individuality. Reviews now claimed that Onisimov's most severe illness was 'the illness of the soul, the illness of the subjugated psyche'; his was 'the tragedy of a suppressed personality', punished for his 'rejection of the moral independence of the individual' and, in the final diagnosis, 'the constant violence towards himself was not without effect: Onisimov fell seriously ill'.[100] The most detailed diagnosis was performed by A. Latynina, author of extensive anti-Stalinist *publitsistika*, who described Bek's pen as a 'scalpel' and his novel as a 'pathological-anatomical investigation' of Onisimov. Though she briefly mentioned cancer, her own investigation concluded that the psychological and moral *sshibka* was the key cause of Onisimov's ailments, from his trembling fingers through to his terminal illness.[101] While this mentality had doomed Onisimov, Latynina saw cause for optimism in the current era's valorization of the 'critically thinking individual'.

This assessment typified the tendency of early responses to focus on the individual as the seat of physical, psychological and moral health. By contemplating Onisimov's complex sickness and reflecting on its causes, individual citizens, and

[100] V Kavtorin, 'Zhurnal'naia proza-86', *Neva*, no. 9 (1987): 148–57; Surganov, 'I vnov' prodolzhaetsia boi."

[101] A. Latynina, 'Anamnez vite ministra Onisimova', *Oktiabr'*, no. 4 (1987), 201–4. c.f. another review which describes 'the *shhibka*, doing much to facilitate the development of the fatal illness of the hero' (F. Chapchakhov, 'Chelovek bez flokenov,' *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, April 2, 1987.)

thus by extension the Soviet system, would achieve 'spiritual perestroika'.[102] Publishing and reading such novels about Stalinism would lead to the 'ultimate victory of everything healthy, bright and progressive' and facilitate 'the education of the moral independence of the reader'.[103] This essentially moral and optimistic discourse of individual illness and health accorded with contemporary ideas of socialism with a human face, and also with the deepening discussion of socialist morality in the intelligentsia.[104]

However, others used Bek's novel as a catalyst for systemic analysis, in which the dividing lines between critiquing Stalinism and socialism began to blur. The most famous and detailed of all responses to the novel came in 1987 from Gavriil Popov, proffering 'the point of view of an economist' on how Bek's belated novel might apply to contemporary processes of perestroika.[105] However, as often in the era's *publitsistika*, its purview was wider than its title and publication in a science journal would suggest: it combined analysis of industrial management with exposure of the 'spiritual scar(s)' and moral compromises, and the mentality of subservience and fear, which had doomed Onisimov and still hampered Soviet progress today. By metonymically casting Onisimov as 'the ideal of the administrative system', and synecdochically identifying the *sshibka* as that system's central mechanism, Popov pointed to fundamental and chronic problems of the Soviet system, which 'crippled' its citizens. His piece sounded a clarion call for 'perestroika of the whole system of administrative leadership' and of its 'subsystem of fear', so poignantly captured in

[102] Vsevolod Surganov, 'I vnov' prodolzhaetsia boi. O romane Aleksandra Beka "Novoe naznachenie" i ne tol'ko o nem', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 4 (1987), 9–14.
[103] V. Savateev, 'Pervye uroki vremeni', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, January 2, 1987; Kavtorin, 'Zhurnal'naia proza-86."
[104] Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*., pp. 186-202.
[105] Gavriil Popov, 'S tochki zreniia ekonomista.', *Nauka i zhizn'* 4 (1987), 54–65.

Onisimov's mental torment and so prevalent as to pose 'a real danger of submerging the cause of perestroika'.

The terminology that Popov coined (*administrativno-komandnaia sistema*) instantly became a keyword in the national debate over reform, and Popov himself played a prominent role in national reforms in the late 1980s and 1990s.[106] More specifically, it shaped the subsequent debate over Bek's novel, with reviewers increasingly now adopting a systemic perspective: one 1988 review, for example, imagined the 'state mechanism' in horrifying terms, broken free from its people and 'clanging like iron' as it shattered their lives.[107]

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Soviet discourses of illness had become both more urgent and more contested. Delegates at the next Party Congress, in 1990, expressed less optimism and more frustration that 'the perestroika process, which got off to a good start and brought so much for society, hadn't produced a cure for many of its illnesses', and pointed out that 'the illnesses of our society can be "grasped", but they need to be consciously thought through at this critical stage'. Gorbachev was also criticised for 'announcing yet another complicated prescription to cure our illnesses without the leadership of the country and party having assimilated the technology to compile the cure and use it'.[108] In the broader public debate, cancer and

[106] The term appeared for the first time in the Soviet press in November 1987, soon after Popov's publication, and was then used in *Izvestiia, Pravda* and *Voprosy istorii* 200 times between then and the August 1991 coup. Studies of glasnost de-Stalinization deem Popov's article a prime example of 'the probing analysis of the Stalin period' of the time, and call it 'original and influential' (R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1989)., pp. 88-90; Alec Nove, *Glasnost' in Action: Cultural Renaissance in Russia* (Boston ; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989)., pp. 22-23, 142-43). On Popov as radical reformer (and eventually mayor of Moscow), see e.g. G. Popov, *Blesk i nishcheta administrativnoii sistemy.* (Moscow: PIK nezavisimoe izdatel′stvo, 1990); G. Popov, *Chto delat'?: o strategii i taktike demokraticheskikh sil na sovremennom ėtape* (Moscow: Izdanie gazety "Pozitsiia", 1991).

[107] N. Fed', 'O chem sporiat', *Nash sovremennik*, 6 (1988), 163–84.

[108] *28yi s''ezd kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991)., pp. 56, 140, 257. The only use of cancer imagery at the congress came in an appeal not to withdraw the party from the army, claiming this would be akin to refusing further oncological treatment and giving in to the 'metastases' of the 'cancer' of military hazing (p. 553).

metastasis tropes became commonplace, especially in the context of discussions of Stalinism and other lingering malignancies.[109]

In a similar way, in the late 1980s, vague diagnoses of Onisimov's psychological and moral malaise, typical of early responses to the novel, began to be overtaken by evocations of the radical threat of cancer, as illustrated by two very different 1989 reviews. One, by thaw-era journalist and literary critic Lazar' Lazarev, positioned Bek less as a documentary or historical writer, and more as a true artist concerned with morality and psychology.[110] Echoing the 1960s and mid-1980s discourse around the novel, Lazarev argued that Onisimov's ailments were symptomatic of 'moral crisis' and 'spiritual deformations'. However, like the more recent analyses, Lazarev also now placed these problems in systemic perspective: such crisis inevitably befell individuals living in a 'totalitarian system'. He concluded with praise for Bek's last unfinished work, which probed Stalinism's origins to determine 'what sort of virus gives rise to such a malignant tumour', but he did not apply this (rather confused) cancer imagery to *The New Appointment* itself.

In contrast to this perpetuation of thaw and early glasnost discourses of individual health, a virtually contemporary review elaborated much more deeply on the idea of cancer, and applied it to the whole of society. The review author, V. Khatiushin, analysed Onisimov's nervous illnesses, and saw *sshibki* as their root

[109] On Stalinism: the historian Volobuev laments Lenin's benign view of leftism and war communism as 'childish diseases' rather than cancers 'already giving off metastases' that would progress during Stalin's reign (P. Volobuev, 'Lenin i nasha istoricheskaia sud'ba', *Izvestiia*, April 20, 1990.); 'Byt' vperedi', *Pravda*, April 27, 1990.: description of 'Stalinism, whose metastases are felt now too'.; 1989 historians' debate warns that 'a past that hasn't been overcome usually repeats itself in one form or another, or gives off wide-ranging metastases' (B.G. Mogil'nitskii, 'Al'ternativnost' v istorii sovetskogo obshchestva', *Voprosy istorii*, 1989, 3–16.) A 1990 piece of *publitsistika* calls for 'political renewal' and judicial reform to address the 'metastases' of Soviet injustice (V. Larin, 'O metastazakh i bezumtsakh', *Neva*, no. 5 (1990), 163–70.)

[110] L. Lazarev, 'Istoriia, otrazhennaia v cheloveke', *Oktiabr'*, no. 11 (1989), 182–88. The article was a critique of Popov's response, though was somewhat unfair in describing it as only 'the beginning of the investigation of this monster [the system]'.

cause.[111] However, he was also the first ever reviewer also to pay attention to cancer, first by highlighting Onisimov's tumour diagnosis and then by using cancer imagery to dramatize the dangers of Stalinism and neo-Stalinism. Khatiushin diagnosed cancer as the cause of Onisimov's death, then used the disease figuratively, observing that Stalinism 'kills and decomposes the soul and organism of any healthy individual, *like* a cancerous tumour'. Bek had naively assumed that this cancer had been killed off in the post-Stalin era, but, Khatiushin contended, 'no one can yet say that we are finished with the cult of personality for good, that the metastases of this illness are no longer going to devour our society in future'; the only way to 'rid oneself of that illness [was to] combat it in the harshest way possible'. The survival of Stalinist mentalities after Bek's novel had been briefly raised by other reviewers, such as Popov, but its framing in cancer imagery here made it more vivid and sinister, recalling Solzhenitsyn's earlier use of similar tropes.[112]

By the time that *Gulag Archipelago* and *Cancer Ward* were published in 1989 and 'the year of Solzhenitsyn' (1990), respectively, such tropes and critiques of Stalinism were commonplace in literary and political discourse, and responses to Solzhenitsyn's texts were not as ground-breaking as might have been anticipated.[113] Illustrative was the only major review of *Cancer Ward* to greet its 1990 publication. It opened with an analysis of the text's autobiographical elements and its apparent realism in depicting the effects of cancer on both Kostoglotov and Solzhenitsyn, but

[111] V. Khatiushin, 'K chemu privodit skhema', *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 2 (1989), 245–52.
[112] E.g. in Popov, 'S tochki zreniia ekonomista.'; A. Urban, 'Dela i liudi: vchera i segodnia.', *Zvezda*, no. 7 (1987), 195–206.
[113] On declining responses to Solzhenitsyn, see also: Rosalind Marsh, 'The Death of Soviet Literature: Can Russian Literature Survive?', *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 1993), 115–39. (here 119-20).; Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*.: 193. The more muted response may be linked to the fact that *Cancer Ward* had been much more widely read in samizdat than Bek's novel, and also to the fact that responses to *Gulag Archipelago* were still dominating discussions of Solzhenitsyn at the time of *CW*'s publication (39 reviews of *GA* appeared in the Soviet press between 1989 and 1991).

switched to an elaborately metaphorical and political reading on reaching Rusanov.[114] His mentality:

> is widespread, infecting all of society. It is like a malignant tumour, giving off metastases, if one can use that already semi-worn-out metaphor from recent times, since it's entirely appropriate when discussing *Cancer Ward*. That metaphor is, as it were, inserted into a realist narrative…it deepens it, activates its symbolic energy…Developing this metaphor that's arisen, in the cancerous tumour of Rusanov himself one can see an extension of that inner moral necrosis which has already taken place inside him, in his soul. But one can see in it something bigger too—the reflection of that necrosis, with which the Rusanovs, with their all-conquering ideology and methods of inculcation, infiltrated the whole of society.

The novel prompted readers to reflect on 'how on earth this necrosis spread so far through the social organism, penetrating each of us, and now we can't in the slightest free ourselves of it, we can't at all break free of its tight claws'. It also 'appealed for recovery' from this tenacious disease, but posited the only possible cure as shock therapy. Such a synthesis between realist and metaphorical readings, and such radical political critique, had both been impossible to voice in the Brezhnev era; however, the increasingly rancorous debates of the previous half-decade—to which the evolving reception of Bek's novel had made such a key contribution—had made the imagery of radical socio-political illness not just feasible to voice publicly, but virtually 'worn out' by this time.

Conclusion

[114] E. Shklovskii, 'Chem zhiv chelovek. O povesti "Rakovyi korpus"', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 7 (1990), pp. 10–14.

Tracing illness imagery across these two novels and through more than two decades of their reception shows that they allowed Stalinism to be 'mapped' on to disease(s) in multiple and complex ways. These discourses of illness reveal a shifting and diverse post-Stalinist spectrum of views on the broader issue of Soviet reform, from optimism to disillusionment. The latter attitude was most evident in the blatantly metaphorical and brutally critical disease imagery in Solzhenitsyn's later samizdat works and other dissident narratives of political illness of the 1970s, and also in the urgent critiques voiced very late in perestroika, both examples of how cancer can indeed function as 'the most radical of disease metaphors'.[115]

However, illness was much more often an open-ended and guardedly optimistic trope or set of tropes. These two complex narratives of sickness frequently encouraged polyvalent interpretations, and most often spurred readers to search for 'cures' for Soviet ills rather than to express resignation about terminal illness. It was this very ambiguity and instability that stoked suspicions powerful enough to delay both texts' publication for decades. Nonetheless, when they finally appeared, they turned out to be suited to the contemporary debate over the Soviet future, their imagery exploited both in scenarios of reform and, eventually, of radical change.

Cultural historians of cancer have often emphasized the 'mystery' that still surrounds the disease, even after more than a half-century of concerted 'war' on it and significant scientific advances. James Patterson links American 'cancerphobia' to the mysterious causes and largely hidden workings of cancer, and observes that 'many use cancer as a metaphor for things that scare them'.[116] Sontag likewise argues that the mystery surrounding cancer makes it 'awash with significance', and then traces

[115] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 86.
[116] Patterson, *The Dread Disease*, p. 307.

how 'the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world'.[117] It was these multiple, proliferating and unstable meanings of cancer that emerged through these texts, rather than the more polemical discourse of cancer as a terminal disease or one requiring radical surgery. This is not to say, however, that the acute 'dread' more conventionally associated with the disease—a corollary of this 'mystery'—did not feature in some of the more extreme diagnoses of Stalinism.[118]

Further complicated by both texts' intricate intertwining of mental with physical illnesses, the Stalinist and Soviet symptoms diagnosed in and through these texts were profoundly varied. This variety of diagnoses might be viewed as a failure to conceptualize a complex phenomenon rigorously, and public debate over Stalinist problems was prematurely aborted by the controls imposed on the 'cult of personality' in the late 1960s, and limited even in the late 1980s by the yoking of glasnost to practical reform goals. Yet these multiple diagnoses reveal a persistent desire, especially within the literary intelligentsia, to grapple with this complexity and to convey it to a wider audience through vivid imagery. More broadly, these complex illness texts and their reception point to metaphor's capacity to generate multiple mappings of complex or abstract concepts on to tangible domains, such as the body.

Finally, the saga of these two texts illustrates how flexible and varied Soviet metaphors of physical illness could be in the post-Stalin period. This flexibility suggests a broader shift away from Leninist and Stalinist revolutionary rhetoric of illness and excision, towards an emphasis on restoring systemic health through milder intervention, or even, according to the doctrine of developed socialism, through maintenance of the status quo (this refusal to probe the system's chronic moral, social and economic diseases was one of the major drivers of both the Brezhnev-era

[117] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 60.
[118] On the 'dread' of the disease, but also the multiple, contradictory connotations attached to it, see Ibid., pp. 5, 26.

dissident movement, and Gorbachev's perestroika). Contestation over whether the Soviet body politic would maintain or regain health through major or minor surgery, or none at all, only ended with the death of the Soviet system itself.