

Ukrainians, Russians, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn

JOHN-PAUL HIMKA

I was not yet born when the first coelacanth was trawled in 1938, and I was still a toddler when the second of these prehistoric fish was caught by a native angling in the waters near the Comoro Islands in 1952. Four more were pulled from the sea during the next two years. I was still just a tyke, but I was infected by the excitement, thrilled by the encounter with a species of fish that had been presumed to be extinct for sixty million years. How many fantasies the coelacanth spawned! What marvels, I wondered, would yet turn up? What jungle-covered corners of the earth had not yet been thoroughly explored? I hoped someday to travel to just such uncharted regions and discover forms of prehistoric life even more spectacular than the coelacanth.

In time, for better or worse, the vision faded. Instead of the intrepid jungle-master in search of living fossils, I became a historian. The past I was concerned with was no longer measured in the tens of millions of years but in mere decades and centuries. The places to which I traveled, although peculiar in their own right, held little promise of harboring prehistoric beasts. For many years the old dream gathered dust somewhere in the basement of my subconscious. Only recently have I recalled the mood and paleozoological intentions of my childhood. The memories came unbeckoned, aroused by the force of association. Because recently—although I am not happy about it—I stumbled across the equivalent of a coelacanth.

I was not trolling off the coast of southern Africa but sitting in the library reading the September 18, 1990, issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, which contained Alexander Solzhenitsyn's political pamphlet *Kak nam obustroit' Rossiu?* (How shall we organize Russia?).¹ But I was as startled as if I had found *Latimeria chalumnae* swimming in the water off Cape Cod. There in front of me, as part of a living debate in a recent issue of a periodical, were ideas that I thought had died somewhere in the Denikinist emigration. I knew them well, but I had only seen them in pamphlets and newspapers yellow with age. They had flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Russia, but they had, I was convinced, become extinct, re-

placed by their evolutionary descendants. Yet here they unmistakably were, flapping their tails and strutting their fins, the arguments of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian nationalists against the existence of the Ukrainian nationality.²

The tone was identical. The same derision: Solzhenitsyn called it “comic ignorance” (*lubochnoe nevezhestvo*) to maintain that “Vladimir the Saint was a Ukrainian.” The same stridency: “All this talk of a Ukrainian people with a separate non-Russian language existing from almost the ninth century on is a recently invented falsehood.”³ The content of the arguments was also identical. All descendants of the medieval Kievan state were Russians. Those who found themselves included in Poland-Lithuania in the fourteenth century retained their Russian consciousness, fought against Polonization and Catholicization, and sought to rejoin the rest of Russia. Most achieved this great goal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the westernmost Russians of the Carpathian region were “wrested away”⁴ by Austria. The so-called Ukrainian language was an artificial creation “larded with German and Polish words,” a product of Austrian instigation, an instrument to make the Carpatho-Russians forget the Russian tongue.

I was amazed. My first impulse was to dash off to some royal scientific society and announce my discovery: “These ideas still live! After all that has happened, they still live! They are not just history!” Other reactions soon followed, however. Anger: I felt insulted, for myself as the grandson of Ukrainian immigrants, but particularly for that long-suffering, tormented people whose very existence Solzhenitsyn denied. Amazement again: a Nobel laureate passed over all the fine scholarly work on the history, language, and culture of the Ukrainians in favor of the shoddy products of an antiquated and discredited prejudice. Understanding: perhaps Solzhenitsyn’s coel-acanthic ideas were to be expected, since throughout Eastern Europe the political ideologies of the immediately pre-Communist period have been emerging from the depths.⁵ Fear: with the authority of Solzhenitsyn behind them, could these ideas become respectable again and even hegemonic among the intelligentsia of the new Russia? Perhaps the oddest reaction that came over me, however, and one that I have been unable to shake, was a compulsion to respond to Solzhenitsyn’s notions about Ukrainians, even though my reason told me they do not at all deserve this.

Let me start with history, indeed with St. Vladimir, whom Ukrainians in their “mutilated” language⁶ call St. Volodymyr. Solzhenitsyn thinks it ridiculous to call this grand duke of Kiev, the ruler who baptized Rus’ in 988, a Ukrainian. He never actually states the reason why he finds this laughable, because the reason is obvious both to him and to any reader of his pamphlet. I too can see grounds for not calling Vladimir a Ukrainian. By lineage he was more a Viking than a Slav, even if he was primarily a Slav by culture. But this consideration does not enter into Solzhenitsyn’s reasoning. One might also refrain from labeling Vladimir a Ukrainian for the same reason that one might refrain from calling Charlemagne a Frenchman (or German) or from calling Julius Caesar an Italian: it is anachronistic to apply the concepts of

modern nationality to earlier epochs. But this is not what Solzhenitsyn had in mind either. Far from it, since Solzhenitsyn is quite ready to endow Vladimir with a modern nationality, only not Ukrainian, but Russian.

Why should Vladimir be considered Russian and not Ukrainian? All the East Slavs—the Belorussians, Russians, and Ukrainians—trace their history back to the Kievan Rus' state. It exercised a formative influence on all three nationalities; it gave them Christianity in the Byzantine-Slavonic rite, a writing system, an ecclesiastical and literary language, even their historical name (all East Slavs called themselves Rus' for centuries after the collapse of the Rus state). The territory of Kievan Rus' extended over lands where ethnic Belorussians, Russians, and Ukrainians live today. Although the East Slavs of Kievan Rus never formed a single people—as Solzhenitsyn, transposing categories recklessly from one epoch to another, believes—they did develop certain common characteristics in the period from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. At some point in the early modern era, however, the East Slavs had clearly developed into three branches. Exactly when a Ukrainian nation was formed is a matter of legitimate scholarly dispute, particularly because of the difficulty of defining what constitutes a nation and of defining the essential characteristics of Ukrainianness. For all the prejudice and malice in his judgment, Solzhenitsyn is correct to believe that the Ukrainian nation emerged only after Kievan Rus collapsed. The point he misses altogether, however, is that so did the Russian nation. It too was a product of early modern state formation, the progeny of Muscovy. If Vladimir cannot be called a Ukrainian, he cannot be called a Russian either.

Solzhenitsyn, retaining the habits of the original coelacanths of imperial Russia, relies on word play instead of substantive arguments to make his case. The key word is *russkii*, which in the Russian language serves double duty. It is the Russians' name for themselves, as well as the adjective from *Rus'*. Thus the medieval Kievan state, St. Vladimir, and Vladimir Monomakh are all *russkii*. It is a very convenient device. Solzhenitsyn not only uses it to appropriate the Kievan heritage for Russia, but he also finds it handy for turning modern Ukrainians into Russians. He writes with satisfaction that “in Austria in 1848 the Galicians still called their national council the *golovna russka rada*.” Only later did nefarious Austrian intriguers succeed in supplanting the original consciousness of being *russkii* with Ukrainianism.

The fact is that Ukrainians—as all East Slavs, as all the children of Kievan Rus—long used the word *Rus'* and its derivatives (*rus'kyi*, *rusyny*, *rusniaky*, *malorosy*) to refer to themselves. When writing in Latin, they frequently called their nation and homeland *Russia*, meaning Rus'. The old name *Rus'* survived longest among those Ukrainians who were furthest removed from Russian rule. In Austrian Galicia it lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century. In Transcarpathia the name *rusyn* survives even to the present day.⁷ For the East Slavic inhabitants of these westernmost regions of Ukraine, politically separated from Russia until World War II, the Rus identity sufficed to distinguish them from the nations that ruled them, the

Poles and Magyars. But Ukrainian intellectuals under Russian rule began to change their name to *Ukrainian* in the early nineteenth century, during the era of national awakenings, precisely in order to avoid any assimilatory confusion with the Russians.

The new nomenclature was not picked out of a hat. The geographical term *Ukraine* had a long pedigree, and it was infused with connotations of the Zaporozhian Cossack past, so central to the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation. What was really new was the transformation of the term *Ukrainian* from a primarily territorial to a primarily national designation. The terminology in transition gave rise to some interesting historical curiosities. For example, the Ukrainians' most revered national poet, Taras Shevchenko, who wrote in the mid-nineteenth century, though imbued with a full-featured Ukrainian national consciousness, never used the substantive *ukrainets'* in his writings. *Ukraina* appears frequently in his poetry, and one can also find the adjective *ukrains'kyi* but not the noun designating Ukrainians. Or, to take another example, the first Ukrainian political party, founded in 1890, called itself the *Rus'ko-ukrains'ka radykal'na partiia*. The compound *rus'ko-ukrains'ka* was intended to signify that the party included *rusyny*, that is, Galicians, as well as *ukraintsi*, Ukrainians from Russian-ruled, Dnieper Ukraine. This reflected the prevailing usage in late-nineteenth century Galicia, where even ardent proponents of Ukrainian national unity, like Ivan Franko, used separate terms for Ukrainians on different sides of the Zbruch River. It was only in 1900 that the Galician Ukrainian intelligentsia made a conscious and united effort to abandon their old self-designation in favor of the name *Ukrainian*, to stress their unity with their co-nationals in Russian-ruled Ukraine.

I have often wondered whether the change of name that occurred in the nineteenth century was not a tactical error on the part of the Ukrainian national revival. It disguised the Ukrainians' connection with the old Rus' heritage and made more plausible to the historically unsophisticated the contentions of Russian nationalists like Solzhenitsyn that old Kiev was medieval Russia and that the Ukrainian nationality was a nineteenth-century invention. But I well understand what led the Ukrainian awakeners to adopt a new name for themselves. They were giving expression to a preexisting difference between themselves and the Russians, one that Ukrainians had been conscious of for centuries. In early modern times, when they had to make the distinction between themselves and those other Rus', they called themselves Little Rus' or Little Russians—the Rus' of *Russia minor*, “Russians” in the narrow, original sense of the term. But in the nineteenth century, when submerged nationalities were awakening to new life throughout East Central Europe, this terminology seemed insufficient. It seemed to imply that Ukrainians were only a variety of Russian. Therefore the leaders of the national movement embraced a new and distinctive name.

Rites of passage often include the adoption of a new name. It would be false to pretend that the Ukrainians' change of name in the nineteenth century was a neutral

act without motivations and consequences. It reflected a certain maturity of national self-consciousness natural to the age. It was intended to, and it did, deepen the conceptual cleavage between the two Rus'. It created a concept around which differences could crystallize. But it would be a grave intellectual error to imagine that the name created a nationality that had not existed previously. By the time the national revival began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, distinctive Ukrainian and Russian nationalities had already come into being. They had been forged in the early modern era, in different social and political structures and in different cultural climates. They exhibited many salient differences in their customary and political institutions, in their social organization, in their literary and artistic influences. But from the point of view of the nineteenth-century awakeners, the most important difference they manifested was that they spoke distinct languages.

There are some things I know about the Ukrainian language and its differences from Russian that derive less from study than from personal experience. I cannot imagine, for example, that I could ever be persuaded that the Ukrainian language is an artificial creation, as Solzhenitsyn asserts, an Austrian-inspired substitute for the natural Russian speech of the Galician population. The grandmother who raised me came from Galicia. Completely unlettered, she never attended a school either in the old country or in America. The village she came from was relatively backward, even for the region. She lacked a modern national consciousness; if you had asked her what her nationality was, she would have been puzzled or else answered, "Austrian." The language she spoke therefore was in a state of nature, untutored, a particular dialect spoken in a particular village at the turn of the century. Until I was about fourteen, she did not use this language of hers to speak to me, except for the odd word here and there; although we both regretted it later on, she had decided to raise me in English. But from an early age I was keenly aware that Grandma was different, that she had come from another country, that she spoke another language, which she used with some of her ladyfriends and with my father when she didn't want me to understand. I must have been about ten or twelve when I began questioning her about her origins. She came from Austria, she told me, near Lemberg. It took some time to sort out that she was not speaking German and that the Lemberg area was now in the Soviet Union—in Russia, as I called it back then. By that time I had become determined to learn Grandma's language, so I acquired a teach-yourself-Russian pocketbook and a little Russian dictionary. I tried out my phrases on Grandma. The pronunciation must have been dreadful, but even so I hoped to elicit some recognition from her. But only occasionally would an individual word have meaning for her, and then she would change the pronunciation from what I found in the book. I began to doubt that my book was accurate. Certainly what the book said was pronounced as *g* must actually be pronounced more like *b*.

Fortunately, that summer my aunt Mary came to visit us. She had gone to college and studied Russian, so I expressed my frustrations and plied her with ques-

tions. It was she who explained what the problem was. Grandma spoke Ukrainian, not Russian, a related language, but different. I wanted some books about this Ukrainian language, but these were not for sale in local bookshops as my Russian books had been. My father eventually drove me to a small, dark store near Grandma's church, which sold candles, yeast, ribbons, and books. There I picked up a *bukvar*, or elementary reader, and a dictionary. From there on it was clear sailing. Oh, there were some differences: Grandma said *tu*, the book said *tut*, but at least not *zdes'*. I had found Grandma's language.

In the years since, I have had many other occasions to experience the difference between Ukrainian and Russian. I will just mention the most recent. A prominent historian from Moscow came to lecture at our university and I spent some time with him. Although I read a great deal in Russian, my active command of the language is rather weak, and it is a bit of a strain for me to speak it at any length. So I eventually asked our guest if he understood Ukrainian, in which I am much more fluent. Oh yes, he said, perfectly. I was much relieved and continued my part of the conversation in Ukrainian. I soon realized that he didn't understand a word I was saying. Like many educated Russians, he had assumed that he could understand spoken Ukrainian, but in fact he couldn't.

Solzhenitsyn characterizes the idea of a "separate non-Russian language" with roots going back to the ninth century as "a recently invented falsehood."⁸ I was not trained as a linguist, so I cannot take on this contention, but I can adduce the authority of an expert. No one has studied the history of the Ukrainian language in greater depth than George Shevelov. His explanation of the matter strikes me, a historian, as eminently reasonable:

The question "When did the Ukrainian language arise?" is often asked and often answered with great assurance. It is, however, both unanswerable and unscholarly, for it ignores the difficulty of defining historically the term "Ukrainian language." The further back we trace the Ukrainian language, the fewer of its present-day characteristics are found until, sometime around the seventh or eighth century, it dissolves in Common Slavic. In the interval the gradual accumulation of specific characteristics which we now label Ukrainian occurred. But at what point a sufficient number of these characteristics is accumulated so that the language may be called Ukrainian remains open to question. The decision can only be arbitrary and, more often than not, it is politically motivated. What is undeniable is that a continuum has existed from the earliest local changes within Common Slavic to the present.⁹

Shevelov here refers to the history of the spoken Ukrainian language. The history of the literary language is different, marked by great discontinuities.

Perhaps at the root of many of the misunderstandings concerning the Ukrainian language is the change in the literary language of the Ukrainians that occurred

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, roughly around the time that the Ukrainians changed their name. In 1798 appeared Ivan Kotliarevsky's *Eneida*, a travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*. What was revolutionary about this book was that it was published in the vernacular Ukrainian language. Although the Ukrainian vernacular, the *prostaia mova*, had appeared in print before, for most literary purposes Ukrainians used other languages: Polish, Latin, Church Slavonic, Chancery Ruthenian (Belorussian), and Russian. It is one of the peculiarities of early modern Ukrainian culture that Ukrainians generally spoke one language among themselves but wrote in a number of other languages, only rarely the one they spoke. The vernacular was used primarily in low genres, such as comic plays and satirical songs. Philosophical and theological works, historical tracts, serious poetry, and drama were generally written in one of the standardized literary languages. By the time Kotliarevsky wrote the *Eneida*, most educated Ukrainians in the Russian Empire were using standard Russian or Russian mixed with Church Slavonic for serious writing. The *Eneida* was not a serious piece, but it was extremely well written and showed off the charms of the vernacular to great advantage. It appeared at a moment when all of East Central Europe was discovering the vernacular languages as literary media. A Ukrainian literary movement started and rapidly gained momentum; the old literary languages were either abandoned or treated as *foreign* literary languages, and the vernacular was ultimately raised to the status of the standard literary vehicle for Ukrainians.

The Ukrainian case was quite different from the Russian one. The spoken Ukrainian language developed relatively independently of the literary languages until it finally became the literary language in the nineteenth century. In Russian there was more synthesis, more interaction between the literary and vernacular language over a longer period of time. This is why Russian looks like living Church Slavonic to some, while Ukrainian strikes the Solzhenitsyns as an artificial, mutilated construct. These different language histories are but reflections of the Ukrainians' and Russians' different historical fates in the early modern period. Ukrainians lived under Polish-Lithuanian rule. They were without a state, their institutions were undeveloped, and their elite was Polonized; they were predominantly serfs, Cossacks, and priests. Their vernacular language had low social status. Russians created a state, eventually a powerful state, of their own. Their elite was not denationalized; rather, it denationalized others. Latin and Polish never supplanted Church Slavonic and Russian as literary languages. The literary language of the Russians had a much more continuous and integrated development than that—really those—of the Ukrainians.

A final point on language. Solzhenitsyn emphasizes the role of Austrian Galicia in the creation of the modern Ukrainian literary language, so larded with German and Polish expressions. Solzhenitsyn is not the only one to take a dim view of the Galician influence on modern Ukrainian; Ukrainians in Russian-ruled Ukraine at the turn of the century also protested the penetration of Galicianisms into their literary medium. I really have no opinion about whether the Galicians improved or dis-

figured standard Ukrainian. But I do think it is important to understand why they were in a position of such influence. It is because the Ukrainian language was outlawed in the schools, church, and administration in Russian-ruled Ukraine and banned from print by decrees of 1863 and 1876. In the same period in Austrian-ruled Galicia the Ukrainian language entered all spheres of public life. Thus the Galicians developed a richer Ukrainian vocabulary than the Dnieper Ukrainians did, since they needed Ukrainian terms for much that was outside the village environment; they also published the vast majority of books and serials that appeared in Ukrainian in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If the Ukrainian language had been allowed to develop freely in Russia, then the Galician influence would have been less pronounced. Solzhenitsyn in his pamphlet said it was “painful and shameful” to recall the czarist ban on the Ukrainian language, but at least—he consoles the Ukrainians—“it did not last long.” No, not long: just the four decades following the abolition of serfdom. The ban on Ukrainian publishing was temporarily lifted in 1905 and reimposed from 1914 until 1917 when czarist Russia collapsed.

History is a game of chance; it has rules, but so in fact do all games of chance. I think that in certain circumstances the Ukrainians could have developed into Russians. For instance, if the Kievan Rus’ state had been able to repulse the Mongol invasion, if its appanage principalities had reconsolidated, and if the resulting polity had survived at least to the mid-nineteenth century, I think it most probable that a single Rus’ nation would have been forged. This would not be the “Russian” nation that we know today, but it would be a single East Slavic nation, probably reflecting the greater influence of the Kievan, proto-Ukrainian element, with regional variations and some dialectical differences over its fairly extensive territory.

It might have been possible to change Ukrainians into Russians in the seventeenth century, when Russia acquired Eastern Ukraine from Poland. It would have been a propitious moment because of the relative receptiveness of some influential circles in Ukrainian society. By the seventeenth century many Ukrainians had become profoundly alienated from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and feared, as Bohdan Khmelnytsky told the Pereiaslav *rada* in 1654, “that even the name Rus’ might not be remembered in our land.”¹⁰ In one of the most fateful turning points in East European history, Khmelnytsky and the Cossack *rada* asked for the protection of “the Orthodox Sovereign Czar of Great Russia.”¹¹ Although it seems that Khmelnytsky and his Cossacks were not aware of any other kinship with the Russians than a common religion, there were some learned churchmen who proposed that the Rus’ suffering in Poland-Lithuania and the powerful Rus’ of Muscovy were ethnically related. The classic text is the petition for aid that the Kiev metropolitan Iov Boretsky sent to Czar Mikhail Fedorovich in 1624; Boretsky referred to the Ukrainians and Russians as “emanating from the same womb” (*edinoutrobnye*) and “united by

birth in the flesh and spirit" (*rodom ploti i rodom dukha edinye*).¹² Although views such as these did exist in some ecclesiastical circles in the seventeenth century, they were not common and they were certainly insufficient for turning Ukrainians into Russians.¹³ More ingredients would have been necessary for this alchemy. Russia would have had to accomplish a century earlier what it only succeeded in accomplishing at the end of the eighteenth century: the complete abolition of Cossack autonomy and institutions, and the full integration of Ukraine into the Russian imperial administration.¹⁴ It would also have had to swallow Ukraine in one bite—not just the Left Bank, but the Right Bank and Galicia as well. And it would have been very prudent to have undertaken the sort of mass population transfers that Muscovy had used in the past to subdue Novgorod. This whole scenario, of course, is very problematic—requiring a much more advanced Russia than could have existed in the seventeenth century.

A less obvious moment to consider, but I think more reasonable as a possibility, is the year 1878. Imagine if the Austro-Russian tensions of that year had exploded into war and Russia had been able to annex Ukrainian Galicia. It was a very bad patch of time for the Ukrainian movement in the Russian Empire. The language had just been banned from print again, and more comprehensively than in 1863. Some of the most prominent Ukrainian leaders, such as Mykhailo Drahomanov, had gone into exile. All Ukrainophile institutions had been closed down by the government. In the real course of history, the “Ukrainian Piedmont” of Galicia helped the Ukrainian movement in Russia survive the subsequent decades of persecution, publishing the works of writers from Kiev and Kharkiv in their relatively free Ukrainian-language press, offering refuge to political exiles, carrying on Ukrainian scholarship, raising the Ukrainian question in the wider European press, and developing Ukrainian culture and institutions. But what if, as in our imagined scenario, Galicia had also passed under Russian rule? It is quite clear, in general from the history of czarist policy toward Ukrainians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in particular from the history of the Russian occupation of Galicia during World War I, what measures the czarist government would have taken in the region. The Ukrainian press, school system, and voluntary associations would have been closed down. Leading Ukrainian intellectuals would have been banished to the Russian interior. The Greek Catholic church, which contributed so much to the development of the Ukrainian nation in Galicia,¹⁵ would have been abolished and its clergy and faithful integrated into the Russian Orthodox church. In short, public Ukrainian life would have come to an end.

The year 1878 would have been a most opportune time to have worked on the Russification of Galicia, for two reasons. First, Russophile sentiment was very strong among the Ukrainian secular and clerical intelligentsia in Galicia. The Austrian government had recently given the Polish gentry the run of the province, and the Ukrainians felt betrayed and embittered. The climate was reminiscent of the one that had

produced Iov Boretsky's petition of 1624. The Galician Russophiles looked to the Russian czar for rescue from the Poles; they wrote in a truly artificial idiom combining Russian, Ukrainian, and Church Slavonic elements, opposed the idea of a separate Ukrainian nationality, and considered themselves to be Russians (albeit of the Little Russian branch). Second, it was a time before the mobilization of the peasantry had advanced very far. Not many Galician peasants had even a smattering of education. There was as yet no Ukrainian newspaper for the common people and few voluntary associations in the village. Peasants with a modern national consciousness were still a rarity in 1878. Even a decade later the situation would have been much different; the czarist authorities would have had to contend with a well-organized national movement with a mass constituency.

I offer a final scenario for the Ukrainians to have turned into Russians: it may have happened had the Soviet Union continued for a few more generations to develop along the trajectory it had been following since about 1930. It was as if Stalin were trying to make up for all the missed opportunities of the past, as if he were trying to undo history with unprecedented force and violence. How else can one explain the systematic murder of the Ukrainian intelligentsia; the incorporation of the last bits of Ukraine—Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia—in order to strangle these little Piedmonts; mass deportations and resettlements; destruction of every autonomous Ukrainian institution; the complete dismantling of Ukraine and its reassembly in a way that it matched, down to the last detail, his new Russia. But let us not put things too abstractly. Not long ago in western Ukraine a mass grave from the Stalin era was unearthed; there were heaps of human skulls, each with a bullet hole in the back near the base of the brain; some of the skulls were small and still had braids attached. Solzhenitsyn says that communism, not Russia, is responsible for these crimes. I think it is closer to the truth (although hardly the whole truth) to consider these crimes socialist in form but national in content.

Stalin performed his bloody work with such energy that his successors could afford to take a more systematic and bureaucratic approach to Russification. They phased out all Ukrainian-language films and scientific journals and most Ukrainian-language university lectures. They drastically reduced the number of Ukrainian-language broadcasts on radio and television as well as the number of Ukrainian-language schools. They gave incentives to Ukrainians to leave Ukraine and to Russians to move there. They purged nationally conscious Ukrainians from institutes and the party. They censored the Ukrainian press much more stringently than the Russian press. They arrested and exiled those intellectuals who could not be silenced by other means. These measures were slowly but effectively bringing about the denationalization of the Ukrainians. God only knows what would have been the result if the process had continued for another fifty years or so, but I fear it might have brought about the death of a nation.¹⁶

Now, of course, it looks as if all this effort on the part of Stalin and his suc-

cessors was in vain. The momentum has been interrupted; what was undone is now being done again. The Ukrainian press is flourishing as never before in its hard history, schools and universities are phasing the Ukrainian language back in, yesterday's political prisoners sit in parliament and run oblasts, the blue-and-yellow banner of Ukraine flutters in front of Kiev's city hall, a multitude of Ukrainian organizations and political parties spread their networks across the republic, and the parliament has issued a formal declaration of Ukrainian sovereignty that was subsequently endorsed by 80 percent of the electorate. It is like Easter. And this, I think, is what has lured the coelacanth to the surface from his lair forty fathoms below—the reassertion of Ukrainian national identity, the resurrection of the nearly dead. From the point of view of a Russian nationalist, the turn of events in Ukraine is tragic. The sublimation of all Rus' into the one and indivisible Russian nation had been so near to accomplishment and had cost so much in terms of human suffering. And now one has to start all over again.

Let me end where I began, with the coelacanths. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* characterizes them as “robust and powerful flesh eaters.” They kill and swallow other fish, even rather large ones. The second coelacanth, the one that was caught in 1952, had in his belly the eyeballs of another fish that weighed at least fifteen pounds.

Notes

1. This translation of the title is David Remnick's. He wrote a perceptive review of Solzhenitsyn's pamphlet in the *New York Review of Books*, February 14, 1991.
2. The reference is to the section of Solzhenitsyn's pamphlet entitled “Slovo k ukraintsam i belorusam.”
3. Remnick's translation.
4. Solzhenitsyn uses the phrase *ottorgnutia Galitsiia*.
5. In Ukraine itself, for example, there has emerged the cult of Stepan Bandera, the uncompromising nationalist leader of the interwar and war years.
6. “Iskazhennyi ukrainskii nenarodnyi iazyk . . . ,” writes Solzhenitsyn.
7. In fact, there are those in Transcarpathia who reject a Ukrainian national identity altogether and consider themselves a separate Rusyn nation.
8. “Eto vse—pridumannaia nevdavne fal'sh', chto chut' ne s IX veka sushchestvoval osobyi ukrainskii narod s osobym ne-russkim iazykom.”
9. George Y. Shevelov, “Evolution of the Ukrainian Literary Language,” in *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, ed. Ivan L. Rudnytsky (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1981), 216.
10. John Basarab, *Pereiaslav 1654: A Historiographical Study* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1982), 251.
11. Ibid.
12. *Vossoedinenie Ukrayny s Rossiei. Dokumenty i materialy v trekh tomakh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954), 1:47.

13. Solzhenitsyn's assertion that "the return of these lands [Ukraine and Belorussia] to Russia was perceived by all at that time to be reunification [*vosseininenie*]" could only have come out of a Soviet textbook of post-1954 vintage. It is good propaganda but bad history. On the problem of *vossoedinenie*, see Basarab, *Pereiaslav 1654*, and M. Iu. Braichevs'kyi, *Pryiednannia chy vozziednannia? Krytychni zauvahy z pryvodu odniiei kontseptsii* (Toronto: Vydavnytstvo "Novi dni," 1972), available also in an English translation by George P. Kulchycky.

14. There is an outstanding monograph on this subject: Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s–1830s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1988).

15. See John-Paul Himka, "The Greek Catholic Church and Nation-Building in Galicia, 1772–1918," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 8, no. 3–4 (December 1984): 426–52.

16. Milan Kundera came to a similar assessment: "One of the great European nations (there are nearly forty million Ukrainians) is slowly disappearing. And this enormous, almost unbelievable event is occurring without the world realizing it." "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books*, April 26, 1984.