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Title: 'What Men Live By': Leo Tolstoy's Proverb-Parable As a Source for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Novel, *Cancer Ward*"

Abstract:

In this centennial year marking the birth of Nobel Prize laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, it is fitting to examine one of the Russian author's most important literary works, his novel *Cancer Ward*. Although this novel has attracted a rich array of scholarly approaches over the years, including its affinity with much of Leo Tolstoy's writing and thinking, I propose to submit a new consideration based on a paremiological study of the relationship between Tolstoy's proverb-parable, "What Men Live By" (1881) and Solzhenitsyn's novel.

With the exception of Gregory Saul Morson's perceptive article on the role of "absolute language" in Tolstoy's writing, Russian and American literary critics and paremiologists alike have devoted little attention to the literary functions of proverbs in fictional writing. Time has come to fill this lacuna in Solzhenitsyn scholarship, especially as we approach the centenary observance of his birth in December, 2018. Prior to devoting specific attention to the structural relationship of the proverb-parable in both writers' works, I will provide an introductory background and analysis of Solzhenitsyn's high regard for Russian proverbs and his penchant for including them in his fictional works. I will also incorporate information that his widow, Natalya Dmitrievna has shared with me about her husband's passion for Russian proverbs. [She will participate in Vermont's Centennial Celebration of her husband's birth, for which I serve as co-Chair.]

Written in the form of a parable on the theme of love, Tolstoy's famous story adapts an account long known in various versions from the Talmud, the Apocrypha, the Koran, and the Arabian Nights. Written more in Solzhenitsyn's preferred style of a modern polyphonic novel, I will argue how *Cancer Ward* thematically enhances and reiterates the central question raised in Tolstoy's proverb title through an analysis of how this proverb-question is answered by four of the major dramatis personae of Solzhenitsyn's novel.