

LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER

February 4, 1982. New York

Dear Igor Markovich!*

I'll take the risk of presenting you with a delicate proposition. It's basically as follows.

For three years now I have been trying to publish my prison-camp book, and trying all this time to do it as quickly as possible.

More to the point, it was specifically *The Zone* that I should have had published before anything else. For it was with this book that my ill-fated writing career began.

It turns out that it's extremely hard to find a publisher. I, for example, was rejected by several. And I wouldn't want to hide this.

The reasons for rejection were almost boilerplate. These were the basic arguments, if it's of any interest:

The prison-camp theme is exhausted. The reader is tired of endless prison memoirs. After Solzhenitsyn, the subject ought to be closed.

This idea does not stand up to critical examination. It goes without saying that I am not Solzhenitsyn. But does that deprive me of a right to exist?

Also, our books are completely different. Solzhenitsyn describes political prison camps. I – criminal ones. Solzhenitsyn was a prisoner. I – a prison guard. According to Solzhenitsyn, camp is hell. Whereas I think that hell is in us ourselves.

Please believe that I am not comparing degrees of talent. Solzhenitsyn is a great writer and a monumental figure. But enough about that.

The other argument for not publishing my book was much harder to refute. The fact is, my manuscript is not a finished work.