

## THE FUNCTION OF LOVE IN SOLZHENITSYN'S *THE FIRST CIRCLE*

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Life itself, the manifestation of a principle higher than any ephemeral socio-political system, is the sole dominion to which Aleksander Solzhenitsyn gives complete allegiance. In *The First Circle* he portrays life as an existential struggle for self-definition by free choice. To lead truly meaningful lives on a universal level, Solzhenitsyn's characters must accept the responsibility for their own actions and become cognizant of the deeper implications of submission to the will of authority. To act otherwise is to deny the primacy of life itself.<sup>1</sup>

Within this context the theme of love in Solzhenitsyn's works functions allegorically as an indication of the extent to which individual freedom is preserved or destroyed as his characters are confronted with painful ethical choices.<sup>2</sup> In *The First Circle* this theme is carefully developed during a four-day period in the lives of prisoners who serve in what they term the "first circle of hell," a technical research institute requiring the talents of specialists whose inventions assist Stalin's state security operations.<sup>3</sup> While these prisoner-specialists work under conditions which place them among the elite in the Stalinist penal system, they are never more than a step away from plunging to the lower circles of the forced labor camps. Correspondingly, Solzhenitsyn portrays other "first circles" in the privileged social class and the circle of officials whose positions in Stalin's regime are equally tenuous. In each of these circles and in lower regions as well the theme of love eloquently articulates Solzhenitsyn's position.

According to Rollo May, love in the Western tradition is a synthesis of four basic elements.<sup>4</sup> The first, *sex*, is the manifestation of purely physical need. The second, *eros*, is associated with the

passion for self-fulfillment, the creation of higher levels of being, or the desire to possess and procreate beauty, as described in Plato's *Symposium*. The third element is *philia*, brotherly love or friendship. The last, *agape*, defined as love directed toward the welfare of others, has God's love for mankind as its prototype.

In *The First Circle*, each of these facets of love manifests itself in the relationships between individuals subjected to the all-pervasive influence of temporal authority and is equally important in the characterization of the desire for self gratification or preservation. There are no easy courses of action, as Solzhenitsyn significantly observes in a chapter with that title, "Life is no love story" (304, 368).

To consider the role of sex in *The First Circle*, we shall have to adjust to a distinct difference in attitude, for the novel's impact will otherwise be greatly diminished by Western social conditioning. Unlike its presentations currently favored in popular literature, which are more concerned with frequency or technique than with morality, sex regains significance in Solzhenitsyn's work to the degree that it is affected both by state intervention and by a heightened sense of personal ethic.

The emphatic and hopeless cry of Ruska Doronin, "Every man needs a girl!" speaks for all the prisoners in the research institute and labor camps<sup>5</sup> (74, 92). Sexual need is universally comprehensible as part of the animal and human condition; a society which forcibly denies this need oversteps the limits of what man will sacrifice in return for its benefits. Ruska's terse exclamation is not braggadocio, not the flippant statement of a young man playing a role among friends; rather it is an indictment of a social system. A sense of loss of individual rights is thus eloquently conveyed in sexual terms. Because of their forced separation from women, the prisoners are constantly occupied with them in their conversations, thoughts, and dreams: "... if there's an innocent girl in a prison story, everyone — including me," admits Gleb Nerzhin — "ardently hopes that by the end of the story she won't be innocent any more. For *zeks* [prisoners] that is the main point of the story"<sup>6</sup> (34, 45).

While younger prisoners such as Ruska, whose virginity "weighed upon him like a burden" (302, 365), remain frustrated by the contemplation of an unexperienced pleasure, the married prisoners find themselves in equally, if not more distressing circumstances, leading to observations such as Dimitri Sologdin's that "Lev [Ru-

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bin] and I agreed that a wife who has been unfaithful can't be forgiven, but a husband can be" (371, 449).

Because they are distinctly aware of the sacrifices made by their wives on the outside, many of the prisoners are troubled by the question of fidelity. Indeed, all of the twenty-two female employees, "... despite the swords hanging over their heads, had found a secret attachment . . . , were in love with someone and embraced him in secret, or had taken pity on someone . . . ." (231, 280). Sologdin, a married man, reflects the dilemma of the others as he surreptitiously gives himself "penalty marks" whenever his desire for one of these women becomes too overpowering. This theme of separation is at least as old as the *Tale of the Campaign of Igor* (1185) parodied by the prisoners in *The First Circle*, and even in this tale, as Andrei Potapov points out, the hero probably weakened in captivity. "Who among us," he asks, "will believe that a man will refuse a woman?" (353, 427). "In prison," Solzhenitsyn comments, "you live for years without the one thing men were put on earth for" (291, 352). "The love of a woman," he adds, "of which you are deprived, seems worth more than anything in the world" (292, 352).

For Nerzhin, Solzhenitsyn's main protagonist, this situation is employed to demonstrate the response of the individual who has come to understand life as a challenge to ethical conduct, who finds the meaning he wishes to establish with his life to be dependent upon decisions made upon moral bases rather than in response to external pressures. When Nerzhin chooses not to take advantage of Simochka, a willing female employee in the research institute, sex becomes a powerful representation of man's true responsibility not to be personally as immoral as the system against which he rebels. This is not a moment for hypocrisy, but for personal triumph.

Nerzhin's achievement is placed in sharp relief by Sologdin's failure to withstand the same temptation. When one recalls his earlier observation on fidelity, one is not surprised to see Sologdin succumb to the sexual attraction of a married female employee, getting "precisely what he wanted from her," and eventually deal with the prison authorities on their own immoral level in exchange for a reduced sentence.<sup>7</sup> In this instance, weakness of the flesh betrays a moral deficiency which promotes the continuing domination of the system over individual freedom.

In this same sense, the repeated emphasis upon the sexual separation of the prisoners from their loved ones (“...from now on, holding hands and kissing is forbidden.” [222, 270]), and the often worse deprivation experienced by the wives and their similar responses to the dilemma confronting their husbands constantly serve as indications of a very real and all-encompassing loss of freedom. A simple kiss between the prisoner, Illarion Gerasimovich, and his wife at a prison interview, “stolen from the authorities and from fate,” is consequently heightened in significance (259, 314). *The Love Girl and the Innocent*, of course, offers the ultimate sexual symbol of coercion in Lyuba (whose name means “love”), who must give herself to a camp official in order to protect the man she loves and remain with him. Such is the essence of “Do I have a choice?”

Nor are the authorities, the protectors and executors of the system, themselves untouched by sexuality. A lieutenant on evening duty, “counting on getting something for himself that night” (467, 561), seduces a plump young medical assistant. Major Shikin, the Mavrino security officer whose sole purpose is that no one “should think or do anything harmful,” himself “devilishly got involved” with his fat-legged secretary (511, 614). Innokenty Volodin, a state administrator who discovers his conscience after years of spiritual emptiness, is unable to achieve a satisfying sexual relationship with his wife. Both Volodin and his wife have been unfaithful. As representatives of those who perpetuate and guide an immoral social order, the message is clear. It is only when Volodin acts selflessly against the established system that he finds his former desire for his wife returning. To complete the characterization of a system gone bad, Stalin himself finds at this point in his life that “even the thought of a woman was repulsive” — clearly indicating the decay and impotence of the system he dominates (101, 124).

In his article, “Signs and Symbol in the Sexual Act,” Hans van Lier observes that the symbol, like the Greek *symbolon*, an object divided into two parts to enable two people to identify one another, defines a relationship between parts which when conjoined form a harmonious and completely resonant whole bearing meaning which neither part achieves independently.<sup>8</sup> The sexual act, he contends therefore, is the “permanent root of all symbolism,” the “most primitive” experience.<sup>9</sup> In *The First Circle*, the two halves of such a *symbolon*, whether prisoner and wife, prisoner and female employee, government official and wife, official and other woman

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(the combinations suggested in the work are numerous), provide conjunctions which achieve new meanings as they are consummated, or just as significantly, when they are prevented from occurring. When sex itself is taken as one part of the *symbolon* and individual freedom the other, both the nature of sex and of freedom attain in their new unity a vital meaning as a concrete symbol.

The function of eros, the passion to create a higher level of being, should easily have become associated with Soviet society striving to attain the lofty goals of the Revolution. As Andrey Sin-yavsky (pseud.: Abram Tertz) points out in *On Socialist Realism*, the all-important Purpose of Soviet society demands explicit celebration in its literature, which in turn is to reflect reality in its positive revolutionary development. What one encounters in *The First Circle*, however, is a society in retrogression, founded upon a Purpose which has become stagnant and is constantly redefined to permit injustices which serve the interests of those in control. Rather than leading by their example, those in power drive others to action, more out of fear than foresight. Failing to perceive the moral vacuousness of the system, Rubin contends that "Our ends are the first in all human history which are so lofty that we can say they justify the means by which they've been attained," to which Sologdin resolutely replies, "Just remember: *the higher the ends, the higher must be the means* [Author's italics]!" (469, 564).

Creativity obtained under duress is passionless and barren, and those who lose faith in the Purpose look elsewhere for meaning in their existence. For Ivan Denisovich Shukhov in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, eros is evident in the pride taken in his bricklaying as an end in itself, the satisfaction of individual achievement in spite of the fact that those who supervise his labor are concerned only with output, not with quality. As Colonel Yakonov reflects in *The First Circle*:

Yes, a deadly game had been going on, and its end was near. Yakonov knew, he already felt that insensate, unbearable pressure of hurry when people are tied hand and foot by arbitrary, impossible, crippling time limits. It was a squeeze, a wringing out . . . faster . . . more, still more . . . an honorary extra shift . . . a competitive duty . . . fulfillment of goal ahead of schedule . . . even further ahead of schedule . . . . When things were done this way, houses did not

stand, bridges broke down, construction collapsed, harvests rotted or the seed did not come up at all. (138, 168-69)

When it occurs in *The First Circle*, the passion for creation is characteristically not related to the Purpose. While the peasant prisoner, Spiridon Yegorov, has based his life upon a passion for work directed toward his family, Nerzhin expresses individual concern about the quality of a job he has done earlier laying parquet floors (24, 32), and Potapov channels his energies into fashioning attractive cigarette lighters and cigarette cases out of scrap materials. The spirit of the prisoners is telling. As one of them observes, "A dozen academic lions live together peacefully in one den because they've nowhere else to go. It's a bore to play chess or smoke. What about inventing something? Let's. A lot has been created that way. That's the basic idea of the sharashka" (72, 90). The spirit, the desire, is absent. In Sologdin's terms, "Experts should approach their work as eagerly as if they were going to meet their mistress" (535, 641).

Sometimes the flame of creativity is briefly rekindled, as is the case with Rubin when he becomes involved in a phonoscopy project:

He was launched on that mysterious flight of the soul which physiologists have never explained. Forgetting his liver, his hypertension pains, feeling refreshed after the exhausting night, not hungry although he had eaten nothing since the birthday party cookies the night before, Rubin was soaring aloft on the wings of the spirit, a state of being in which one's vision can distinguish single grains in the sand, when memory easily retrieves everything stored in it. (584, 698)

Even his project supervisor, Adam Roitman, who had lost the joy of creativity when he slipped from being a creator into the position of boss of creators is caught up with Rubin in the pure nature of the research until their results are predictably taken from them to serve yet another immoral purpose: to trap Volodin by his voice print.

They sat down again on the chairs where they had recently dreamed of the great future of the new-born science. And they fell silent.

It was as though everything they had so delicately constructed had been trampled on. It was as though phono-

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scopy wasn't essential ["weren't scientific." — J. A. S.] in the least. (592, 707)

The role of the authorities is devastatingly familiar: vindictive, passionless, threatening, destructive. The passage calls to mind a similar thought expressed by Dushan Radovich, a Serb on the "outside," concerning the fate of the imprisoned patriot, Laszlo Rajk: "And for all we know they may have laid him out flat on the floor and trampled his genitals with their boots" (423, 512). There could not be a more eloquent expression of the destruction of creativity.<sup>10</sup>

For Gleb Nerzhin it is precisely this kind of emasculation, the bitter realization that Stalin has "robbed him and Nadya of their children" (231, 281) which is especially agonizing; in this lies the denial of perpetuation of human qualities and the hope of contributing to the future of mankind. When Roitman delightfully describes all the habits and accomplishments of his child to the prisoners he doesn't realize how incredibly painful it is to "men deprived of fatherhood"<sup>11</sup> (490, 589). As in Evgeny Zamyatin's *We* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the creative urge is subordinated to administrative fiat, to maternal and paternal norms with ominous Darwinian implications. The prisoner, Valentine Pryanchikov puts it quite simply: "... why do we have to live without women? It limits our creative possibilities"<sup>12</sup> (73, 91).

For the representatives of the privileged power structure, the situation is equally revealing. It is not the urge for creation which motivates them, but the fear of punishment or loss of their comfortable position that comes with failure to obtain results. There is no sense of building for the Purpose; instead, there is a feverish struggle against arbitrary deadlines to satisfy immoral, inhumane, and unforgiving superiors. The sterility of this existence is effectively reflected in Volodin's childless and passionless marriage. "We have only one life!" they felt at the outset of their marriage, "So take everything life can give except the birth of a child"<sup>13</sup> (394, 477). Now they have separate bedrooms, and Innokenty accepts the fact that there will never be anything between them again.

General Makarygin's marriages are also significant. His first was consummated in the spirit of the Revolution, and gave him daughters appropriately named Dotnara ("daughter of the people") and Dinera ("child of a new era"). His wife, however, died bearing their

third child, and her less imaginative name, Clara, betokens Makarygin's waning passion for the new society. The photograph of his late wife clad in her revolutionary garb, full of hope and determination, stands in sharp contrast to his fussy second wife, whose concerns are materialistic, self-centered, and spiritless. The lives of the daughters who were given such hopeful names by their mother also express the failure of the purpose of the Revolution, as do their unfortunate marriages.

Finally, it is apparent too that Colonel Yakonov, a powerful figure soon to be destroyed by the system he serves and represents, would have ended far better had he chosen to marry the woman he really loved, Agniya, rather than rejecting her in favor of his career. This personal sacrifice (Agniya's very name means "lamb") again illustrates the true nature of a system which prevents meaningful human endeavor. His mistake is evident in her own words to him: "... without love, why would anyone want to live?" (143, 175).

Artistic creativity is affected in much the same fashion. Many instances in *The First Circle* depict the artist "standing on the throat of his own song" (a metaphor penned by the poet of the Revolution, Vladimir Mayakovsky) as authors, film producers, and writers such as Nikolai Galakhov recast their efforts to meet the procrustean limitations set by Stalin's censors. Solzhenitsyn's painter prisoner, Hippolyte Kondrashev-Ivanov, embodies the creative individual's frustration. Forced to produce lifeless and banal canvasses to suit the tastes of the authorities, Kondrashev-Ivanov prostitutes his talents in order to survive, but continues to create works for himself which are imbued with vitality and substance. His much-discussed painting of the knight pausing before the city of the Holy Grail is emblematic of the life-seeking aspirations Solzhenitsyn espouses, while the Maimed Oak canvas is equally expressive of the tenacity necessary for those who would persevere in their struggle to raise themselves above the strife of a stormy and threatening existence. It is not accidental that he shares these paintings with Nerzhin. "... why are people who love each other faithful when they're separated?" he asks Nerzhin, and answers his own question: "Because he [man] has in him an image of perfection which in rare moments suddenly emerges before his spiritual gaze" (297, 359).

The instigator of the hostility toward eros is Stalin, whom Solzhenitsyn ironically calls the "Father" of his country (108, 132)

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and "Father of the Peoples" (429, 519). Like the courtroom challenge to Fyodor Karamazov's right even to be considered a father in view of his behavior, *The First Circle* demonstrates Stalin's lack of concern for his people, and even for his own family. Less than human, Stalin grows old "like a dog," and is bereft of love or desire. "He did not even need his beloved daughter any longer . . ." (134, 164), says Solzhenitsyn. Compared with Spiridon, "...that very representative of the People from whom one should seek inspiration" (452, 544), Stalin is a coldly indifferent strangler of children and creativity. He lacks the bond with humanity that the word "*Vater*" held for the German foreman who did not take revenge when Spiridon stepped forward with an axe to defend his son. "I am myself a *Vater*. I *verstehe* you," the German had told Spiridon (459, 552). Such compassion would be incomprehensible to Stalin.

For the first two basic forms of love, sex and eros, there is a demonstrably hostile environment in *The First Circle*. Unlike the idealistic era which first experimented with free love and was characterized by the enthusiasm of those who believed in the humane principles underlying the Revolution, the milieu presented by Solzhenitsyn is arbitrary, hostile, and barren. It emasculates man's most basic drives and denies the creative instinct which sets him apart from other animals. Paradoxically, it appears that it is those who have been forcibly removed from the new society and placed behind prison walls who find it possible to pursue the highest goals.

Though sex and eros are threatened by the anti-individualism of the social order in *The First Circle*, a few are capable of the sacrifices which place individual integrity above compliance with a morally bankrupt but powerful system. In the same way, philia and agape are reinforced in those who are aware of the immorality of the forces that dominate their lives. Like the Muscovites in *One Day*, these characters have an almost magnetic affinity for one another and share a sense of self-worth and a concern for individual rights born of resistance to the system. Inevitably, they display a human regard for each other and a sense of cooperation necessary for survival of the onslaughts of the common foe. As Nerzhin explains to Simochka, "...the lower I sink in this inhumanly cruel world, the more I respond to those who speak to my conscience" (600, 716). Each of these individuals manifests inner strength stem-

ming from personal allegiance to a higher principle, and each makes human gestures which resist the dehumanizing reduction of man to a cipher by the system.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, those who serve the system are plagued by the fear, uncertainty, and jealousy which accompany the knowledge that there is no room for true friendship among people whose very positions were attained by placing personal gain above morality.

The prisoner's world makes strange bedfellows, such as Lev Rubin and the German prisoners with whom he spends Christmas eve at the research institute. "Rubin," Solzhenitsyn writes, "could not exist without friends, he suffocated without them" (216, 262). Comparing prison life to that outside the prison, Rubin finds an unexpected feature which the fellowship at Nerzhin's birthday celebration causes him to mention: "I have never had any doubts about love. But to tell you the truth, until the front and prison, I didn't believe in friendship, especially the 'give-up-your-life-for-a-friend' kind" (372, 451). Nerzhin himself toasts the "friendship which thrives in prison vaults" (370, 448), and the embrace between Nerzhin and Rubin shortly before Gleb's departure for the labor camp is intensely moving.

In Stalin's official parlance, the prisoners are known as "social enemies," while thieves and thugs are regarded as "socially friendly." The female employees of the Mavrino research institute are warned that the men are the "dregs of the human race" and are particularly dangerous because they do not openly show their "wolf fangs," but hide them behind a mask of courtesy and good breeding and characterize themselves as innocent victims. In spite of such admonitions and the possible consequences (twenty-five years of hard labor), the women not only do not come to fear or hate the prisoners, they actually find unqualified respect for these "enemies" of their society. Clara Makarygin, daughter of the state prosecutor, is typical. Though she should have warily avoided all contact with Ruska Doronin except that dictated by her official duties, "By lunchtime they were fast friends, like children taking turns biting into one big apple" (288, 347). Even Lieutenant Nadelashin, a prison guard, cannot help treating them with "honest goodwill" (166, 201). When the authorities are among themselves, however, it is impossible for them to escape the mistrust and fear which permeate the system. In this, they reflect the state of mind of the

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"Friend of All Sailors" and the "Best Friend of All Counterintelligence Operatives." Stalin is clearly afraid and mistrustful, and is constantly searching for cunning in the eyes around him. Reduced to a hermit's existence in maximum-security quarters with armor-plated walls and bullet-proof windows, he even has a lock on the top of his favorite bottle of liqueur to guard against poison. Though many celebrate his birthday, they are motivated by fear, not by friendship, as at Nerzhin's party. Stalin's relationship with others is simply a chain of command; his wishes are carried out because of fear, and all are aware that though they may punctiliously execute orders or people on one day, they could easily become victims the next.<sup>15</sup> Stalin is alone. He had never has a "... loyal, big Friend ... because of people's perfidy and constant insincerity" (102, 125). His close associates are people like Poskrebyshev, a "... creature who, alas, could not be a friend either because of his utter subservience" (105, 129). Stalin, Solzhenitsyn contends, trusted neither his mother, nor the God he had bowed to as a youth, nor his intimates, his wives and mistresses, or his children (122, 148-49). He trusted no one because he himself had never been a friend.

In Socialist Realist works, such as Gladkov's *Cement*, Kochetov's *The Zhurbins*, or Polevoi's *The Story of a Real Man*, true soviet friendship develops as the characters work together toward a common goal or to defeat a common enemy. Personal concerns are subordinated to a higher cause, and cooperation leads to satisfaction and a sense of achievement of a worthwhile end. In such circumstances, friendship is virtually unavoidable, it is part of a sense of team play and mutually shared experience which benefits all who have participated. In *The First Circle* there is, except among some of the prisoners, a notable absence of such spirit, a paucity of higher motivation. It is an era of informers and mistrust, and the Purpose is no higher than Stalin himself.

Stalin's isolation has developed inexorably, irreversibly over the course of a life characterized by the absence of agape — a sincere concern for the welfare of others. Through Stalin, the twisted conception of protecting the best interests of individuals by informing upon them is a dominating element of life in society on both sides of the prison walls. When citizens outside the power structure do receive benevolent treatment, the reason is, as Valentine Pryanichikov remarks, "It has been proved that a high yield of wool from sheep depends upon the animals' care and feeding" (10, 15).

If philia is severely limited by the system, agape is nearly destroyed, for welfare loses its meaning when it is redefined as that which serves the best interest of those in power. To find those concerned with the welfare of others, it is again necessary to consider the prisoners, those "social enemies" who represent a threat to the system. Among these people a spirit of self-sacrifice stemming from a concern for the needs of others is readily identifiable; this is decidedly untrue of the manipulators of the system.

It is in this sense that agape is evident from the first in *One Day* in the relationship between Ivan Denisovich and fellow prisoners such as Senka, Alyoshka, and Captain Buinovsky. It is not a case of self interest being served by mutual cooperation, but rather a manifestation of genuine human interest and concern prompted by a recognition of individual worth and resistance to a mutually-perceived threat. It is the agape inherent in Volodin's phone call to Dr. Dobroumov that sets *The First Circle* in motion and characterizes the essence of the conflict between individuals and the system. The authorities fail to understand and feel ill at ease in the presence of those who are motivated by agape rather than by self interest. Solzhenitsyn's frequent irony is at its bitter best when he writes, "Having set himself the goal of living to ninety, Stalin thought sadly of the fact that these years would bring him no personal joy, that he simply had to suffer another twenty years for the sake of humanity" (101, 124).

Because Stalin has separated them and identified them as "enemies of the people," the prisoners and their wives are forced to extreme measures. The agape in the love they share leads to painful decisions. While Sologdin's wife denies the very existence of her husband and ceases all correspondence with him so as not to be fired from her job, others endure the deprivation and public humiliation of acknowledged prisoners' wives.<sup>16</sup> When Gleb Nerzhin tries to lessen the burden upon his wife ("... don't destroy your youth. Leave me! Marry again!" [242, 293]) he only echoes what she had written him earlier: "If any diversions can ease your burden in that hopelessly dismal life — well, what of it? I consent darling, I even insist — be unfaithful to me, see other women" (242, 294). When Nadya does face the idea of a divorce as a necessity, she hastens to add, "It — would not be real" (255, 309). "In everything," he reassures her, "do what is best for you" (258, 313). After this exchange there can be no doubt as to the presence of agape in

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Nerzhin's decision to remain faithful to Nadya and decline a sexual encounter with Simochka the next day. As Gleb explains, "I — I love only her! You know when I was in the camps she saved my life. And above all she has killed her youth for my sake . . . I must go back to her alone. I couldn't bear to cause her . . ." <sup>17</sup> (598, 713).

For Gerasimovich and Dyrsin, whose wives suffer miserably outside, the situation is equally painful. Ignoring the warning at the prison interview, Gerasimovich and his wife kiss: "It was not the sort of kiss that would have shaken them in their youth. This kiss, stolen from the authorities and from fate, was colorless, tasteless, odorless — the pale kiss one might exchange with a dead person in a dream" (259, 314). But it was not fading love that made their kiss so lifeless, it was the hopelessness of their situation. Gerasimovich reflects, "What young girl, attractive and fresh but an incomprehensible stranger . . . could mean more to him than his wife?" (259-60, 314-15). Though her sisters and aunt jeer at her and urge her to divorce and remarry, Natalya Gerasimovich carries within her that vision of perfection that Kondrashev-Ivanov captured in his painting of the Castle of the Holy Grail. To save her, as she pleads for him to do, Gerasimovich would be forced to cooperate on an invention in return for a reduced sentence. "But the trouble is," he admits, " . . . the inventions . . . are — well, extremely undesirable" (263, 318). Undesirable specifically because they will be used to trap unsuspecting people still free on the outside. Torn between his feelings for the suffering of his wife and a broad sense of agape for his fellow man, Gerasimovich, the "sparrow . . . whose heart was as brave as the cat's" (548, 655), repudiates the universal law that "your own shirt is closer to your body" (582, 696) and refuses to cooperate with Yakonov in the creation of just such an invention. " 'No! That's *not* my field!' he said in a high clear voice. 'Putting people in prison is not my field! I don't set traps for human beings! It's bad enough that they put *us* in prison . . . ' " (583, 696). Placed in the same situation, Nadya Nerzhin's roommate, Muza, sacrifices her career rather than her fellow students by refusing to become an informer. "How could she judge the human qualities of Hamlet and Don Quixote, remembering that she was an informer . . . ?" (315, 381).

The peasant prisoner, Spiridon, also reflects the "spiritual superiority" (61, 76) which Solzhenitsyn values. Always placing his family first, Spiridon's life has been a paragon of devotion to the

welfare of others. Having risked his life innumerable times to protect his family, Spiridon is also sensitive to more universal loyalties. While a prisoner in Germany he put out food for any village dogs that might have evaded the German soldiers' rifles. In his dealings with others he did not lie about anyone, slander, or "steal a rag or crumb from anyone" (460, 554). His family was everything to him, and his standards were unshakable. "The wolfhound," i.e. the protector, is right he maintained, "and the cannibal is wrong" (466, 561).

Among the prisoners, the authorities, and in the outside world, cannibalism born of self-preservation is rife. It is in defiance of this cannibalism that Volodin sacrifices his career and his life, Ruska Doronin plays the fatal game of double informer, and Nerzhin and Gerasimovich are sent from the research institute to the penal labor camps. In a society where one can be imprisoned for *failure* to inform upon one's friends, Solzhenitsyn applauds the courage of those like Volodin who decide that though you have only one life, "you also have only one conscience" (399, 484). When Nerzhin is about to be sent away, he is surrounded by prisoners who remember how he had stood up for their rights and had defended their interests. At the height of the emotion of this departure, Solzhenitsyn deftly transmutes the mood of defiance into one of the human kindness which so typifies Nerzhin and those like him. Turning away from his own concern with the ordeal upon which he is momentarily to embark, Nerzhin senses a need in Spiridon, who, nearly blind, has finally been given a letter from his fifth grade daughter which the prison officials had kept from him. Nerzhin asks Spiridon for the letter and begins to read it aloud as has been their custom. The words will become etched upon their souls:

My Dear Father!

It's not fair to write to you, but I don't dare live any longer. What bad people there are in the world. What they promise — and how they deceive . . . (661, 790).

These opening words of a child's letter to a father, a man to whom family has always meant everything, poignantly reiterate the message of love in *The First Circle*. *Sex*, *eros*, *philia*, and *agape* — all have been trampled upon, and only those as tenacious as Kondrashev-Ivanov's Maimed Oak will succeed in preserving the essence of these qualities so vital to human existence.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Both Solzhenitsyn and his most notable spiritual predecessor, Boris Pasternak, collided with the Soviet regime on this point. Innokenty Volodin, the young Soviet official led by his conscience to martyrdom in *The First Circle*, states Solzhenitsyn's stance unequivocally: "...the writer is a teacher of the people; surely that's what we've always understood? And a greater [More correctly translated, "great."—J.A.S.] writer... is, so to speak, a second government. That's why no regime anywhere has ever loved its great writers...." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 415; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenij* (Frankfurt/Main: Possev Verlag, 1969-70), III-IV, p. 503. All further citations from *The First Circle* will be indicated in the text by page numbers in parentheses. The references to the English translation will be given first, followed by italicized page numbers indicating the corresponding page or pages in the Russian edition, hence: (415, 503).

<sup>2</sup> Pasternak's treatment of the theme of love in *Dr. Zhivago* is equally allegorical.

<sup>3</sup> The Bantam translation retains the slang term *sharashka* for a sham technical research institute staffed by prisoners, as well as the acronym *zek* for a prisoner in such circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Doronin also complains more pointedly, "The one way the Plowman [Stalin] could really hurt us was to deprive us of women. And he did it" (79, 98).

<sup>6</sup> When the prisoners discussed the things they most wanted out of life, says Solzhenitsyn, "'everything' narrowed down to the possession of a female body, good clothes, good food, and liquor" (365, 441).

<sup>7</sup> When Sologdin reveals his own devious and mistrustful terms for cooperation, the chief of operations at Mavrino joyously recognizes his own kind of man: "Yakovov listened to Sologdin almost with delight. He had liked this man the moment he came in." (534, 639).

<sup>8</sup> Henri van Lier, "Signs and Symbol in the Sexual Act," *Facets of Eros*, ed. F. J. Smith and Erling Eng (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), pp. 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> The English translation by Thomas P. Whitney creates a parallelism with the use of the word "trampled" which is not, however, present in the original. While Solzhenitsyn does use the word *rastoptali* ("they trampled") in the first instance, *otščemljali* ("they squeezed or squashed out") appears in the second. Another parallel is present in both the original and the translation where Gleb Nerzhin reflects about his wife, Nadya, "He clearly saw the love between them as fated, predestined to be trampled" (181, 219). In the original, the phrase is "*obrečennoj na rastoptanie*," or "predestined for trampling."

<sup>11</sup> One of Solzhenitsyn's more poignant images in *The First Circle* is evoked by the prisoners and their New Year's tree: "Tomorrow or the day after, the fir tree would be set up in the semicircular room, and the *zeks*—fathers deprived of their children—would become children again themselves, [and] would hang decorations on it" (667, 797).

<sup>12</sup> For Nadya Nerzhin, the situation is succinctly summed up in the chapter title, "The Old Maid" (318, 384).

<sup>13</sup> This is in striking contrast with the words of Dasha, one of Nadya Nerzhin's roommates (and definitely not a member of the privileged class) who muses, "Happiness for a woman [is] simple: give birth to a child..." (314, 380). It is Dasha whose favorite saying is "Life is no love story."

<sup>14</sup> As Valentine Pryanchikov remarks to Rubin at the opening of the novel, "Numbers on human beings? Lev Grigorich, let me ask you, is that what you call progressive?" (6, 11).

<sup>15</sup> "It's you today, me tomorrow" (54, 68), is a dominant motivating force in their actions, Solzhenitsyn points out.

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Böll emphasizes that the full impact of this loss of the freedom to love may in fact be lost on the West: "Out of the material of imprisonment is born something so scorned in the West, not a virtue, but a quality: a wife's faithfulness to her husband. The sexual torment and the tormenting sex of Western literature only expresses an unconscious imprisonment and an absurdly misinterpreted freedom." Heinrich Böll, "The Imprisoned World of Solzhenitsyn," *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*, ed. John B. Dunlop, et. al. (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Co., 1973), p. 228.

<sup>17</sup> Olivier Clément provides further insight into the implications of Nerzhin's and Volodin's behavior: "In Innokenty Volodin and Gleb Nerzhin, conscience is an awakening initiated by love. But that which preserves love in the next world may well cause its loss in this one: Innokenty does not discover his wife as a person until the moment he is about to lose her for having attempted to rescue his fellow-man from injustice; Gleb feels his fidelity toward Nadia more strongly at the moment when he is about to plunge without hope of return into the lower circles of hell...." (My translation. — J.A.S.) Olivier Clément, *L'Esprit de Soljenitsyne* (Paris: Stock, 1974), pp. 148-49.