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Echoes of *Pochvennichestvo* in Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*

A notable characteristic of Solzhenitsyn's earlier works, from *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to *Cancer Ward*, was their apparent philosophical and aesthetic eclecticism. Their author seemed neither to reveal the intellectual origins of his work nor to articulate in his novels a coherent philosophy of history or theory of art. One critic was forced to conclude that artistically Solzhenitsyn was an "eclectic with conservative leanings" whose main concern was with truth and honesty in literature.¹ The publication of *August 1914* tended at first to allay this feeling. Parallels of both form and content could be drawn between the new novel and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Further reflection, however, suggests that the comparison with Tolstoy raises as many difficulties as it resolves.² But this does not mean that the riddle of the origins of Solzhenitsyn's thought remains insoluble. When examined in conjunction with the Nobel Prize lecture and the programmatic letter of September 5, 1973, to the Kremlin leaders, *August 1914* does reveal the sources of Solzhenitsyn's philosophical and aesthetic views. Taken together these works exhibit a theory of history and a philosophy of art that place their author in a tradition stemming from the nineteenth-century doctrine of *pochvennichestvo*.³ The subject of this study is the striking similarity between this original *pochvennichestvo* and Solzhenitsyn's thought as it has unfolded in his recent writings.

Pochvennichestvo was born and flourished in Russia between 1850 and 1870. It was a product of the enthusiasm and optimism engendered by the promise of major social and political reform in the empire after the humiliations of the Crimean War. Its founder and chief theorist was Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigoriev (1822–64), a brilliant, melancholic, and pathetically

1. Deming Brown, "Cancer Ward and *The First Circle*," *Slavic Review*, 28, no. 2 (June 1969): 312.

2. Only a few examples need be cited: Solzhenitsyn disputes Tolstoy's major thesis that it is the movement of the masses, not the actions of leaders, which determines the outcome of events, and he rejects Tolstoy's assertion that men cannot control human suffering. Tolstoy divides his attention almost evenly between war and peace, but only about one-tenth of *August 1914* is devoted to peace. The polyphonic structure of *August 1914* is a device used by Dostoevsky as well as Tolstoy.

3. *Pochvennichestvo* is best translated as the "native soil movement" and *pochvenniki* as the "men of the soil."

dissipated *intelligent* who made a scant living from the sale of his admirable but almost totally ignored articles of literary criticism. *Pochvennichestvo* discovered an enthusiastic popularizer in Fedor Dostoevsky (1823–81), who became the *de facto* editor of the *pochvennik* journals *Vremia* and *Epokha*, which were owned and financed by his brother Mikhail. Grigoriev and the Dostoevsky brothers were also afforded able but equivocal support by the critic and bibliophile N. N. Strakhov (1828–96), one of Russia's most competent and persevering advocates of Hegelian philosophy. These four major proponents of *pochvennichestvo* were seconded by a number of lesser figures, among them Ia. P. Polonsky, the poet, A. E. Razin, a well-known writer of children's stories, A. U. Poretsky, one of Dostoevsky's closest friends, and I. G. Dolgomostiev, a talented young writer who, like Grigoriev, died prematurely as the result of physical and moral dissipation.

The "native soil" movement embraced a romantic-national doctrine based on a free adaptation of Herder's cultural nationalism and on elements arbitrarily selected from German idealism, especially from Schelling. It was distinct from Slavophilism by virtue of its belief in the continuity of Russian history and the organicism of the Russian nation, and by its emphasis on the leading role of art, particularly literature, in national development. The *pochvenniki* agreed with Herder that each nation was the embodiment of one single aspect of the greater idea of Humanity, which that nation developed during the course of its history.⁴ They conceived of the nation as an organic whole with a life and soul of its own. The entire history of a nation was immanent in the national idea which lay at its roots. National history was a process of the growing consciousness of this idea. The *pochvenniki* believed that the Russian idea was that of fraternity, which, when fully realized in the consciousness of the nation, would lead to the reconciliation of all social strata and ideologies in Russia and obviate the revolution threatened by class discord. The agent of this growing consciousness was art. Art was the bridge between the real and the ideal, between the life of the nation and its ideal essence. Since the sources of both art and life resided in the national idea, the two were inseparable. Art was the immediate, spontaneous, and direct expression of life in ideal form. As a consequence of its immediate link with life, art was particularly alert to the progress of the national idea. By virtue of the artist's special sensitivity, art divined the next advance in society's growing consciousness of the idea before that advance manifested itself in life. Through art, this impending advance was transformed in the consciousness of the nation into a general social need. In this way art directed life.

4. Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London, 1800, reprint), pp. 451–56.

The *pochvenniki* considered any extraneous force which hindered the free and spontaneous organic development of the national idea to be destructive of national life. The national idea had to be permitted to unfold gradually, step by step, in an unhurried progression from the native soil itself. The *pochvenniki* were therefore gradualists.⁵ Institutions, laws, and aspects of culture could not be concocted rationally and imposed on the nation, because such impositions were alien to national historical development and destroyed the fabric of national life. They should instead be derived directly and organically from the roots of Russian life. As products of mind alone, rational solutions were one-sided and abstract. Life and history embraced irrational elements which were beyond the grasp of naked reason. In place of abstractions, which they argued had no reality beyond the human mind, the *pochvenniki* put the concreteness of historical and personal experience. This substitution, as will be seen, determined almost every aspect of their thought.

They concluded that the Russians possessed the further characteristic of universality, which enabled them to absorb all the conflicting ideas of the European nations and synthesize them into an organic whole. This synthesis, they believed, would usher in an era of universal harmony and brotherly love.⁶

Solzhenitsyn does not adhere to all the notions of this extravagant doctrine. It is clear in his letter to the Kremlin leaders that he does not believe with the *pochvenniki* that Russia is to play a universal role in human development. His work therefore lacks the messianic quality which distinguishes the views of the *pochvenniki*. Nevertheless, their conceptions of history as idealist and irrational, organic and existential, and their nominalism and gradualism beg comparison, as do their views of art as autonomous but socially responsible. Solzhenitsyn himself has suggested that there is a link between his views and those of Dostoevsky. In his Nobel Prize lecture he wrote of his famous predecessor, "It was given to *him* to see a great deal, and he was amazingly illuminant."⁷ From this and other revealing observations it is evident that there is more to the similarities between their historical and artistic ideas than simple parallelism.

As with the *pochvenniki*, in Solzhenitsyn's philosophy of history Herder's idealist interpretation of the role of the nation in historical development serves

5. P. V. Bykov, who was close to the *pochvenniki* in the early 1860s, recalled that they were known in St. Petersburg circles as the *postepenovtsy* (gradualists). P. V. Bykov, *Siluety dalekogo proshlogo* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1930), p. 51.

6. No comprehensive study of *pochvennichestvo* has been published in any language. The summary above has been condensed from my own doctoral dissertation, "The 'Native Soil' Movement (*Pochvennichestvo*) in Russian Social and Political Thought, 1850-1870" (London University, 1973).

7. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia* (London, 1973), p. 14 (Solzhenitsyn's emphasis).

as the starting point. "Nations," Solzhenitsyn wrote in his Nobel Prize lecture, "are the riches of mankind; though generalized they are its individuals; the smallest of them wears its own special colors and conceals in itself some special facet of God's plan."⁸ In 1861 Dostoevsky had also described the task of nations as the development of one or another side of man's nature. In his scheme of the universe, each nationality reflected "one, single human ideal, only tinted with local colors."⁹ Since every product of the history of a nation is an outgrowth of the national idea, which in turn represents one aspect of the greater idea of humanity, history is organic. Pavel Ivanovich Varsonofiev, one of the most mysterious characters of *August 1914*, who is identified only as a scholar and is known to his student interlocutors as the Stargazer, insists that history has "its own organic and, perhaps for us, incomprehensible structure."¹⁰ In a spurious analogy he goes on to suggest that history, like a river, has its own laws which govern its course. Interfere with these laws and the river will dry up. Varsonofiev concludes, "The bonds of generations, institutions, traditions, and custom—these are the bonds which keep the stream flowing."¹¹ Only organic growth from the soil produces a legitimate social structure and system of beliefs. N. N. Strakhov stated this idea more than a century earlier: "Under the term 'soil' are meant those fundamental and distinctive powers of a people in which the embryos of all its organic manifestations are included. Whatever the phenomenon is . . . be it a song, story, custom, a private or public institution, all these are recognized as legitimate, as having real meaning, inasmuch as they are organically linked with the national essence."¹²

Not only is history organic for Solzhenitsyn, it is also irrational. In *August 1914* Pavel Ivanovich pursues this argument with his young friends over a table rapidly filling with beer glasses. "History grows like a living tree," he says. "And reason for history is an axe; you will not make it grow by using reason on it."¹³ To the materialist argument that to know the needs of society one has only to study the social environment and existing material conditions, the historian Olda Orestovna Andozerskaia replies that this would be true only if the environment actually determined the individual. But besides the environment there are many spiritual traditions, as well as the spiritual

8. Ibid., p. 32.

9. Anon. [F. M. Dostoevsky], "Dva lageria teoretikov," *Vremia*, October 1861, p. 159. The authorship of all the anonymous and pseudonymous articles cited in this study has been established by Soviet and Western scholars.

10. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo* (Paris, 1971), p. 376.

11. Ibid., p. 377.

12. N. Kositsa [N. N. Strakhov], "Primer apatii," *Vremia*, January-February 1862, p. 65.

13. Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo*, pp. 376-77.

life of the individual, which raise a man above the environment to “personal responsibility” for his actions.¹⁴ Neither Solzhenitsyn nor the *pochvenniki* can see man as merely an atom in a universe of like atoms. Strakhov wrote, in a review of Mlle Clémence Royer’s tendentious introduction to the first French edition of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, that human life is shaped and directed by “more profound principles” than those governing nature.¹⁵ Solzhenitsyn defends the autonomy of the individual against those rationalists who would reduce human nature to a monotonous sameness under the rubric “humanity,” just as A. A. Grigoriev defended the individual against the leveling he detected in utopian socialism. Grigoriev passionately affirmed that human souls were eternal and infinitely various and rejected the notion that the diverse colors of nationalities and individuals would some day coalesce into a general and monotonous “mass of humanity.”¹⁶

In the formulation of their fundamental philosophical position, therefore, neither Solzhenitsyn nor the *pochvenniki* appeal to a priori, rational principles. “The mistaking of incomplete thought for complete reality,” Dostoevsky wrote, “here is the root of all the errors of mankind.”¹⁷ Abstract thought proceeds by producing a general and centralizing formula into which it seeks to force all particular cases, and so deprives the particular of its individual essence. The reduction of the specific and concrete to the general and abstract removes from men any criterion for distinguishing one detail or person from another. It also impedes their ability to make moral judgments except in the most general and abstract terms, which have no real bearing on concrete situations. The theoretical thinker is perpetually trapped by the discrepancy between life and his concepts, whereas the organic philosopher derives his thought immediately and spontaneously from concrete existence.

One of the principal themes of *August 1914* is the exploration of the struggle between abstract thought and concrete reality. Solzhenitsyn introduces the subject in the first pages of the novel. The University of Moscow student Isaakii (Sania) Lazhenitsyn is torn by the contradiction between his views and his feelings. As a self-professed Tolstoyan he is sworn to

14. Ibid., p. 504.

15. N. N. Strakhov, “Durnye priznaki,” *Vremia*, November 1862, p. 164.

16. Odin iz mnogikh nenuzhnykh liudei [A. A. Grigor'ev], “O postepenno no by-strom i povsemestnom rasprostraneni nevezhestva i bezgramotnosti v russkoi slovesnosti,” *Vremia*, March 1861, pp. 40–41. Grigoriev was here influenced by Herder’s insistence on the diversity of men and nations. In his Kremlin letter of September 1973, Solzhenitsyn asserts that it is impossible that “the whole of mankind should follow a single absolutely identical pattern of development.” Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “Letter to the Soviet Leaders,” *Sunday Times* (London), Mar. 3, 1974, p. 34.

17. Anon. [F. M. Dostoevsky], “N. A. Dobroliubov,” *Vremia*, March 1862, p. 46. In *August 1914* Olga Orestovna remarks that it is the error of hasty thinking to “point to a branch and pass it off as the whole tree” (*August chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 503).

vegetarianism, but when at his home in a steppe village he eats meat because to his family “meat is an everyday reality” which he can reject only at the risk of ridicule.¹⁸ As a Tolstoyan he is a pacifist and finds pacifism an easily supportable principle as long as war, like meat, does not become an “everyday reality.” When war becomes a reality, it is not the abstract ideal of pacifism which determines Sania’s action, nor is it facile patriotism. Rather it is the concrete reality of endangered and suffering Russia which motivates him to volunteer. Sania enlists because he “feels sorry for Russia.”¹⁹

Solzhenitsyn makes his case against abstraction most tellingly in the character of Sasha Lenartovich, a young lawyer and Social Democrat who enlists to spread socialist propaganda among the troops. Sasha allows no room for love and compassion in his assessment of men but judges them by what they can contribute to the Revolution. In a protracted conversation with a field doctor, Lenartovich reveals the atrophy of moral judgment to which abstraction leads. “The worse, the better,” he declares. The more individual Russians suffer, the sooner they will be driven to the Revolution. And the Revolution, in his eyes, justifies their torture and mass slaughter. The doctor, whose moral universe revolves around the alleviation of the suffering of individuals, is shocked, but Sasha remains adamant: “Individual cases of so-called compassion only obscure the issue and delay a general solution to the problem.”²⁰ But even his cerebral detachment can be overcome, however briefly, by immediate and spontaneous physical experience—as his delight in capturing a German town “with his own body, his arms and legs” suggests.²¹

Solzhenitsyn, like the *pochvenniki* before him, does not accept the “general solution” professed by Lenartovich, which sacrifices individuals to the greater good of an abstract humanity. There is no such thing as humanity, but only nationalities, races, types, and individuals.²² Like all abstractions the concept “humanity” is detached from the real needs and concerns of the nation or individual, and denies historical and personal experience. For this reason the *pochvenniki* worked “directly from what is and [they] only wish to permit the greatest freedom of development to what is.”²³ Solzhenitsyn makes the same point through Olda Orestovna. “The stuff of history,” she tells her students, “is not *opinions* but *sources*. And our conclusions are shaped by the sources even if they go against our opinions.”²⁴

18. Solzhenitsyn, *Av gust chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 18.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

22. Cf. A. A. Grigor'ev, “Neskol'ko slov o zakonakh i terminakh organicheskoi kritiki,” *Sochineniia*, vol. 1: *Kritika*, ed. V. S. Krupitsch (Villanova, 1970), p. 212, and Anon. [Dostoevsky], “N. A. Dobroliubov,” p. 45.

23. F. M. Dostoevsky, “Ob'iaвление za 1862 g.,” *Biografiia, pis'ma i zametki iz zapisnoi knizhki F. M. Dostoevskago* (St. Petersburg, 1883), p. 32.

24. Solzhenitsyn, *Av gust chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 503 (Solzhenitsyn's emphasis).

The civic philosophies of Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki* follow directly from their essentially existential philosophy of history. Since laws and institutions are legitimate only insofar as they grow organically from the national essence, they reject violent social and political transformations and insist on historical continuity. To Solzhenitsyn, revolutions are a “long and senseless process of destruction” and are “always disastrous for the people in whose midst they occur.”²⁵ Dostoevsky similarly characterized revolution as more destructive than its achievements warranted.²⁶ A revolution is destructive because it interrupts the continuous organic unfolding of the national idea and rends the fabric of national life. Moreover, the revolutionary mentality seeks nothing less than the destruction of civilization and its accomplishments. The *pochvenniki* vigorously maintained that the authority of civilization—philosophy, science, art—and of culture in general had to be recognized. This authority was the hard-won common property of mankind, and its existence was the guarantee against chaos and vacillation in human life which ends in social disintegration.²⁷ Solzhenitsyn supports this view. All the actions of the revolutionaries in recent years, he argues, signal their determination to “annihilate civilization.”²⁸ The organicist, therefore, substitutes gradualism for revolutionism. Genuine development, the engineer Ilia Isakovich Arkhangorodsky tells his children in *August 1914*, is the product of adaptation to the slow process of history “by work, by persuasion and gradual change.”²⁹ Here is the exact meaning of Dostoevsky’s declaration that the *pochvenniki* wished for only the freest development of what already exists. The *pochvenniki*, he wrote, had rejected haste and the spilling of blood and had “turned away from the short path to truths.”³⁰ The tension between “destroyers” and “builders” in history is a major concern of both Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki*.

The organicist believes that neither the state nor social institutions can be constructed according to a preconceived theory. Varsonofiev warns Sania and his companion, “The best social order is not subject to our willful invention. Nor even to *scientific* composition. . . . Do not be so arrogant as to suppose that you can invent the best social order—for with this invention you may deform your beloved people.”³¹

The same thought is the basis of *pochvennik* social theory: “If theoretical thinking is harmful, it is precisely in the solution of social questions of the

25. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 536, and “Letter to the Soviet Leaders,” p. 36.

26. F. M. Dostoevsky, “Neizdannyi Dostoevskii,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 83 (Moscow, 1971), p. 176.

27. N. K. [N. N. Strakhov], “Nechto o polemike,” *Vremia*, August 1861, pp. 147–48.

28. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 38.

29. Solzhenitsyn, *Avugust chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 537.

30. Dostoevsky, “Neizdannyi Dostoevskii,” p. 158.

31. Solzhenitsyn, *Avugust chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 376 (Solzhenitsyn’s emphasis).

first importance. Knowing life little and never looking into its depths and, therefore, not understanding its most basic requirements, theoretical thinking tries to construct [political life] on the basis of the theory of state mechanism. . . . The theory of mechanism in political life condemns it to morbid stagnation.”³²

In practical terms theoretical thinking leads to the imposition of a lifeless ideology on a state. And it is to the mechanical obedience of Soviet leaders to Marxist-Leninist ideology that Solzhenitsyn, in his Kremlin letter, ascribes all of Russia’s failings since the Revolution.³³ Solutions to political and social problems must be formulated not according to some rationalistic theory of state or society but in the spirit of the historical life of the people which corresponds to the social structure which it has previously worked out.

Social change is necessarily gradual. As Dostoevsky pointed out, “Every society can accommodate only that level of progress to which it has developed and which it has begun to understand.”³⁴ “And what,” Varsonofiev asks in *August 1914*, “if the people themselves *are not ready*? If they are not, neither abundance of food nor education nor a change of institutions will help.”³⁵ The history of any nation is a process of the gradual evolution of its level of consciousness. Attempts to impose institutions and values in advance of the present state of consciousness can lead only to malformation in political and social life. Such fears and doubts about the preparedness of Russians for democratic forms of government have led Solzhenitsyn to advocate the retention of authoritarian rule in Russia, at least in the foreseeable future. He envisages a kind of *Rechtsstaat* whose spiritual and moral foundations rest on Christian Orthodoxy.³⁶ Neither Solzhenitsyn nor the *pochvenniki* deny or oppose human progress, though both abhor the doctrine of infinite *material* progress. But progress must be orderly and gradual, and change must conform to the roots of national life.

As organicists, Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki* see not only history but also the “people,” or nation, as constituting an organic whole. All the parts of an organism are linked to all its other parts by some inner, necessary principle of unity. Their attitude therefore contradicts the supposition that Russian society was fundamentally divided into classes. In their view Russian nationality (*narodnost’*) embraced the whole nation (*narod*). “For how much longer,” Varsonofiev asks, “must we always identify the people with the

32. Anon. [F. M. Dostoevsky], “Dvorianstvo i zemstvo,” *Vremia*, March 1862, pp. 19–20.

33. “So here again at every step and in every direction, it is IDEOLOGY that prevents us from building a healthy Russia.” Solzhenitsyn, “Letter to the Soviet Leaders,” p. 35 (Solzhenitsyn’s emphasis).

34. Dostoevsky, “Neizdannyi Dostoevskii,” p. 176.

35. Solzhenitsyn, *Avugust chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 373 (Solzhenitsyn’s emphasis).

36. Solzhenitsyn, “Letter to the Soviet Leaders,” p. 36.

peasantry? . . . In any case, [the people] are not just the common people only. And it is impossible to treat the intelligentsia as separate from the people."³⁷ Dostoevsky posed the same question: "Why should nationality belong to the common people only? Does nationality disappear when the people develop? Are we, the educated, not really the Russian people?"³⁸

The main impetus of *pochvennichestvo* was the desire to preserve the organic unity (*edinstvo*) of the Russian people. In this unity its adherents saw the only defense against revolution. Much of the energy of the *pochvenniki* was directed toward the reconciliation of the educated with the uneducated, of the intelligentsia with the peasantry. Solzhenitsyn builds the idea of reconciliation in *August 1914* with painstaking care. It is symbolized in the relationship between Colonel Vorotyntsev, a member of the educated elite, and Blagodarev, his uneducated peasant aide. These men gradually discover an affinity based on instinctual understanding. Together they constitute a unit capable of positive and constructive action. The theme of reconciliation reaches its climax with the burial of Colonel Kabanov in the forests of East Prussia. Peasant soldiers and educated officers are joined in the mystical unity of the Orthodox funeral service chanted by Blagodarev. Even Iaroslav Kharitonov, whose fashionably liberal parents had alienated him as a child from the real people by giving him a mythical substitute, is able to partake in this union because of the deep love of the irrationality of the peasants which his short experience as a junior officer had instilled in him. Only Sasha Lenartovich, the Social Democrat revolutionary, is eternally separated from the people by his rationalism and his abstract vision of humanity. As the mourners gather around the grave, Sasha stands aloof in the background with a "twisted smile of condescension" on his lips.³⁹

In summary, Solzhenitsyn, like the *pochvenniki*, is a convinced nominalist, that is, he believes that abstract or a priori concepts exist in name only without any basis in reality. In his existential scheme, with its emphasis on the concrete and specific as opposed to the abstract and general, history becomes a substitute for philosophical speculation. History and not reason is the final arbiter of reality, and concrete existence is the sole criterion of authenticity. His organicism and its political concomitant—gradualism—logically follow from his historical approach. Change, which is evident in the historical process, is explained by the biological analogy of growth, since nothing enduring can come into being except through what already exists. Everything in the present was potential in the past, and the whole future is immanent in the present.

The immanentism which underlies Solzhenitsyn's philosophy of history inevitably leads to the question of determinism or fate in *August 1914*.⁴⁰ If

37. Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 373.

38. F. M. Dostoevsky, "Knizhnost' i gramotnost'," *Vremia*, August 1861, p. 45.

39. Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo*, pp. 449–51.

40. The author of a recent article maintains that *August 1914* reveals Solzhenitsyn

the history of a nation is nothing more than the progressive expression of the national idea, then fate, not men, controls the nation's destiny. This would be so if every nation inevitably attained its complete expression and lived out a full life. But a nation may be diverted from its course, or its development may be completely halted either by external forces or internal disruption. As Solzhenitsyn points out in *August 1914*, it only required two or three successive defeats in war "for a thousand-year-old nation to perish."⁴¹ Internal disruption, the struggle between the black and the red hundreds, may have the same effect, as Arkhangorodsky warns his revolutionary-minded children. But Arkhangorodsky perceives that he can choose either to participate actively in the process of history or to separate himself from it and oppose it by inventing and working toward an abstract ideal contrary to reality. And whoever follows the latter course may succeed, at least temporarily, in destroying the organicism of the nation.⁴² Solzhenitsyn's freedom is the freedom of idealists like Hegel and Fichte or of materialists like Marx. Man can choose to march in or out of step with the forces of history.

Nor was Russia fated to lose the war with Germany. Leaders and parties, in spite of Tolstoy's opinion to the contrary, do control the destiny of states.⁴³ Men do have power over suffering, as the nurse Tania discovers. Her experience at the front teaches her that the irresponsibility of the officers and not an impersonal "elemental power" is the cause of the suffering in her wards.⁴⁴ This same irresponsibility, this same disregard for the real needs of the nation, was the cause of the war and determined its catastrophic outcome. Like the educated civilians, the officers were alienated from the people and the demands of national history by their life in St. Petersburg and Moscow.⁴⁵ Only a handful of officers who had graduated under Golovin (on whom Vorotyntsev is modeled) understood the real nation and its requirements, but they were inconsequential in a sea of incomprehension. The battle for East Prussia was lost, as is made clear in the conference at General Head-

as a fatalist. See Kevin Windle, "The Theme of Fate in Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*," *Slavic Review*, 31, no. 2 (June 1972): 399-411.

41. Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 109. In any future war with China, Solzhenitsyn warns, the "last root of the Russian people will be extirpated" ("Letter to the Soviet Leaders," p. 33).

42. Solzhenitsyn illustrates this point in a brief but powerful aside. It is a pity, he writes, that no photographs were taken of the common soldiers, the "gray heroes" of World War I, because since then the "make-up of our nation has changed, our features have altered, and no camera can ever again find those trusting bearded faces, those friendly eyes, those deliberate and selfless expressions" (*August chetyrnadtsatogo*, p. 355).

43. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 483.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 224. Solzhenitsyn has no doubt that history repeats itself; he berates the Soviet leaders for their insulation from the "inner life" of Russia ("Letter to the Soviet Leaders," p. 36).

quarters which concludes the novel, because of the incompetence of the high and middle commands and of the “pack of fools” who governed the nation. Men such as General Samsonov may feel that they are the victims of fate—in this is their excuse and salvation. But the destruction of the Second Army is the result of the folly and weakness of Samsonov and his superiors.⁴⁶ Russian soldiers and peasants are not the victims of fate but of the alienation of their military and political leaders from the Russian land.

The aesthetic theories of Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki* naturally proceed from their philosophy of history. It is doubtful that Solzhenitsyn attaches the absolute value to art which the *pochvenniki* did, but his aesthetic views and those of the *pochvenniki* contain similarities which cannot be ignored. The arguments and even the phraseology of parts of Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize lecture are clearly derived from Dostoevsky's famous essay, “Mr. —bov and the Question of Art.”

Both Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki* begin with the assumption that art, especially literature, is an expression of the soul of the nation.⁴⁷ Literature is the true and immediate reflection of its ideals and eternal reality. As the memory of the nation, literature preserves the national soul and provides a link between present generations and the nation's past.⁴⁸ Only art can penetrate to the irrational depths of national life, because only in art are reason and feeling so perfectly combined. Art, says Solzhenitsyn, sends us revelations which “cannot be produced by rational thought.”⁴⁹ Art is the immediate and spontaneous expression of life, whereas rational thought is a reflective process and therefore a secondary activity.

Art also possesses the quality of clairvoyance: it is the first to discover in social life what comes into the general consciousness only later. “Art,” Grigoriev wrote, “often beforehand senses the approaching future as a bird beforehand senses fair or foul weather.”⁵⁰ Solzhenitsyn made the same claim for art in an interview with the Czech journalist Pavel Lichko in 1967: “By intuition and by his singular vision of the world, a writer is able to discover far earlier than other people various aspects of social life and can often see them from an unexpected angle.”⁵¹ Art serves as the barometer of social life

46. Solzhenitsyn, *Av gust chetyrnadtsatogo*, pp. 566–68.

47. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 50. Cf. A. A. Grigor'ev, “Stikhotvoreniia N. Nekrasova,” *Vremia*, July 1862, p. 23.

48. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 32. Cf. F. M. Dostoevsky, “Riad statei o russkoi literature: G. —bov i vopros ob iskusstve,” *Vremia*, January-February 1861, p. 200.

49. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 10.

50. A. A. Grigor'ev, “Kriticheskii vzgliad na osnovy, znachenie i priemy sovremennoi kritiki,” *Literaturnaia kritika* (Moscow, 1967), p. 324.

51. Leopold Labedz, ed., *Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record* (London, 1970), p. 8.

and consequently expresses social needs before they are generally felt. Art, therefore, has a formative influence on social life.

The *pochvenniki* rejected both the art-for-art's-sake and the utilitarian schools of literary criticism. In their view, art should be neither detached from the concerns of society, as in the former, nor consciously directed toward the solution of social problems, as in the latter. For the *pochvenniki*, true art was inseparable from life and consequently was always contemporary and relevant to the burning questions of the day. Since time alone could determine what in a work of art was truly useful to the whole of humanity, Dostoevsky wrote, the subordination of art to short-term, utilitarian aims was destructive of its real purposes.⁵² In the Nobel Prize lecture Solzhenitsyn himself does not directly discuss the question of art-for-art's-sake and utilitarian art but commends to his listeners the views of Albert Camus on the subject in his Nobel Prize speech of 1957.⁵³

There is, however, sufficient evidence in Solzhenitsyn's own lecture to relate his aesthetic theory to that of the *pochvenniki*. He agrees with Dostoevsky that art should not be used for "fleeting political purposes or limited social needs."⁵⁴ The real purpose of art lies in its long-term effects on the human soul. In ways as manifold as the persons it touches, art raises the soul to the highest spiritual existence.⁵⁵ In this is art's real purpose and its true utility. For that reason both Solzhenitsyn and Dostoevsky insist in almost identical passages that one should not "demand anything from the artist," but should be "permitted to scold him, to ask him, to summon and to entice him."⁵⁶ To demand that art be useful is to violate its inherently free nature. The artist is completely at liberty to choose his subject, but his main duty is to his nation and to history.

Art is efficacious, and can work its plastic effect on the soul, only when it is based on truth, and a work of art which has drawn on truth is ageless.⁵⁷ Linked organically as it is to life, art cannot remain true to itself and yet be unfaithful to life. An inartistic work—a work not based on truth—can never attain its aims, and it "convinces no one."⁵⁸ An artistic work—one founded in real life and truth—is therefore "the best, the most convincing, the most

52. Dostoevsky, "G. —bov i vopros ob iskusstve," pp. 173–74.

53. Camus argues that art is both the affirmation and the rejection of existence and that the artist is destined to stand between the two schools of criticism. Albert Camus, *Discours de Suède* (Paris, 1958), pp. 54–55.

54. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 6.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 10. Cf. Dostoevsky, "G. —bov i vopros ob iskusstve," pp. 196–97.

56. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 34. Cf. Dostoevsky, "G. —bov i vopros ob iskusstve," p. 204.

57. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 12. Grigor'ev wrote in 1861 that genuine poetry "cannot be opposed to truth. . . ." Anon. [A. A. Grigor'ev], "Iavleniia sovremennoi literatury," *Vremia*, March 1861, p. 67.

58. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 12.

indisputable, the most intelligible means" of presenting a cause to the public.⁵⁹ Solzhenitsyn maintains that a political speech or a piece of journalism can be entirely convincing and yet be based on a lie. Only a work of art fails to convince if it is false. A century earlier, Dostoevsky wrote that Pushkin, Turgenev, and Ostrovsky could do more for Russian development than the finest political section of a journal.⁶⁰ In the thought of both Solzhenitsyn and the *pochvenniki*, art carries a heavy burden: it is the bearer of truth and the only surety against falsehood.

Although art is primarily national, it is also man's link with humanity. Solzhenitsyn marvels at the capacity of art to "transfer living experience from whole nation to whole nation," and so to unite the human race.⁶¹ The *pochvenniki* were also acutely aware of the universality of artistic creativity. Every work of art, Grigoriev argued, contained something universally human, which it expressed "in the colors of time, place, and people."⁶² Solzhenitsyn sees the same relation in art between the national and the universal: "The living feeling of World Literature reassures me; it beats as one great heart in response to the cares and troubles of the world, although these cares and troubles are represented and seen in their own way in each of the corners of the world."⁶³ Art is therefore the instrument and the vanguard of the growing unity of mankind.

The similarities between the thought of Solzhenitsyn and that of the *pochvenniki* are not entirely fortuitous. The *pochvenniki* wrote at the height of the Russian "enlightenment," when the materialist ideologies of Feuerbach, Büchner, Moleschott, and others were washing over the intellectual life of Russia, and when Turgenev's character Bazarov served as the symbol of everything useful and enlightened in society. The *pochvenniki* were seeking an alternative to materialism, to the utilitarian doctrine of enlightened egoism, and to the tyranny of the theory of infinite material progress in which individuals counted for less than humanity. They discovered that alternative in the ideals of the nation, the autonomy of the human soul, and the regenerative powers of artistic creativity. Their aim was to find a principle which raised men above the pursuit of material prosperity.

Solzhenitsyn stands at the opposite end of a century of materialism, but the problems confronting the artist remain the same. In his view the theory of progress is no less tyrannical now than it was one hundred years ago: "For we are always quick to change even the very best of what we have,"

59. Dostoevsky, "G. —bov i vopros ob iskusstve," p. 193.

60. Cf. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia leksiia*, p. 12, and Anon. [F. M. Dostoevsky], "Svistok i Russkii Vestnik," *Vremia*, March-April 1861, p. 76.

61. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia leksiia*, p. 30.

62. Anon. [A. A. Grigor'ev], "Neskol'ko slov o Ristori," *Vremia*, January-February 1861, p. 156.

63. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia leksiia*, p. 46.

he writes, "so long as it is for something new."⁶⁴ He contends that the quest for material prosperity remains no less dominant as the "main aim of earthly existence," and he views the theory of economic progress as the chief threat not only to Russia but to the whole of civilization.⁶⁵ Those coercive powers which Dostoevsky's "devils" were willing to unleash to destroy Russian civilization in the name of humanity are now being used to annihilate civilization throughout the world. Youth with no more experience of life than sex, Solzhenitsyn wryly observes, "joyously repeats our discredited Russian platitudes of the nineteenth century" and imagines it has discovered something new.⁶⁶ Men must cease to be destroyers and become builders, must turn from external economic to internal moral development, and must descend to the "soil" from the clouds of abstraction and seek values in the concrete reality of nation, tradition, and custom.

There is little hint of resignation in this position. Men need not be the hapless victims of history capable only of tragic and sterile rebellion against its dictates. By listening with the inner ear of feeling to the voice of history which is to be heard everywhere in life, men can become the conscious and willing collaborators of the historical process. Only in this way can they reassert the freedom and individuality of the human soul. Solzhenitsyn believes with the *pochvenniki* that art, with its ear finely tuned to life, can discover a new and more human path.

Although it is apparent that Solzhenitsyn is familiar with Dostoevsky's *pochvennik* writings such as "Mr. —bov and the Question of Art," and perhaps with the works of other "men of the soil," it would be hazardous to exclude the role of intermediaries in the formation of his outlook. *Vekhi*, to which Sania Lazhenitsyn refers in *August 1914*, is undoubtedly one example of such an intermediate influence. But most of the relevant passages in *Vekhi*, such as the authors' insistence that *narodnost'* extends to all the classes of Russia and not only to the peasantry, are themselves within the tradition of *pochvennichestvo*, and it is the origins of this tradition and their relevance to Solzhenitsyn's thought which are central to this article. It is the measure of Solzhenitsyn's consistency that the elements of *pochvennichestvo* which have become explicit in his writings since *August 1914* were already implicit in his earlier works, as a retrospective examination would disclose. Regrettably such an examination must remain outside the scope of the present study.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 8. Later in the lecture Solzhenitsyn relates the idea of the tyranny of progress to Dostoevsky's phrase "becoming a slave to silly little progressive ideas" (p. 38).

65. Solzhenitsyn, "Letter to the Soviet Leaders," p. 34.

66. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobelevskaia lektsiia*, p. 38.