

## Solzhenitsyn: Prisoner of Chillon

They loved, but God forgive them!  
They would not tell their love. . . .

— Heinrich Heine

Between you and your land an icy  
link is born.

— Osip Mandelstam

### I. The Theory of Horse \* Rider, or the Justification of Evil

Goethe once said that if Byron had had an opportunity to give vent in Parliament to all the antagonisms within him, his poetic talent would have been much the purer. One cannot say this of Solzhenitsyn: had he had an opportunity to express himself in a parliament, he might not have been a writer at all.

This is the Russian tradition. Where political life is forbidden, politics is smuggled into other spheres, first and foremost into literature. In no other country do the authorities attribute so much importance to literature as in Russia. For words you are put in prison or into a madhouse. You are killed, as Babel and Mandelstam were. You are hounded to death, as Chaadaev, Lermontov, and Pasternak were. You are exiled, like Herzen and Solzhenitsyn. Words have a value in Russia as nowhere else. But this gives rise to its own pathology, a limit beyond which the writer finally ceases to be a writer and becomes a politician.

This is what has happened to Solzhenitsyn.

The politician cramped the artist in him and in the final analysis suppressed the artist. One would hardly attempt a political study of writers such as John Updike, Saul Bellow, or

Kurt Vonnegut—it would be artificial. Quite the opposite is true for Solzhenitsyn, who simply cannot be studied in the framework of literature alone. In his work the preponderance of the political over the “artistic” is obvious. He had produced a good hundred political articles, interviews, open letters; the three weighty volumes on the Soviet camps; the portraits of Stalin, Lenin, Czar Nicholas II, and other Russian political figures; the programmatic anthology *From Under the Rubble*; his historical, actually political novel about World War I; and, finally, his reminiscences, again more political than literary, and even entitled, symbolically, with a Russian proverb, *The Calf Butted the Oak*. Today the author of the *Gulag Archipelago* cannot even remain a historian, for a historian requires objectivity, and Solzhenitsyn is too tendentious for that. For him facts are not decisive, but are subordinated to political concepts, and sometimes even distorted to fit them. This becomes clear when we compare the objective, even confessional first volume of *Gulag* with the latter two, in which he employs an approach contrived in behalf of his political ideas.

In his novel *The First Circle*, Solzhenitsyn calls a great writer "a second government"; his literary career and even his fame Solzhenitsyn views as a political weapon. A few months before his exile from the Soviet Union, he sent out his "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" with its detailed plan for the reform of Russia. In Lefort Prison, before hearing the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., when Solzhenitsyn was given a new suit, he was convinced that he would be driven at once to the Kremlin to help decide the fate of Russia. More than once we have tried to imagine the conversation: the long table, famous and well-known from many photos, and seated at it Leonid Brezhnev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

SOLZHENITSYN'S PRESENT ISOLATION is unnatural, and his regular sorties from his Vermont seclusion—his speech at Harvard University, his talk on the BBC, or his recent flood of articles in the American press—*Time*, *Foreign Affairs*, the *Washington Post*, and more—have a calculated, almost strategic character. Obviously, he has chosen the time—since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—for a campaign. But, instead of riding the current wave of anti-Soviet feeling, he has chosen a different tack, one almost against the current, and sought to deflect Western anger from Russia solely onto Communism. Thus he developed his theory of the horse and rider—a poor horse (Russia) saddled with a savage rider (Communism), and the horse itself innocent of any guilt when its hooves trample the soil of foreign lands. Or, in another series of images, his view of a mysterious ailment (again Communism), which all of a sudden has stricken an unfortunate victim (again Russia): "We do not, after all, confuse a man with his illness; we do not refer to him by the name of that illness or curse him for it?"

Can one imagine Thomas Mann or Bertolt Brecht discussing the Nazi attack on Poland in September 1939, and saying, "Germany is innocent; ideology is guilty—a fatal illness, a mysterious rider. . . ."

Solzhenitsyn has another trick of termi-

nology: he insists that we distinguish the two names for the same country—the Soviet Union and Russia. Herzen's famous cry, "One is ashamed to be Russian!," Solzhenitsyn would alter to "One is ashamed to be a Soviet!" But this is not a matter of terminology or even chronology. For Solzhenitsyn all that is good is "Russian," all the bad is "Soviet." Who won the war with the Germans? The Russians. Who created the Gulag Archipelago? The Soviets. Who wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*, *War and Peace*, *Three Sisters*? Russians. And who has occupied Czechoslovakia, Poland, Afghanistan? Soviets.

But who occupied Poland during the last century and conducted a bloody suppression of its uprisings in 1831 and 1864? Or who occupied, at the end of the 19th century, the Central Asian khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, which bordered on Afghanistan? The concept of the "Soviet" did not exist then. Solzhenitsyn's work cannot sustain historical criticism, for it consciously ignores well-known facts. He writes, for instance, that "Alexander I had even entered Paris with an army, but he did not annex an inch of European soil." Does he pretend that the Congress of Vienna, which confirmed the partition of Poland and Czar Alexander as King of Poland, was not a result of the victory over Napoleon? And was not Russia the country that received in the 19th century the nickname of the "gendarme of Europe," and did Russian soldiers not have the honor of suppressing European uprisings each time they occurred?

Nor was it any better inside Russia. Solzhenitsyn is fond of defending Nicholas I, who upon his accession to the throne had executed the five leaders of the Decembrist uprising (while Brezhnev continues to send dissidents to prison, exiles them, permits them to emigrate, but does not execute them—we say this not in praise, but to set the record straight). Solzhenitsyn praises Prime Minister Stolypin, whose mass executions led Russians to nickname the Russian gallows "Stolypin's necktie." And was it not Russia that preserved the institution of serf-

dom until 1861, and the Jewish Pale until 1917? Which Russia does the Marquis de Custine describe in his great book of 1839, a book replete with terror, sympathy, and pity—the Soviet or the *Russian* land?

SOLZHENITSYN AND MANY OTHER RUSSIANS fail to see the continuity of Russian history; they fail to see that the Revolution of 1917 was neither an end nor a boundary. For even after the older model of Russian history was destroyed by the young Soviet regime, it came back under Stalin and finally even in the imperialism and chauvinism of the present regime. The division of Russian history into pre-October and post-October is put in doubt, if only by the striking similarity of the monster Ivan the Terrible to the monster Stalin, or that of the imperial reformer Peter the Great to the Bolshevik reformer Lenin, or of the liberal czar Boris Godunov to the liberal prime minister Nikita Khrushchev.

For Solzhenitsyn this dubious boundary of 1917 with its two revolutions is doubly fateful for Russia. For him the socialist ideas of October and the democratic ones of February spring from the same root, and he turns the same disfavor on both. They are equally unacceptable to him, since they come together in a single conception of the “ideological West,” something to be set against Russia. This is the point of departure for all his speculations. For Russia’s misfortunes he lays the guilt not only on the Communists but also on their immediate predecessors, the prerevolutionary liberals and democrats, Westernizers who had turned Russia away from her old-time, autochthonous way. This is the theme of his 20-volume historical novel, “The Red Wheel,” of which so far he has published only *August 1914* and *Lenin in Zurich*. And sometimes Solzhenitsyn, loyal to his ideological perspective, relates Russia’s historical catastrophe back to the distant times of the reformer and Westernizer Peter the Great.

For Solzhenitsyn 1917 remains a historical boundary on one side of which lies good, on the other evil. The source, paradoxically, of Solzhenitsyn’s notion is the vulgar Soviet view of 1917 as a milestone of good. Just as

this antithesis serves Soviet propaganda, so Solzhenitsyn attributes to it another significance: *a justification of Russia in all situations*. Guilt is lifted away once and forever and attributed to supernatural causes: a mysterious rider, an unknown disease, a Communist ideology coming from . . . God knows where. The Russian Revolution thus becomes something like the fall of Eve, following which she (Eve, Russia) was driven out of the primeval Paradise. Hence his patriarchal view of Russia as an ideal: how fair until she fell! Mandelstam called this “the great Slavic dream of how to stop the course of history.” A hundred years ago another Russian writer, A. K. Tolstoy, followed the same road but, dissatisfied with those very times Solzhenitsyn now finds so alluring, attributed Russia’s fall to a much earlier, indeed legendary period: “When I think of the beauty of our history up to the cursed Mongols, I sometimes feel like throwing myself on the ground and sobbing with grief.”

This is an old Russian tradition—to isolate evil and identify it with plots, revolution, foreign incursions, or infiltration. A scapegoat is created, to which you attribute all your negative features. One source of this idea is, perhaps, the gospel belief in demons that can be driven out of a person by liberating an innocent nature from the evil that has somehow become attached to it. Search not within, but without.

Solzhenitsyn goes farther than others in his detective-story analysis of Russian history by placing the Bolshevik seizure of power on the same footing with an occupation by foreigners. This enables him to be less bothered by the real occupation of Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Esthonia, and more, by Russians.

Who then are these mysterious occupiers of the Russian land? To suppose that Russians have subjected other Russians to occupation would be awkward; to stop short with a reference to some mystical ideology would mean to stop short of the full truth.

Did not the first years of the Revolution show features of a kind of foreign invasion? When in

a brigade requisitioning food or meting out punishment come to destroy a peasant district, almost no one would speak Russian, and there were Finns and Austrians among them? When the Central Committee included plenty of Latvians, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, Chinese? . . . They [Russians] had no protective inoculation—they lost their heads—yes, then they submitted—yes, they even liked it! But—they were not the first or the only ones to discover it, from the fifteenth century on!

So the search for the responsible one slips out of history and into ideology and then, necessarily, into ethnicity. For, if only it bears an ethnic character, evil is easily recognized. It would seem that the Russians had nothing to do with it, that the distortion of their history, that “mortal breaking of the spine,” has taken place quite against their will, and that the guilty were those who had turned them from their course. “It is not through us that injustice has come into being,” Solzhenitsyn declares in *August 1914*. To the Jews, naturally, belongs an honorable place in this xenophobic scale.

IN ITSELF Solzhenitsyn’s anti-Semitism would hardly deserve special attention, were it not that his detective-story view of Russian history lies at its base. First of all, anti-Semitism is scarcely original for a Russian writer, and in one degree or another it is characteristic of the majority of Russian classics—Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky (of Tolstoy, it would seem, not). Second, Solzhenitsyn is clever enough that openly anti-Semitic pronouncements (against the Jewish emigration, against Jewish cosmopolitanism, or against Voice of America broadcasts addressing Soviet Jews) are either veiled or balanced by declarations in favor of Israel or Zionism. Third, we believe that he does not hold to any “zoological” anti-Semitism; if he is anti-Semitic, then it is in an ideological sense. Hence he admits of a Jewish identity that is Israelite, Zionist, nationalist, but not of a Jewishness that is assimilated, cosmopolitan, pro-Western. Russian Jews for him, and the politically conscious intelligentsia as well, are the bearers and at the same time the symbol of ideas—socialist, democratic, bourgeois,

international—hostile to Russian nationalism. Ideological anti-Semitism is a sign of estrangement from them.

Hence, for instance, in his lampoon of history, *Lenin in Zurich*, ideological bases are replaced by racist ones. Some ten years ago the Soviet writer Marietta Shaginyan, working on a series of novels on Lenin’s family, discovered a document in the State Archives from which it appeared that Lenin was one-quarter Jewish. This sensational discovery was nowhere published in the Soviet Union, of course, and six workers of the State Archives were let go for having shown Marietta Shaginyan the fateful document.

But Marietta Shaginyan’s discovery agitated Solzhenitsyn no less than it did the Soviet officials—not only the one-quarter Jewish blood (how much!) but the one-quarter Russian (how little!). Analysis of Russian history is replaced by analysis of genes, chromosomes, and blood. The key to Solzhenitsyn’s conception is the following internal monologue, attributed to Lenin:

Why then was he born in that uncouth country? Because one-quarter of your blood is Russian, and for that fate has hitched you up to a large, clumsy Russian rig! A fourth of your blood, but neither in character nor in will nor in inclinations have you ever shown a kinship to that make-do, knock-down, eternally drunken land. . . .

Wishing to emphasize the non-Russian and anti-Russian character of the Russian Revolution, Solzhenitsyn presents in detail the emigré atmosphere in which Lenin lives, where there is not a single Russian (by blood); but where there are Jews. Solzhenitsyn sharply exaggerates the historical role of the insignificant Alexander Parvus, to whom he attributes the secret direction of the Russian Revolution as an assignment from the German General Staff. In relation to Lenin, Parvus appears in the role of Mephistopheles, a devil and tempter. The old story is related about the sealed railway carriage in which Lenin arrived in Petrograd, to supposedly produce the October Revolution at the expense of the Kaiser’s government. All is as clear as possible: the Russian Revolution is a

German provocation, and its secret mover the German spy Alexander Parvus who is, besides, a Jew: Solzhenitsyn gives the real family name of Lenin's Mephistopheles—Helfand—and insistently calls him “Israel Lazarevich,” though Parvus, like many other Russian revolutionaries, had exchanged his real name for a pseudonym in the interest of security. . . .

Every writer has his own archetypes and with writers who are not complex, like Solzhenitsyn, it is easy to identify these. If Lenin is only a political marionette in the hands of the German Jew Alexander Parvus, then we should look for some Jew behind Stalin's back as well. This Solzhenitsyn promptly shows, this time not in his fiction, but in *The Gulag Archipelago*. He finds for us Stalin's Mephistopheles, the Turkish Jew Naftali Frenkel, founder, it would seem, of the entire system of the Gulag Archipelago. The problem is not only the complete lack of any documentary evidence, but the undeserved diminution of the role of Stalin. Criminals on his scale scarcely require inspiration.

So the theory of the horse and the rider passes into the theory of the scapegoat, and the scapegoat unexpectedly manifests sharply national characteristics. Paraphrasing Voltaire's famous dictum about God, we could say, “if there were no Jews, one would have had to invent them.”

## II. The Liberals' Reply, and the Reply to the Liberals

BUT LET US TRY to avoid the temptation that leads liberals to criticize Solzhenitsyn from too easy a position. They say, “Of course, freedom is better than no freedom, democracy better than authoritarianism, the political West better than the political East, and so forth. These things are too obvious to employ as arguments.” In the light of such criticism, Solzhenitsyn can only appear to be something of an *enfant terrible*, an eccentric, but still a reactionary, a chauvinist, an anti-Semite. It is strange, in fact, that Solzhenitsyn does not understand he has thrown his critics such an easy bone of polemic contention. But the bone is already picked too clean. There

are bright flare-ups from these polemics: the interchanges between Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov; the accusation made by his former fellow prisoner Dmitri Panin (the real-life model of the character of Sologdin in *The First Circle*), as well as several verbal reworkings of the title of Solzhenitsyn's memoirs, *The Calf Butted the Oak*. The writer Viktor Nekrasov renamed it “The Pig Under the Oak” (a reference to Krylov's fable, in which a pig that has eaten its fill of acorns proceeds to dig up the oak tree's roots out of ingratitude). Nekrasov is thinking of the Moscow liberals, who in fact helped the former *zek* to get on his feet. To Sinyavsky (Tertz) is attributed an even coarser paraphrase: not *The Calf Butted the Oak*, but “The Calf Screwed the Oak.”

Of course, in any such enterprise Solzhenitsyn only failed. His most extreme attempt was his “Letter to the Soviet Leaders.” It never was published in the Soviet Union. This meant the destruction of all his political ambitions. No prophet is honored in his own land; his fate is to be stoned, or sent into exile as Solzhenitsyn was.

To this theme we will return, and meanwhile remark only that Solzhenitsyn's break with the government was at the government's initiative, while his break with the liberals was at his own initiative. This is important, even though it is true that his impatience with them is not much greater than their impatience with him. In a totalitarian land the opposition comes to be something of a union of false friends, who unite in the face of the common enemy. But in the final analysis the common enemy may seem to some as preferable to their unnatural friends. And Solzhenitsyn and the liberals now consider each other more dangerous for Russia than their former common enemy, the Soviet authorities. As for patience—this is not a Russian trait, especially not in politics.

Solzhenitsyn was one of the first Russian dissidents and one of the first to leave the movement, and his quarrel with it is perhaps of greater existential importance to him than his older quarrel with the Soviet authorities. It is quite natural that this rejection of liberalism has brought him closer to the authorities—

it could not be any different in view of the sharp polarization of ideology in Russia. His political memoirs are devoted to a struggle on two fronts: first, with the authorities, then with his fundamental opponents, the liberals, at one and the same time with both, and at one and the same time in alliance with both.

This paradoxical transformation of Solzhenitsyn from a Saul to a Paul (democratic to authoritarian, progressive to reactionary, anti-Stalinist to neo-Stalinist, and so on) does not require condemnation so much as it requires discussion and analysis.

Solzhenitsyn's political evolution is the result of a crisis in the dissident movement itself, and his break with the liberals (tactical as well as ideological) is a sign of its weakness. So is his shift to the Russian nationalist movement and his pretense to be its leader—a true index of the revival of nationalism in Russia today and its changes of political success. Solzhenitsyn is calculating on a real Russia, not an ideal democratic one. His pragmatism is one reason for abandoning liberalism.

It is curious that, just as Solzhenitsyn's reactionary views cannot stand *liberal* criticism, liberal criticism of him will not stand up to a *realistic* critique once it is taken out of the liberal context of the West and presented in the quite different, unliberal Russian context. This applies not only to intellectuals, but to members of the government, the Party, the bureaucracy, the military, and the people—the Russia that, as Gogol correctly observed, has spread itself over half the world and that just now, without special effort and by its own mere weight, has taken Afghanistan. In his quarrel with the dissidents, Solzhenitsyn might well have relied on Stalin, who once inquired how many divisions the Pope had. The Soviet dissidents had not a single soldier—they were commanders without troops.

James Reston has called attention to an aspect of Solzhenitsyn's Harvard speech: in calling for moral resistance to evil, at the same time he placed his only hope on the armed forces of the United States and was annoyed by its limited actions in foreign policy. Such is his traditional, Russian, imperial

view. If in the first half of the 19th century it was Russia that fulfilled the role of an international gendarme, now it is America that must take up this role.

SOLZHENITSYN'S CRITICISM of the West for its weakness and his prophesies of its impending doom are deeply Russian: many leading Russians, such as Herzen, arriving in the West, joined the ranks of its gravediggers. This Russian sense of Western weakness has its origin in the power of authority in Russia. Russians can be passionate revolutionaries, and still their prolonged and unsuccessful struggle with that power compels them to respect it, and only it. "Magnanimity is considered a weakness among peoples accustomed to force," the Marquis de Custine wrote in his Russian diary.

Let us then finally admit that Solzhenitsyn's negative traits are traits of Russia, and that his liberal opponents' quarrel is not with him but with Russia itself, which in fact is undemocratic, illiberal, without freedom, and not very open to precise analysis through application of the customary categories of logical reasoning. And this is why so much attention has been paid in the West to the handful of Russian dissidents, since for the West the very existence of an opposition in a totalitarian country seems to make that country comprehensible. But alas, this is only an illusion.

We have already written that democracy has limits to its understanding, that it has trouble realizing what "undemocracy" is. To understand "undemocracy," democracy must itself become undemocratic, and this may be too high a price to pay for understanding.

Yet the Russians themselves have already recognized the impotence of the mind to comprehend Russia. The poet Tyutchev wrote a quatrain that for a century now has been quoted with pride by Russian nationalists, though its meaning is in fact highly ambiguous:

The mind may not comprehend Russia,  
The yardstick cannot measure her:  
She has her own character —  
We can only believe in her.

And here is where the line is drawn that separates Solzhenitsyn from his former partisans and fellow crusaders, against whom he is now in open battle, considering them the worst foes of that Russia in which he *believes* (while they believe only in *reason*). He knows that Russia, historical and contemporary, is irrational; they suppose that with the aid of reason they can understand and change Russia.

If Solzhenitsyn's earlier views arose as a reaction against Stalinism and had a liberal tinge, his present, reactionary ones arose as an allergic reaction to Western "reformism" extending from the Kadet minister Milyukov to the Bolshevik Lenin, from the democratic and eclectic Sakharov to those Russian Euro-communists, the twin brothers Medvedev. Russian history in fact refutes the self-deceptions of the Western mind, which supposes so many of its institutions, including political ones, to be universal and obligatory for everyone, apart from indigenous traditions and inclinations. To the Soviet dissidents we can apply the characterization the historian Klyuchevski gave to the Russian Decembrists: they hoped to achieve results before the causes that would produce them. The dissidents were people who cast no shadows, so without effect was their noisy passage across the stage of Russian politics. They were Westernizers not only in the sense of their political preferences or their political origins, but in their final departure from Russia with their ideological baggage—like the Jews' exodus from Egypt. Their physical emigration was preceded and facilitated by their earlier inner, ideological emigration. Their presence in Russia was short-lived, transitory, privileged, and in view of the great interest the West paid them even honorable. Alas, the effect of their activity within the country was deeply negative: thanks to the exaggerated accounts given by foreign radio stations broadcasting to the U.S.S.R., their listeners became infected with an illusion of optimism and lost their grasp of that real-life milieu that continues to surround the average Soviet citizen. Solzhenitsyn wrote his "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" when he finally com-

prehended that it was futile to discuss Russia's fate with the liberals because of their estrangement from Russian reality, their utopianism, rationalism, and political heedlessness.

We do not take sides in this quarrel: unlike Solzhenitsyn, our views are democratic, but unlike the Russian democrats, we see no application for them in Russia. Nor has the Russian dissident movement died because Solzhenitsyn lacked faith in it! It did not even die from the repressions of the KGB, though these were more effective. It died from within itself, since it could not support the weight of Russian history. And, though their numbers were very small, the defeat of the Russian dissidents has been the defeat of the whole Russian liberal intelligentsia, and it has ended with the intelligentsia's exclusion from all political life.

Solzhenitsyn has made his choice: between the truth and his fatherland he has chosen the fatherland, the link with which has not been broken—rather it has been strengthened—by exile, just as the parts of a crushed worm, writhing, strive to unite again.

### III. The Lone Wolf: In Search of a Pack

WE JUDGE a person by his friends, or by his enemies, or by both at the same time. A solitary man cannot be judged; turning his back on people he sloughs off any associations; and what cannot be compared obviously cannot really exist.

Solzhenitsyn is as solitary as a wolf who has left the pack and does not recognize its laws. He knows that any ideological pack, even one that belongs to the opposition, even one that is willing to be sacrificed, inevitably turns into a Mafia: he broke with the dissidents partly for psychological reasons. Even his break with *Novy Mir*, the journal that first published him in the Soviet Union, was more than ideological. It was an instinct for literary and political self-preservation. In the period of its liberalism, and especially in those final years of disfavor and persecution, *Novy Mir* succeeded in preserving a political and esthetic monopoly, succeeded in dictating its own

taste and views for the entire Russian liberal intelligentsia. Solzhenitsyn necessarily had to break this artificial tie for the sake of his own survival as a writer, and he preferred the way of the lone wolf to that sacrificial path on which the herd of *Novy Mir* went down to their political slaughter. It is quite natural that neither then, in that time of heroism and sacrifice, nor even now could his criticism of *Novy Mir* be understood as anything else but a betrayal.

In 1969, in the heat of the official campaign against *Novy Mir*, not long before the final destruction of its liberal editorial board, the already fated journal resolved on a final, mortal struggle against the gang that, under the cover of the official ideology, preached chauvinist, neo-Stalinist, and anti-Semitic views. The chauvinists, their positions strengthened by the recent decision to occupy Czechoslovakia, at once made a reply to *Novy Mir* in the form of a denunciatory article, the notorious "Letter of the Eleven." And Alexander Solzhenitsyn (a writer contributing to *Novy Mir*) made common cause with these cursed enemies. From calculation? More probably from conviction. But from calculation as well, since he was already betting on the success of the reaction with its imperialist chauvinism, betting on it to win the ideological and political leadership in Russia. Tvardovski, the editor of *Novy Mir*, made a bitter jest at Solzhenitsyn's expense: "He is the twelfth of the eleven signers: the one who hadn't time to sign."

But he did have time to write and sign his "Letter to the Soviet Leaders," his most decisive attempt to achieve a political alliance with the authorities. In it he writes of the imperialist triumphs of the Soviet Union, greater than ever before. He writes about the cul-de-sac of our civilization, but emphasizes that in the West things are worse than with "us," and calls on the Soviet leaders "not to destroy Russia in the crisis of Western civilization" but to renounce ideological, scientific, commercial, and industrial cooperation with the West and enclose Russia in a healthy isolation with an emphasis on patriotism. He opposes Western democracy with political

stability and authoritarian order: "Russia has lived a thousand years with an authoritarian regime—and up to the beginning of the twentieth century she has preserved both the physical and spiritual health of her people." He calls for limited freedom for artistic creation, but not for "political books, proclamations, political pamphlets—God forbid?" Even in his attitude toward Communist ideology Solzhenitsyn is breaking down doors that are already open: he proposes that we discard an ideology that the Soviet rulers have already discarded, quietly replacing the Communist empire with a bureaucratic one and preparing to exchange the latter for a nationalist and chauvinistic one—a realization of Solzhenitsyn's own chief dream.

We recall how Anna Akhmatova called Solzhenitsyn a "Soviet man." There are points where the concepts of "Soviet" and "anti-Soviet" coincide. Varlam Shalamov, author of the well-known *Kolyma Tales*, told one of the authors of the present article, "Why do our leaders hate Sasha [Solzhenitsyn] so? They're cut from the same cloth. They come from the same school; only the signs are reversed: plus and minus. Family squabbles are the noisiest." This was said while Solzhenitsyn was still in Russia.

Solzhenitsyn graduated from that frightful school, the Gulag Archipelago. Its graduates not only bear hatred for it, they have also acquired its traditions, ideas, methods, even its style of thought. Sacrifice is learned from the torturer—not willingly, but from necessity, in order to survive. And habit turns into character and dies only with the person.

"Blessings on you, prison!" Solzhenitsyn exclaims, and he is correct in that his character was in fact completely formed by prison life. In the preface to *Gulag*, Solzhenitsyn declares: "The eleven years I spent there I bore not as a mark of shame, nor as a cursed dream, but almost with love of that monstrous world. . . ." And in his memoirs, which form a unique key to his psychology, he writes of his "irreversibly camp-style brain," and adds, "My habits are those of a prisoner, of a camp inmate. Without posing I may say that I belong to and owe to Russian literature



no less than I belong to and owe to Russian imprisonment—my character was shaped there, and that forever.”

The negative experience of the Gulag seems to Solzhenitsyn to be positive, indeed, essential for all mankind. “It is an indubitable fact,” Solzhenitsyn said at Harvard, “that the human character has weakened in the West and gained strength in the East. The complex and deadly crushing life has produced characters which are stronger, deeper and more interesting than the beneficent and regulated life of the West.” So what are we to do? Design a Gulag Archipelago in the West in order to breed heroic, courageous characters?

IN ALL his fulminations against the West one can detect the nostalgia of the crippled citizen for the land that is as crippled as he, the land where he suffered and was tortured, but which has been imprinted in his soul forever. It is the nostalgia for prison of a man set at liberty, a feeling described by Byron in “The Prisoner of Chillon.”

Is it any wonder, then, that Solzhenitsyn has surrounded his house in Vermont with a guard fence, and has installed closed-circuit television by the gate, as in a guard tower? Is it any wonder that Solzhenitsyn, who himself has suffered from the Soviet censorship, nonetheless has attacked freedom of the press with an angry diatribe? Is it any wonder that from his negative picture of Western society Solzhenitsyn made three exceptions: Franco’s Spain, Salazar’s Portugal, and Pinochet’s Chile? Or, finally, that he now uses Stalin as an example for other Russian leaders? Solzhenitsyn writes in his “Letter to the Russian Leaders”:

From the first days of the War Stalin did not count on the rotten support of ideology, but discarded it quite sensibly, even almost ceased to comprehend it, while he unfurled the old Russian flag, at times even the banner of Orthodoxy—and we won! . . . When they look forward to war with China the national leaders of Russia will necessarily have to rely on patriotism, and only on it.

And Solzhenitsyn’s changing attitude to-

ward Stalin only anticipates changing attitudes of his countrymen, although this foresight was the first reason for driving him out of Russia.

The second reason was that the Soviet authorities do not wish to be defended in a language they themselves do not understand.

And the third reason: Solzhenitsyn is a political extremist while the Soviet leaders are political pragmatists.

We can understand the anxiety of the Russian liberals who suppose a Solzhenitsyn in power to be a more dangerous variation on the present Soviet regime. Solzhenitsyn and the Soviet regime are no longer enemies, but rivals, ready at some point for cooperation with one another. Indeed, as time goes on they have more and more in common: from fear of China to fear of liberty, from neo-Stalinism to chauvinism.

And hence Solzhenitsyn’s political position is by no means so hopeless, if we consider the changeable fates of political emigrés (Lenin, Peron, Khomeini) and contemporary technological means of bridging space, of which Solzhenitsyn makes clever use (his Russian speeches on foreign broadcasting stations). This is the reason he varies his words to suit those who are listening. . . . Solzhenitsyn, writing in *Foreign Affairs* to defend Russia from the charge of aggression, sharply distinguishes the rank-and-file Russian from the ruling Politburo. But, when addressing Russia on the BBC, he unites the people and its rulers:

In our country, I count on the degree of enlightenment which has already developed in our people and must inevitably extend also to the spheres of the military and the administration. A people, after all, is not just a throng of millions down below, but also its individual representatives occupying key posts. There are sons of Russia up there, too, and Russia expects that they will fulfill their filial duty.

This resembles a call to a military coup, and a coup not in a liberal direction, but quite the opposite, in accord with the views Solzhenitsyn developed in his “Letter to the Soviet Leaders.” Or, as he explained in his speech on the BBC, he “was trying to map out

a path which could be taken by other leaders—not the current ones—who might suddenly come to replace them.”

Solzhenitsyn reflects his country like a looking-glass, not only in the subjects of his books, but in himself: his character, his contradictions, his ideas and passions. Not only Stalin’s Russia, which he cursed in his *Gulag* but later took as a model; not only Krushchev’s, whose drive toward liberalism he shared, but then rejected; and not only Brezhnev’s, which by persecuting him brought him world fame, but also the same Russia that he himself has foretold and that will come the closest to his ideal model, though probably more slowly than he would like.

In the West, Solzhenitsyn appears a Utopian prophet or a religious moralist, but in his political views he is no less a realist than in his

fiction. He expresses Russia as it in fact is, and not as it would become according to the reformist ideas of those who wish it well. Solzhenitsyn’s readers may like him or not like him, but this is the same as liking or not liking his country.

By this tragic link with Russia, he is strengthened and fortified. He is not the greatest Russian writer, even among those now living, but he is the most Russian of all who have ever lived. Not only in birth and in blood, but in spirit; not only Russian as a common man, but as a ruler.

One Soviet official, in conversation with us, prophesied Solzhenitsyn’s early return to Russia, “on a white horse, as a victor. . . .” Living or dead, he is destined to return, alas, not only through his books, but through his ideas as well.

Translated from the Russian by WILLIAM E. HARKINS □

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