DOSTOYEVSKY AND SOLZHENITSYN:
THEIR BRIDGE OVER A TROUBLED CENTURY

by
Nicolet Whearty

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Department of Languages
Carroll College

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Academic Honors
with the B.A. degree in Russian Studies

Carroll College
Helena, Montana
April, 1974
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Modern Languages.

Joseph J. Ward
Director

Dr. William J. Burgfah -
Reader

T. O. F. Stogdall
Reader

Apr. 1, 1974
Date
PREFACE

The world has heard a great deal about Alexander Solzhenitsyn lately. His audacious works, his unconventional stance among his fellow writers, and finally his unprecedented banishment by the Soviet government have thrust him into the world's spotlight. But a great deal of misunderstanding surrounds his novels. Hailed as exposes of a morally corrupt political system, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, First Circle, and Cancer Ward have been received by the West as ideological coups. My purpose in writing this paper is to deepen a comparatively scanty understanding of contemporary Soviet literature and life—as perceived through the writing of Solzhenitsyn—and to view it within the context of the Russian literary tradition.

In my effort to link the charisma of the present to the glories of the past, I have chosen Solzhenitsyn and Feodor Dostoyevsky as my poles of study. The bond that ties these authors exists in their lives, their works, and their purposes. For what Dostoyevsky has pursued on the level of individual man—realization of guilt, public confession of wrongdoing, and redemption through suffering—can be seen in Solzhenitsyn's work on
the social level. His works demand that Russia comes to grips with the horror that existed at the time of Stalin--and still exists. The confession and atonement he asks for will cleanse the Russian soul.

The books that I have chosen to compare, the order and way in which they are discussed, and even the words I have used in my discussion of them should convey this typical Russian process: guilt, confession, redemption through suffering.

At this time I would like to thank those people who have helped me complete this work, who have challenged my thinking and enhanced my four years of college: Dr. Joseph T. Ward, Fr. William Greytak, Fr. O. Lee Hightower, and Richard Reese. No small thanks is due to Kris Brandt for typing this thesis and to my husband, Bruce, for his honest criticism and steady encouragement.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. The Men and Their Ideas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Guilt</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Confession</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Redemption</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Conclusion: Their Purposes</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

A Soviet writer has said of the nineteenth century novelist Feodor Dostoyevsky, "all contemporary literature is following in Dostoyevsky's footsteps. . . Dostoyevsky still means to talk of the most painful, to talk of profound issues of our current life."¹ In reference to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a twentieth century Russian novelist, and his impact on Soviet literature, one of his critics stated, "We simply cannot go on writing as before."²

Unusual men these, whose writings have so effected their successors and contemporaries, and have so punctuated the great tradition of literature to which they belong. Unusual too the stormy and strangely parallel lives that surround their parallel literatures.

Dostoyevsky, born in 1821, and Solzhenitsyn, born in 1918, have shared a common fate: that of the dedicated and thus persecuted writer. At very early ages, they both conceived of devoting their lives to literary careers. However, when sixteen, Dostoyevsky was sent to the School of Engineers and trained in the military. Solzhenitsyn


likewise forfeited training in the fine arts and received his degrees in physics and mathematics. At twenty-eight Dostoyevsky was arrested and convicted for participating in a "conspiracy of ideas" with a group of ardent young radicals and for reading and circulating copies of Belinsky's revolutionary letter, which criticized the Tsarist government and the role of the Church in perpetuating the social injustices of his era. Solzhenitsyn, at twenty-eight, was arrested and convicted for his thinly disguised criticism of Stalin in letters to a friend. He denounced "the whiskered one" for aggravating the war situation through his tactical blunderings, for his weak social theories and primitive language and for betraying the principles of Lenin. Dostoyevsky was ordered by the Tsar to be put through a charade execution: he and his accomplices were brought before a firing squad in a public square. At the last minute, word reached Dostoyevsky that his sentence had been commuted. Recently, Solzhenitsyn was taken to the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow, where he was told he would receive the maximum punishment for his crime of treason against the USSR. After spending the night in preparation for the death sentence, he was instead stripped of his citizenship and deported. 


From 1850-1854 Dostoyevsky served at hard labor in a prison camp at Osmk. From 1950-1953 Solzhenitsyn spent the second half of his eight year sentence doing hard labor in Kazakhstan, a single island-camp in the chain system of penal camps strewn across the Siberian wastelands: the Gulag Archipelago. In 1853, periodic seizures identified as epilepsy began to plague Dostoyevsky: they would remain with him for the rest of his life. Solzhenitsyn discovered in 1953 that he had malignant cancer. He was treated by camp doctors. Later in a hospital in Tashkent, the growth of the cancer was arrested. The danger of secondary growths is still present in his life. The exiled Dostoyevsky spent five years, from 1854-1859, serving in the military in Semipalatinsk. Solzhenitsyn was in exile in Kazakhstan from 1954 until 1957, when he was rehabilitated in the post-Stalin thaw.

After returning from exile, Dostoyevsky edited a monthly review called Vremya. He published his first major work after his imprisonment, in 1862. Called The House of the Dead, it was a document of his life and thoughts in prison camp. Solzhenitsyn taught school after his exile and in 1962 published a description of life in a Stalinist concentration camp. It was entitled One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.

Dostoyevsky's first wife married him while he was in exile. Their unhappy marriage ended however with her
death in 1864. Three years later Dostoyevsky took a second wife, twenty years his junior, and together they raised two children. Solzhenitsyn's first wife, under pressure from the government, divorced him during his term in Kazakhstan: and after his rehabilitation their efforts to rebegin their married life proved unsuccessful. Recently Solzhenitsyn married a second time to a woman eighteen years younger than he. They have two sons. Dostoyevsky spent four years with his second wife in unwilling exile abroad, where he had fled to escape his creditors and continue work on his novels. Solzhenitsyn has been driven from his homeland by the Soviet government and is beginning an exile in the West.

At fifty-six, Dostoyevsky had published such great works as Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Devils and was planning and writing sketches for what was to have been his greatest work, The Life of a Great Sinner. This religious epic would trace its Russian hero's spiritual development from his initial transgression and crime to his final redemption and reconciliation: a grandiose work that would be accomplished in a cycle of five novels. The Brothers Karamazov, published one year before Dostoyevsky's death, was only a fragment of his larger projected work. Solzhenitsyn, now fifty-six, has already seen First Circle and Cancer Ward published in the West. The first two parts of his Gulag Archipelago,
a documentary tracing the history of the Soviet people from 1918-1956, have been smuggled out of Russia and are being published in Europe and the United States. Whether Solzhenitsyn can complete the massive task that lies before him—the reconstruction of his greatest work without his archives and while banished from his country—remains to be seen.

Physically, Dostoyevsky was a short man with strong, coarse hands. Solzhenitsyn is a tall man with a husky but athletic build. Each has earned broad, powerful shoulders that are slightly bowed by their years as prisoners. Dostoyevsky's face, framed by thinning hair and wisps of beard, was dominated by his eyes: "suffering, somber, smoldering, inquisitorial--eyes of a man bent inward on himself". Solzhenitsyn looks out on the world from a careworn face: his penetrating eyes capture imperishably everything that is happening around him. Both men have displayed an almost inexhaustible energy with regard to their works and a vigorous will to live their lives richly and fully.

It would not be surprising, considering what these writers have suffered at the hands of the tsarist and Soviet regimes, if Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn rejected

---

their Russian heritage. But the spirit of Mother Russia in her sons is indomitable, and both men love their homeland to the point of Slavophilism. Dostoyevsky was mocked for his visions of how Russia would lead mankind toward the Christian ideal. He spoke, at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow, of the "panhumanism" and "universality" of the Russian national character, asserting that Russia could combine "separate cultures into a living synthesis" and bring about the "unity of mankind in obedience to the law of Christ."6 His love for Russia even extended to a disdain of what was non-Russian. His hatred and scorn of the West is all too evident in his "Winter Notes on Summer Impressions". Paris and London epitomized for him the crass, bourgeois materialism of Western civilization. The Germans, though somewhat less odious, were "hard to bear". Russia's masses were however "immune from bourgeois infection", said he.7 Viscomte E.M. de Vogue, the French diplomat stationed in St. Petersburg, in his descriptions of Dostoyevsky, relates his statement that "we [Russians] possess the genius of all nations in addition to our own, that is why we can understand you, but you cannot understand us."8

---

6Ibid., p. 381.
7Ibid., pp. 169-71.
8Ibid., p. 374.
Solzhenitsyn is perhaps more discreet in his love for his native land but certainly is no less passionate. He, too, believes that Russia will have a great role in changing the course of the world, especially through her writers and her literature. He contends

If the world had access to all the uninhibited fruits of our literature, if it were enriched by our own spiritual experience, the whole artistic evolution of the world would move along in a different way, acquiring new stability and attaining even a new artistic threshold.9

and, "Good literature arises out of pain. That is why I pin my literary hopes on Eastern Europe."10 It is not mere eccentricity, then, that has Solzhenitsyn create a character in First Circle who speaks in the "Language of Maximum Clarity", that is using only those Russian words which are of Slavic derivatives. All of Solzhenitsyn's work, most notably One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, uses a clean, wholesome, very peasant-like language, devoid of hackneyed Stalinist phrasing and sterile foreign talk.

This return to what is simple and simply good in life is characteristic of both Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn. Although they are painfully aware of the discrepancies


10"Remission from Fear, Time, November 8, 1968, p.121."
between our conception of the ideal and the brutal reality that surrounds us in their depiction of "the worst aspects of misery" there prevails a certain "primitive purity"\(^{11}\) or "natural piety of man".\(^{12}\) And indeed, each, in spite of his experiences of suppression and penal servitude, of disease, isolation, and exile, has preserved a very artless, even childlike nature throughout his entire intellectual and spiritual development.

No less paradoxical than their individual natures is their ability to dominate the literature of their times while being, in many ways, outside their times. Dostoyevsky is recognized as being a century ahead of himself. No other nineteenth century writer had so anticipated and inaugurated the philosophy of existentialism, had psychoanalyzed psychology, and had so ominously "fore-felt" more than foreseen the course that socialist beliefs would take in Russia. Solzhenitsyn, however, seems to be a man of Dostoyevsky's century rather than his own twentieth century. There exists for him "an absolutely direct and open connection between literature and morality, art and life."\(^{13}\) He admits that the notion that "a writer can do much among

\(^{11}\)Sergei M. Volkonskii, *Pictures of Russian History and Russian Literature* (Boston, 1897), p.168.

\(^{12}\)"Remission", *Time*, p.121.

\(^{13}\)Dan Jacobson, "The Example of Solzhenitsyn", *Commentary*, May, 1969, p.82.
his own people and that he must"\(^{14}\) has long been "ingrained" in Russian literature and in the Russian people. Prodded by the belief that he, as a writer, must try to help the modern world, Solzhenitsyn is no less than a quixotic figure, whose lance is a pen, and whose windmill dragons are the multitentacled octopus of bureaucratic lies that suppresses and eventually destroys individual freedom. He maintains that

Writers and artists can do more: they can vanquish lies. In the struggle against lies, art has always won and always will. .. Lies can stand up against much in the world, but not against art.\(^{15}\)

Solzhenitsyn's and Dostoyevsky's novels, though radically different in many ways, share several similarities. Their works are rooted in their own lives, which are uncannily parallel. The autobiographical element in First Circle and Cancer Ward is obvious, while Dostoyevsky's works are usually more subtle in displaying the parallels between a character's life and his own. They are perhaps autobiographical on a different level. Beyond, however, the limits of their own centuries and their own lives, Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn show themselves to be confreres by aspiring to transcend their times and places. Solzhenitsyn expressed his will to transcend the transitory concerns of life when he said:


\(^{15}\) Ibid., p.33.
Life when he said:

It is not the task of a writer to defend or criticize one or another mode of distributing the social product or to defend or criticize one or another form of governmental organization. The task of the writer is to select more universal and eternal questions: the secrets of the human heart and conscience, the confrontation between life and death, the triumph over spiritual sorrow, the laws in the history of mankind that were born in the depths of time immemorial and that will cease to exist only when the sun ceases to shine.\(^\text{16}\)

His words echo those spoken nearly a century before him by one of Dostoyevsky's characters. Two brothers, separated for most of their lives and soon to be apart again, have met in a cafe. Ivan speaks to Alyosha:

It's different for other people. But we in our green youth have to settle the eternal questions first of all. That's what we care about. Young Russia is talking about nothing but the eternal questions of the existence of God and immortality. And those who do not believe in God talk of socialism or anarchism, of the transformation of all humanity on a new pattern, so that it all comes to the same. They're the same questions turned inside out.\(^\text{17}\)

Indeed, Dostoyevsky has spoken to Solzhenitsyn. They are brothers, though strangers to each other, who have met in the grand tradition of Russian literature. Across the century that separates them they agree: It is the eternal questions that must be asked and seized, even if they will

never be answered, for these are the only ones that matter.
CHAPTER II

There may be no better place to explore the meaning of the human condition than in a prison, where humanity is stripped of all its superficial coverings. Solzhenitsyn and Dostoyevsky have each observed human beings caged. Their observations and reflections on imprisoned men, recorded in The House of the Dead and One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch, show that prisoners of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lead much the same lives, think the same thoughts, and struggle with the same conditions.

Indeed, what is most appalling in these documentary works is the realization that the passage of one hundred years of technology and progress has done nothing to mitigate the prison conditions under which Dostoyevsky was compelled to live for four years. In fact, the evidence presented by Solzhenitsyn's Ivan Denisovich seems to indicate that prison life has steadily worsened over the years. The tsarist labor camp is described by an aristocrat, Alexander Petrovich Goryanchikov, who has the facility of language and of thought necessary to probe and analyze the situation. The Stalinist concentration camp is viewed through the eyes of a simple peasant, Ivan Denisovich Shukov, whose unadorned language and good-natured naivete leave him capable of merely relating matter-of-
factly the conditions around him. Whether we read the impassioned words of a brooding aristocrat, or the calm understatements of an industrious peasant at home in his surroundings, the indictments of the systems are equally vehement.

Reveille was sounded for Goryanchikov by the beating of a drum: one hundred years later Shukov is awakened by the blows of a hammer on an iron rail. The prisoners' huts of tsarist days had thirty beds in them--Goryanchikov deplored the lack of privacy that he had to endure for ten years. Ivan Denisovich lived for ten years in a building that held not less than four hundred beds. Prisoners of both centuries had their heads shaved. While the nineteenth century prisoners were shackled in twelve pound chains, the twentieth-century prisoners, probably by virtue of their unmanageable number, only had numbers painted on their caps, knees, backs, and chests. The high palisade of Dostoyevsky's day was replaced by barbed wire, guard towers and searchlights in Solzhenitsyn's time. The guards' rifles became machine guns. In spite of the fact that the plank beds, refuse pails, contraband knives and other sharp objects remain a part of both prison scenes, there is, nonetheless, an unmistakeable laxity in the camp spirit that Dostoyevsky describes, which remains totally unknown to Ivan and his prisonmates. There are very few wardens in Goryanchikov's prison and the passage of a
column of prisoners through town is a time for joking and laughing among the convicts as well as a time for receiving alms and food from the townspeople. In sharp contrast are the marching orders given to the prisoners in the Stalinist camp:

Your attention, prisoners! You will keep strict column order on the line of march! You will not straggle or bunch up. You will not change places from one rank of five to another. You will not talk or look around to either side, and you will keep your arms behind you! A step to right or left will be considered an attempt at escape, and the escort will open fire without warning.  

In the midst of thousands of men there is only absolute isolation for each of the prisoners.

Perhaps one of the most significant contrasts between the two groups of prisoners is the amount of personal freedom and free time granted. By virtue of their leisure time and free hours in the evenings, their inactivity on Sundays, name-days and religious holidays (the religious tolerance shown to Jews and Moslems and the observation of their holidays is noteworthy in the camps of so staunchly an Orthodox nation), the convicts in House of the Dead are in "an entirely different world metaphysically and morally as well as physically".  

---

1 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (New York, 1963), p.42. 

that of the men in One Day. Whereas Dostoyevsky's men are able to choose courses of action or thought: (they may give themselves over to passions by indulging in food, drink, and even, occasionally, sex or may adhere to the commands of their consciences), Solzhenitsyn's men have neither the chance, capacity, nor the need to choose. Their lives and actions are strictly regimented until there is no time nor strength for thought. While the prisoners under Nicholas I were priviliged to raise pets and domestic livestock, engage in theatrical performances, or heal their tedium with balalikas or violins, the prisoners under Stalin spent their lives trying to escape freezing and starving, intensely trying to survive. Mihajlo Mihajlov observes that "compared with twentieth century conditions, certain scenes from 'the worst Siberian prison camp' of the nineteenth century seem idyllic." One can scarcely believe that Goryanchikov is imprisoned in the most severe of camps while Shukov's camp is a "special" one and considered almost lenient by normal Stalinist camp standards.

Punishment in the system Dostoyevsky described took the form of cruel floggings ranging from five hundred to

3Idem...

to four thousand strokes which usually cost the transgressor his life. The guardhouse was only occasionally used for punishing. The reverse was true in Solzhenitsyn's prison experience. Although Lieutenant Volkovoy had once carried a whip and delighted in drawing blood by an unsuspected lash on a prisoner's neck, Ivan reports that the guardhouse was more readily used to break the will of a stubborn prisoner, for if his spirit were not destroyed in the ten-day battle with the twin enemies of cold and starvation, then his health certainly was.

Ivan also makes the remark that "real jail is when they keep you back from work". The theme of labor is dealt with a great deal in these works and, obviously, takes on a different cast when seen on the one hand by an intellectualizing noble and on the other by a common man whose life takes meaning from his labor. Dostoyevsky's approach is analytical. He observes that there is a difference in kinds of work and in the attitudes held toward them.

It occurred to me once that if it were desired to reduce a man to nothing—to punish him atrociously so that even the most hardened murderer would tremble before the punishment, it would only be necessary to give his work a character of complete uselessness and absurdity. . . .

However for the convict who makes bricks, digs, does plastering, building: there is

---

5Solzhenitsyn, One Day, p.22.
sense and meaning in such work. The convict worker sometimes even grows keen over it, tries to work more skillfully, faster, better.\(^6\)

A century before its occurrence, then, Ivan's satisfaction with his bricklaying in a wasteland of snow, was anticipated and described by the aristocrat Goryanchikov. Surely no passage expresses a more exhilarated joy of living and working than Shukov's appraisal of his bricklaying. Having completed his task for the day, he stops to appraise his handicraft. "He went up and looked over the wall from left to right. His eye was true as a level. The wall was straight as a die. His hands were still good for something."\(^7\)

Dostoyevsky emphasized the merit of creative activity as opposed to hard labor: the voluntary work that the convicts do during their free time, i.e., tailoring, teaching others to read, is for him a more liberating endeavor and requires a much greater skill than the forced labor the convicts were driven to do. But Shukov has no such luxury work through which he may creatively express himself. The wall he is building, though the result of forced labor, is also the object of all the creative skill he has. His work makes prison life bearable and is "a function of Shukov's freedom",\(^8\) because it is representa-


\(^7\)Solzhenitsyn, \textit{One Day}, p.125.

\(^8\)Mihajlov, \textit{Russian Themes}, p.105.
tive of his life outside the camp.

The only other factor in Ivan's day that evokes as much joy from him is his successful scrounging for food. That existence depends on a precariously concealed crust of bread is outrageous, but the convict, who cannot secure an extra ration of porridge or bread will not survive. Only the strongest and cleverest can live on the totally inadequate rations. This consuming quest for food on the part of Ivan and the other inmates is in pathetic contrast to the convicts' rations in Goryanchikov's time. Although he, as a noble, preferred to buy his own food and have it individually prepared by the camp cooks, even the peasant convict could live comfortably on what was normally provided. In fact, the prison bread is famous in the town for its quality, and any official inspection or clerical blessing of the prison is concluded with a sampling of the prison bread. On holidays, delicacies sent by kindly townsfolk appeared on the prisoners' tables, and Christmas brought quantities of all kinds of food, including beef, suckling pig, and geese. Such feasting was unimaginable in Stalin's prisons. The scenes in the mess hall at lunch where "it was every man for himself" and in the dining room where the convicts "cared more for this bowlful [of soup] than freedom, or for their
life in years gone by and years to come" depict hunger-crazed men in a desperate quest for food. It is a sacred moment for the prisoners when that quest becomes a communion with their evening gruel.

The only scene in *House of the Dead* as powerful as these is Dostoyevsky's Dantesque description of the shackled, naked convicts in the bathhouse.

... The place was alive with human beings. There was not a spot on the floor as big as the palm of your hand where there was not a convict squatting, splashing from his bucket. ... From those standing dirty water trickled off on the shaven heads of the convicts sitting below them. On the top shelf ... men were crouched huddled together washing themselves. But men of the peasant class don't wash much with soap and hot water: they only steam themselves terribly and then douche themselves with cold water—that is their whole idea of a bath. Fifty birches were rising and falling rhythmically on the shelves: they all thrashed themselves into a state of stupefaction. More steam was raised every moment. It was not heat, it was hell.10

It is unmistakably an image of the Inferno, and although Solzhenitsyn does not resort to such melodramatic delirium his prisoner characters are frozen in no less hellish a fresco than Dostoyevsky's. Not only are Ivan and Alexander's fates linked by their physical circumstances but they share the company of much the same kind of men as well; and the faces painted in Dostoyevsky's fresco of

---

9Solzhenitsyn, One Day, p.83.

10Dostoyevsky, House, p.122.
prison-hell are mirrored by the ones that appeared one hundred years later in Solzhenitsyn's work. The *House of the Dead* and *One Day* are microcosms of the worlds that instituted them, and contain therefore representatives from all the social and moral levels in the societies of their respective times. A most striking parallel is made between the men with whom Goryanchikov and Shukov share their bunks. The nineteenth-century man was a twenty-two year old Moslem named Aley who is possessed of a sanctity that transcends religious sects. He is inspired by the words of Christ in the New Testament and says to Alexander, his teacher, "Where he says 'forgive, love, don't hurt others, love even your enemies.' Ah, how well He speaks!" Shukov's bunkmate Alyosha, has been imprisoned for being a Baptist. Accepting his life in prison cheerfully and happy to be free to practice his faith, he says to Shukov, "You must pray for the things of the spirit so the Lord will take evil things from our hearts." The goodness of these loving innocents inspires those around them. Dostoyevsky describes through Alexander Petrovich an Old Believer, who, like Alyosha, is persecuted for his faith. (The religious tolerance extended to Jews and Moslems does not apply to the dissenters in the Orthodox Church.)

---

11bid., p. 59.
12Solzhenitsyn, *One Day*, p. 197.
Dostoyevsky also describes the unforgettable Orlov, who encountered Goryanchikov in the hospital when Orlov was brought in nearly dead after receiving two thousand whip strokes. Says the narrator, "I can confidently say that I have never in my life met a man of such strength, of so iron a will."\textsuperscript{13} He took the remaining two thousand blows of his sentence the day after his discharge from the hospital, his back hardly healed. He died during his second whipping. Shukov himself describes a man of a different, though still indomitable, nature.

He was straight as a ramrod... His face was all worn out but not like a 'goner's'--it was dark and looked like it had been hewed out of stone... You could see his mind was set on one thing--never to give in.'\textsuperscript{14}

There are, of course, a dozen others: the usurer Jew and the Latvian tobacco merchant, simple-hearted Aurra and long-suffering Stenka, the degenerate A. and the prisoner-jackal Fetyukov, Ivan the informer and the unknown, ever-present "squealers". There is also an Ivan figure in The House of the Dead and a Goryanchikov figure in One Day. Petrov is the constant aid to Alexander Petrovich, helping him in the bathhouse or seating him comfortably in the "theater", and Shukov is quick to do favors for Caesar, the film director, by standing in line for his packages and guarding his precious foodstuffs. Both are amply rewarded for their services. Ivan's world is plagued by

\textsuperscript{13}Dostoyevsky, House, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{14}Solzhenitsyn, One Day, p.172.
the despicable Lieutenant Volkovoy while the prisonmates of Goryanchikov are at the mercy of "the Major". Dostoyevsky does a study of tyranny as exemplified by this small mean man (which is in keeping with the character of his narrator) while Ivan merely accepts that some men are good and others evil, without questioning why. The characterization in Dostoyevsky is done through the point of view of a keenly perceptive and persistently analytical mind. His characters take shape under the probing and investigative glance of a learned man. Solzhenitsyn relies on a simple "brush-stroke characterization", so Shukov's observations of the men around him are "shrewd but not profound".15

The most marked difference between the criminals in The House of the Dead and the convicts of One Day lies in the nature of the prisoners' crimes. The men described by Dostoyevsky have actually committed a crime, while Ivan's naive narration clearly reveals that the prisoners are themselves the innocent victims of a heinous crime. While the crime most common among Goryanchikov and his inmates is murder—Baklushin murdered a German, Shishkov murdered his wife, Shirotkin a sergeant-major, and the narrator himself his wife—the convicts in Ivan's camp are political prisoners who were victims of the infamous

15Rothberg, Major Novels, p.54.
Article 58, which convicts them of treasonous acts that never existed. Captain Buinovsky, a former liaison officer aboard an English ship received a gift from its Admiral and received a twenty-five year sentence from the Soviet government. Tyurin, Shukov's squad leader, was sentenced to nineteen years imprisonment for concealing his Kulak origin. Shukov was convicted and given ten years because he was captured by the Germans and then escaped. Returning to the Red Army lines, he was suspected of having been intentionally released as a counterspy.

Just as the criminals in the tsarist prison were responsible for their own imprisonment so they were responsible for their own freedom. The criminal's behavior determined whether he was given freedom at the end of his term. But their twentieth century brothers were at the mercy of the whimsical authorities and could receive one arbitrary sentence after another regardless of their actions in prison. Dostoyevsky describes men who freely decided their own fates; Solzhenitsyn writes the tragic story of men whose fate is decided for them by the bureaucratic system. Alexander Petrovich says, "The goal we all had in mind was freedom and an end to captivity", but Ivan represents the thinking of most of the zeks when he said:

16Dostoyevsky, House, p.74.
No, he didn't know either whether he wanted freedom or not. At first he had longed for it. Every night he'd counted the days of his stretch—how many had passed, how many were to come. And then he'd grown bored with counting. And then it became clear that men like him wouldn't ever be allowed to return home, and that they'd be exiled. And would his life be any better there than here—who could tell.

Freedom meant one thing to him—home. But they wouldn't let him go home.  

Ivan's plight is not totally hopeless for he has forged for himself a kind of freedom that stemmed from his active participation in prison life. His prudent survivalist ethic allowed him the freedom "to resist in the form of not co-operating with the authorities, of avoiding punishment, of retaining his hold on himself and his values". Dostoyevsky's prison experience, as expressed through Goryanchikov, resulted in this same paradoxical attainment of freedom. As a noble, he was shunned, misunderstood, and mistrusted by his fellow convicts. He realized that he could never be one of them, and was forever painfully conscious that he was "solitary and remote from all". Yet it was by virtue of his solitary vantage point that he was freed to give himself to the work of watching, understanding, and penetrating the souls of his fellow prisoners. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand,  

17 Solzhenitsyn, One Day, p.199.
18 Rothberg, Major Novels, p.37.
19 Dostoyevsky, House, p.19.
cannot be so clearly identified in *One Day* as Dostoyevsky can be in *The House of the Dead*. Although Ivan represents many of the author's views, we cannot assume that Ivan's experience is wholly Solzhenitsyn's, since a peasant cannot experience prison as a member of the dissenting intelligentsia. Solzhenitsyn is probably best represented by the prisoner X123, who denounces a Soviet artist for his kow-towing to the government and for whom, along with Caesar and Buinovsky:

> It is not enough merely to survive the day, or even to seize it. They must make sense of their experiences, understand the relationship between ends and means, cause and effect. They must integrate the one day with the many, with the years and with the 'current of history', must see pattern or meaning in what is happening to them, to their country and to the world. In all these things they must seek an answer to the most important of the accursed questions that have plagued Russian writers: How is one to live? How is life to be organized? What are good and evil?"}

Solzhenitsyn's purpose in adopting Ivan's point of view is to do more than relate his personal experience in prison. He means "to portray something more frightening--the gray routine year after year when you forget that the only life you have on earth is destroyed."²¹ It is through this realization that Ivan's final words of the day become so tragic:

²⁰Rothberg, Major Novels, pp. 56-7.

²¹Berg and Fieffer, A Biography, p.142.
Shukov went to sleep, and he was very happy. He'd had a lot of luck today. They hadn't put him in the cooler. The gang hadn't been chased out to work in the Socialist Community Development. He'd finagled an extra bowl of mush at noon. The boss had gotten them good rates for their work. He'd felt good making the frisk. Caesar had paid him off in the evening. He'd bought some tobacco. And he'd gotten over that sickness.

Nothing had spoiled the day and it had been almost happy.

There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like this in his sentence, from reveille to lights out.

The three extra ones were because of the leap years. . .22

Solzhenitsyn himself has said, "I have always felt that to write about the fate of Russia was the most fascinating and important task to be performed. The fate of Ivan Denisovich was the greatest tragedy in all Russian drama."23

One begins to understand, then, the ambivalent feelings that Solzhenitsyn and Dostoyevsky hold for their years spent in prison, for although it was an "inferno", it was also a "university". And it was through their sufferings there, that these men were forged into greatness. Dostoyevsky looks on his term in prison as a kind of blessing, for there he was transformed. "I had been sick in mind before my journey to Siberia where I


23Rothberg, Major Novels, p.23.
was cured," he wrote.24 "The eternal concentration, the escape into myself from bitter reality has born fruit."25 Dostoyevsky, through Goryanchikov, admits to a resurrection in prison and a renewal of strength and hope in his soul.

I mastered myself; I looked forward, and I reckoned off every day, and although a thousand remained, I saw the day off; I buried it, and I rejoiced at the coming of another day, because there were not a thousand left but nine hundred and ninety-nine days.26

There is no tragedy here, but only the expression of anticipation of the "freedom, new life, resurrection from the dead"27 that was to come. His joy is reflected by Solzhenitsyn through Aloysha's words, "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul."28 Dostoyevsky's The House of the Dead and Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich are more than mere documentaries on prison life in their centuries, they are testimonies to the authors' discovery of freedom behind prison walls.

25Ibid. p.106.
26Dostoyevsky, House, p. 262.
27Ibid., p. 277.
28Solzhenitsyn, One Day, p.198.
Those readers of Dostoyevsky who delighted in his deeply reflective and autobiographical account of *The House of the Dead* were somewhat startled by his second post-exile work, *Notes from the Underground*. Far from a documentary of nineteenth-century prisoners and their social crimes, it is a monologue of a social misfit who is imprisoned by his own intellect, who attacks the dogmas of the nineteenth century and relentlessly confesses his deepest inadequacies to his readers. It is the anguished outcry of a man who "did not even know how to become anything, either spiteful or good, either a blackguard or an honest man, either a hero or an insect." Dostoyevsky had already spoken of crime as a desperate man's attempt to express himself; in *Notes from the Underground* the reader is struck by the desperation that surrounds the commission and confession of spiritual crime:

... the cause of this sudden outbreak, in the man from whom one would least expect it, is simply the poignant hysterical craving for self-expression, the unconscious yearning for himself, to assert his crushed personality, a desire which suddenly takes possession of him.

---

and reaches the pitch of fury, of spite, of mental aberration, of fits and nervous convulsions.²

Notes from the Underground takes its name from the Russian word meaning the space under the floorboards of a hut, usually the habitat of mice as well as the breeding place of vermin. The numerous references by the narrator to mice and insects link him with this dark, fetid region of contaminating creatures.

The theme of sickness is introduced with the first remark of the unnamed anti-hero. He says, "I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man... I believe there is something wrong with my liver."³ One quickly discovers that the sickness that plagues this unpleasant retired civil servant is not merely physical but mental. The protagonist maintains that "to be too acutely conscious is a disease, a real, honest-to-goodness disease."⁴ The story that follows this bizarre self-presentation is the narrator's contradictory reactions to and meditations on his spiritual death.

Solzhenitsyn has also chosen to deal with themes of sickness and dying, and his novel Cancer Ward is an exploration of disease and death on both individual and social

²Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.75.
³Ibid., p.107.
⁴Ibid., p.111.
levels. For just as the weird little underground man is for Dostoyevsky "one of the representatives of a generation that is still with us"\textsuperscript{5}, so cancerous invalids are Solzhenitsyn's representatives of Soviet society. His characters must confront the reality of death growing inside of them and consuming their bodies. The impact of death on human concerns is the theme of Solzhenitsyn's _Cancer Ward_, "which is nothing less than a meditation on human values"\textsuperscript{6}.

Solzhenitsyn and Dostoyevsky have introduced in these writings protagonists whose lives and thoughts strongly parallel their own. Much more than in _One Day_, the main character in _Cancer Ward_ is a Solzhenitsyn figure. Like his author, Oleg is a war veteran who has undergone an operation for cancer while in a Stalinist prison camp. Oleg was released from prison after Stalin's death and condemned to perpetual exile in Kazakhstan, as was Solzhenitsyn. While the fictional character Kostoglotov lived in Ush-Terek (Three Poplars), his living counterpart settled in Kok-Terek (Green Poplar) until, having discovered that his cancer was still growing, Solzhenitsyn made his way to a cancer treatment hospital in Tashkent. He describes his months of successful treatment there through

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p.107.

\textsuperscript{6}Muchnic, _Russian Writers_, P.433.
his mouthpiece, Oleg, in Cancer Ward. Although there are slight differences between the lives of the author and his character--Oleg was never a captain in the Red Army and because of his disrespect for his commanding officers stayed a sergeant for his entire military career, neither did he graduate from a university but instead became a land surveyor--their personalities are very much the same. "Kostoglotov has the reflective and rebellious character of his creator, the same profound commitments to political and historical justice, to personal freedom and sovereignty."7

Dostoyevsky's work is also extremely autobiographical and although the parallels between the life of the underground man and the life of the writer are more subtle than between Oleg and Solzhenitsyn, the ramblings of the narrator of Notes provide the greatest insights possible into the workings of Dostoyevsky's enigmatic mind. Notes is the "autopsychography" of Dostoyevsky at his life's most desperate moments. As his wife lay in a "prolonged and fearful death agony",8 Dostoyevsky worked in the room adjoining her death chamber and frantically scribbled a strangely brutal account of a guilt-ridden man. It is not surprising that this work, interrupted as it was by his

7Rothberg, Major Novels, p.136.
8Payne, Human Portrait, p.78.
wife's death rattle and his own epileptic fits, reveals more about Dostoyevsky than any of his other writings. In fact, "One is in a confessional listening to a person tell the whole truth about himself in all its loathsomeness, watching him strip himself morally naked." It is no accident that the main character in Notes is a forty-year old retired civil servant whose years in boarding school were miserably unhappy or that he drove his only school friend from him by demanding his complete submission. He says, "The first thing I did on leaving school was to give up the career for which I had been trained so as to break all the ties that bound me to my past, which I loathed and abominated." The unhappy school life of the underground man matches that of Dostoyevsky. Indeed the incomprehensible life that one sees in the Notes is entirely Dostoyevsky's life—both in fantasy and in fact. The confession one hears is Dostoyevsky's own.

The underground man, like Dostoyevsky, is a curious entanglement of contradictory emotions. He is at once cynical and idealistic, noble and debauched, self-loathing and impenitent, more truthful than is bearable and sickeningly insincere, falling deeper into degradation and aspiring for perfection. This is a pitiful man who

9 Yarmolinsky, Works and Days, p.191.

10 Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.175.
embraces all human emotions but cannot maintain even one. And if he should experience even the purest of human sentiment he must also admit the presence of its antithesis. Solzhenitsyn too is engaged in the examination of human passions, but while Dostoyevsky presents all emotions, indivisibly ever present in one man, Solzhenitsyn's characters are each the embodiment of one virtue or one vice. For Dostoyevsky idealism and degradation can coexist in one man, for Solzhenitsyn they coexist in one cancer ward, his microcosm of the Soviet world. Yet there are profound similarities between the hero of Cancer Ward and the anti-hero of Notes.

Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn have both portrayed men who are outcasts (an alienated intellectual and an exiled ex-prisoner) who, from their vantage points outside their societies, are able to see the social and individual ills that are representative of their times. These outcasts each are champions of individualism, free will, and self-definition, and each rebels against those dogmas or institutions which seek to explain man's complexity by simple theories. The underground man passionately refutes the utilitarianism of his day. Man cannot be totally explained by self-interest, he asserts.

Man has always and everywhere--whoever he may be--preferred to do as he chose, and not in the least as his reason or advantage dictated; and one may choose to do something even if it is
against one's own advantage, and sometimes one positively should. One's own free and unfe
tered choice, one's own whims, however wild, one's own fancy, overwrought though it sometimes 
may be to the point of madness— that is that same most desirable good which we overlooked 
and which does not fit into any classification, and against which all theories and sys-
tems are continually wrecked.\textsuperscript{11}

And the narrator proceeds to act entirely against his own advantage and even for his disadvantage. For example, he says that he refuses medical treatment for his ailing liver "out of spite" and knowing "full well that I can't hurt the doctors by refusing to be treated by them; I realize better than any one that by this I am only hurting myself and no one else."\textsuperscript{12} Kostoglotov, on his part, fails to cooperate with the doctors who are treating him.

He is involved in a contradiction:

You complain that they gave you no treatment in the camp or in exile, that they neglected you, and in the same breath you grumble because people are treating you and taking trouble over you. Where's the logic in that?\textsuperscript{13}

To which Kostoglotov replies,

Obviously there is no logic. ... But maybe there needn't be any. After all, man is a complicated being, why should he be explained by logic? Or for that matter by economics? Or physiology? These men beg to be free to choose for themselves; be it a good or bad choice it is bearable if

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p.131.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p.108.
\textsuperscript{13}Solzhenitsyn, \textit{Cancer Ward}, p.75.
it is their own.\textsuperscript{14}

"All man wants is an absolutely free choice, however dear that freedom may cost him and wherever it may lead him,"\textsuperscript{15} insists the underground man. Kostoglotov too demands a role in the choices that the doctors are making for him. He will not let them save his life at the cost of surrendering his freedom.

I simply wanted to remind you of my right to dispose of my own life. A man can dispose of his own life, can't he? You agree I have that right?. . . At the hospital once again I become a grain of sand, just as I was in the camp. Once again nothing depends on me. . . I did come to you as a corpse, and I begged you take me in, and I lay on the floor by the staircase. And therefore you make the logical deduction that I came to you to be saved at any price! But I don't want to be saved at any price! There isn't anything in the world for which I'd agree to pay any price!\textsuperscript{16}

The recluse in his hole and the invalid in his hospital bed agree that man's free will must remain inviolate and that he must always have the opportunity for rebellious self-assertion. Both refuse to worship the science and technology that have come to rule our age. There are depths in man, they say, that cannot be touched by science or reason.

You want to cure man of his old habits and reform his will in accordance with the demands of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14}Idem.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.131.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p.74-75.
\end{itemize}
science and common sense. But how do you know that man not only could but should be remade like that? And what leads you to conclude that human desires must necessarily be reformed? In short, how do you know that such a reformation will be a gain to man?17

Oleg also points out that science in its attempt to cure man has actually crippled him. "They guess at solutions and treatments--x-rays, hormones, surgery, chemo-therapy--which they hope will be efficacious in curing but which are all in themselves crippling."18 He will not believe in the omnipotence of medicine nor in the infallability of the doctors, for those who had been cured through radiation treatments had returned damaged and mutilated. Donsova, the senior doctor of the cancer hospital, is haunted by her cures that have caused crippling... the fifteen-year-old boy whose arm and leg on one side of his body had not kept pace with the growth of the other side, so that "from top to bottom he looked bow-shaped, distorted like a caricature"19 or the young mother whose breast would give no milk because as a child she had been treated with x-rays for a benign tumor in her chest.

No, neither the undergroundling nor Oleg can accept the truths of science as absolutes. There are no absolutes,

17Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.131.
18Rothberg, Major Novels, p.135.
19Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p.87.
they say, there is nothing that cannot be questioned. The Dostoyevskian man gleefully refuses to accept the mathematical absolute of twice two is four. "Mind you, I quite agree that twice-two-makes-four is a most excellent thing; but if we are to give everything its due, then twice-two-makes-five is sometimes a most charming little thing, too." 20 Kostoglotov insists on the right to re-evaluate those "absolute" scientific truths whether medical, mathematical, or socialistic. In answer to a dogmatist's statement that Lenin and Stalin had described moral perfection once and for all, he says, "No one on this earth says anything 'once and for all'. If they did, life would come to a stop and succeeding generations would have nothing to say." 21

Oleg is not the only man in Ward 13 who bears a resemblance to Dostoyevsky's underground man, who, though a defender of individual rights, is also a petty civil servant. He loves mankind but hates the individuals around him. Solzhenitsyn has depicted a similar man in Cancer Ward, Pavel Nicholayevich Rusanov, who is the antithesis of Oleg Kostoglotov. He, too, is a civil servant who is involved in petty governmental concerns. His admission into the hospital is particularly unpleasant for

---

20 Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.139.
this "servant of the great Soviet people" because he is thrust into the midst of common dirty peasants. He exemplifies the "immorality, materialism, snobbery, status consciousness, coarseness, and arbitrariness of the true heirs of Stalin". 22Ironically, this "personnel specialist" for the KGB, whose job it is to search out and denounce "enemies of the regime" and fabricate cases against them, is himself a guilty man with a hidden sin. He is as despicable as Dostoyevsky's lowly clerk, for both men have oppressed and betrayed their closest friends. Dostoyevsky's man is at least honest enough to admit his desire to tyrannize his friend and that, having won complete devotion from him, "I grew to hate him and drove him from me, as though I only wanted him for the sake of gaining a victory over him, for the sake of exacting his complete submission to me." 23Rusanov is guilty of a similar betrayal when, after having grown up with Rodichev in the same Young Communist cell and having shared adjoining apartments with him, Rusanov denounces him to the KGB for the sake of obtaining his apartment for the extra rooms needed by the growing Rusanov family. "Living shoulder to shoulder with them [the Rodichevs] became

22Rothberg, Major Novels, p.137.
23Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.175.
cramped and intolerable. Well, one thing led to another, they had been hasty, of course, and Pavel Nikolayevich wrote the letter."\textsuperscript{24} Accused of intending to get a group of saboteurs together at the factory, Rodichev was quickly convicted and sent to prison. His family lost its status as well as its apartments, but the Rusanovs were obliged by law to wait until Rodichev's pregnant wife gave birth before evicting her. Rusanov's appalling offense is even more insidious than the undergroundling's because, after fourteen years, he continues to justify his actions to himself. He remains a guilt-ridden man and the sin he has committed against his friend returns to haunt and torment him, just as the underground man is afflicted by his guilty memories of his friend and of Lisa, a prostitute he had once offended. "It has been haunting me like some annoying tune you can't get out of your head."\textsuperscript{25} The underground man confesses his sin against Lisa and passes judgment on himself. Rusanov never admits he had done anything reprehensible, but he has, in Solzhenitsyn's view, been judged and punished by some greater justice. Rusanov, the informer, has cancer of the throat.

A conflict arises in Solzhenitsyn's Cancer Ward between Rusanov and Kostoglotov, who are representatives of

\textsuperscript{24}Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p.186.

\textsuperscript{25}Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.146.
the worst and best in the Soviet Union, "the stupid, greedy, mean-minded toady near the top of the social ladder and the fine, intelligent soul at its bottom."26 The former embodies power, possessions, and privilege, the latter justice, equality, and freedom, and the abyss separating these lives cannot be breached. The Dostoyevskian man is involved in an equally devastating conflict, but he, embodying the vice of Rusanov as well as the virtue of Kostoglotov, is being destroyed by the battle within him.

The unfortunate man from the underground shares the traits of yet another personality who appears in the cancer ward of Solzhenitsyn. Like Kostoglotov and Dyomka, the underground man is an idealist and a romantic. The subterranean thinker says that the characteristics of the Russian romantic (and to a certain extent, of himself) are

- to understand everything, to see everything and to see it incomparably more clearly than the most positive of our thinkers... and at the same time to preserve to his dying day a profound and indestructible respect for 'the sublime and the beautiful'....27

That the narrator does believe himself an unsuccessful member of this group is seen by his self-mocking comment, "An innumerable host of romantics... usually end up by

26 Muchnic, Russian Writers, p.437.

27 Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.151.
becoming civil servants of the highest grade... And what an ability they possess for the most contradictory sensations."  

Though he idealistically yearns to grasp truth and sincerity and wants "to put the whole thing to the test to see whether I can be absolutely frank with myself and not be afraid of the whole truth", he creates a buffer for himself against his failure by adding in the same breath that "a man will most certainly tell a lot of lies about himself."  

Solzhenitsyn's sixteen-year-old innocent, Dyomka, carries the same seeds of truth and sincerity within him, but has remained unjaded by the hypocrisy around him. Of Rusanov's daughter Aviette, an aspiring authoress, he asks, "What do you think of the need for sincerity in literature?"  

To her declaration that one must not reveal what is, but what will be by "plowing deep to reveal the seedlings which are the plants of the future" he replies, "Seedlings have to sprout by themselves."  

All the mature arguments of Aviette that

---

26 Idem.

29 Ibid., p. 144-45.

30 Idem.

31 Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p. 434.

32 Idem.
literature ought to be festive and anticipatory cannot stand against his simple idealism, "Literature is the teacher of life."  

The contradictory being from the underground is very much like Dyomka in his longing to be truthful and sincere, but unlike Dyomka he is self-loathing and cynical because he has failed to attain the high standards he has set for himself. He reviles himself, "I am a coward and a slave. Every decent man of our age is, and indeed has to be a coward and a slave."  

His cowardliness is a direct result of his acute consciousness; no sooner does he decide to act than he begins to contemplate the consequences of and the justifications for that action. The result of all this reflection is inertia; the underground man is immobilized by his thoughts. For all his intellectual self-searching and the bravery of his thought, he is nevertheless a cowardly man in his actions. And he harbors the deepest resentment of "l'homme de la nature et de la verite" who acts with impunity. There is just such a man in Cancer Ward, a man who has lived a decent, reflective and cowardly life but who has never dared to act against the injustices of the Stalinist system and consequently participated in a conspiracy of passive

---

33Ibid., p.285.

34Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.149.
silence. Aleksei Shulubin stops to talk with Oleg one day in the hospital garden and confesses his cowardice to the ex-prisoner and man of action. The Soviet people sacrificed their pride in justice and truth in order that they might survive under Salin. "The people are intelligent enough, its simply that they wanted to live. There's a law big nations have--to endure and so to survive." 35

He quotes from Pushkin:

In our vile times
. . . Man was, whatever his element,
Either tyrant or traitor or prisoner! 36

Shulubin admits that, since he has neither been a tyrant like Stalin, nor a prisoner like Kostoglotov, he must therefore be a traitor. "My whole life I've lived in fear but now I'd change places with you." 37 The underground man voices these sentiments about himself

. . . for all his intense sensibility he frankly considers himself a mouse and not a man. I grant you it is an intensely conscious mouse, but it's a mouse all the same. 38

There are definite Dostoyevskian undertones in the character of Shulubin who says to Oleg,

. . . There is the sky of fear, the sky of fear overhung with gray clouds. You know how some-

35Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p.434.
36Idem.
37Ibid., p.435.
38Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.115.
times in the evenings thick low clouds gather, black and gray clouds, even though no storm is approaching? Darkness and gloom descend before their proper time. The whole world makes you ill at ease, and all you want to do is to go and hide under the roof in a house made of bricks, skulk close to the fire with your family. I lived twenty-five years under a sky like that. I saved myself only because I bowed low and kept silent. I kept silent for twenty-five years. . .

Echoes of the underground man's words:

The unhappy mouse scurries back ingloriously into its hole. There, in its stinking, disgusting, subterranean hole, our hurt, ridiculed, and beaten mouse plunges into cold, venomous, and above all unremitting spite.

The correlations, then, between the sick men of Solzhenitsyn's Cancer Ward and the sick man of Dostoyevsky's underground are numerous. But the deepest parallels between these authors and their worlds is in their study of love. The unhappy philosopher of Notes, in spite of his myriad divergences, is, in fact, disclosing to his readers the truth about his unfortunate love affair with a prostitute. After describing a disastrous party where he is humiliated by his former school mates, the rejected hero races after his insulators to a brothel where he plans to slap and spit on the man he most despises. But he arrives too late to take his revenge and turns his passion toward Lisa, the girl who was given to him for the evening.

---


40Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.116.
Upon awakening next to Lisa, he experiences...

...some vile sensation, resembling the sensation you experience when you enter a damp and stale cellar... And he reflects how absurd and hideous like a spider was the idea of vice which, without love, grossly and shamelessly begins where true love finds its consummation. 41

They begin to talk. Slowly the relationship that began in a simple animal act becomes purified by the sharing of thoughts. The philosopher urges Lisa to leave her profession and take a husband. She is a beautiful girl that any man would desire for a wife. Any life, even an unhappy married life, would be better than the one she leads here, he says. "For if you love, you can live without happiness. Life is sweet even in sorrow. It's good to be alive, however hard life is." 42 He paints her a beautiful picture of how happy her marriage would be, but she timidly retreats, telling him that he speaks as though he were reading from a book. Hurt by her remark, the underground man begins to torture Lisa with a description of how her life will end: with a consumptive's death, in a murky, cold cellar in a house in the town's worst district. She is stung by his censure and cries bitterly. Before taking leave of him, she shows him a love letter from a man who does not know of her background. He gives her his address so that he can help her escape prostitution.

41 Ibid., p.195.
42 Ibid., p.199.
Kostoglotov, in Solzhenitsyn's work, experiences a love affair as well. However, he does not love one woman who fulfills him both physically and spiritually as does the troglodyte. Oleg is pulled between his physical need for Zoya, a young affectionate nurse (whose name means life in Russian) and spiritual attraction for his doctor, Vera Gangart (whose name means truth). As his health begins to improve, Kostoglotov's needs for sex and love return. A serious relationship begins to develop between Zoya and Oleg, and Zoya tells him that the hormone treatment he is receiving under Dr. Gangart's orders will suppress his sexual potency (and eventually, though more slowly, his libido too). At his insistence, she agrees secretly to skip his injection. "Zoya, then, is conspiring to save his body because that is what he wants--and also what she wants--but Vera insists on saving his life, even if the cure will emasculate him."  

Kostoglotov feels betrayed by Vera Gangart and laments,

If my life is totally lost, if I can feel in my bones the memory that I'm a prisoner in perpetuity, a perpetual 'con', if Fate holds out no better prospect, if the only expectation I have is being consciously and artificially killed--then why bother to save such a life? . . . First my own life was taken from me, and now I am being deprived even of the right. . . to perpetuate myself. I'll be the worst sort of cripple! 

---

43 Rothberg, Major Novels, p.165.
44 Solzhenitsyn, Cancer Ward, p.333.
But Vera cannot accept the attitude that love and life are based on physical fulfillment.

No, it's not true! You don't really believe that, do you? I know you don't! Examine yourself—those aren't your ideas, you've borrowed them from somewhere else, haven't you? . . . There must be some people who think differently! Maybe a few, maybe only a handful, but differently all the same! If everyone thought your way, who could we live with? What would we live for? Would we be able to live at all?  

Suddenly Oleg realizes that he has been wrong and that he sincerely believes that emotion or spirit, not the body, is primary in the relationship between the sexes. Vera and Oleg reject any contrary theories and dismiss the conclusions of a book they had each read in their youth.

Such consistent, logical, irrefutable materialism and the result was . . . the point of living? . . . Such heartless certainty that psychology is of secondary importance in marriage. The writer makes the point that physiology is the sole cause of incompatibility. . . You see, that kind of attitude destroys everything human on earth.  

But the argument is one to which Oleg is only partially committed, for as they shake hands on their friendship of truth and purity Kostoglotov "wanted to do more than shake the hand, he wanted to kiss it, even though it would have been a contradiction of every thing he had said."  

Dostoyevsky's underground man is involved in a similar

45 Idem.  
46 Ibid., p.335.  
conflict. Having first used Lisa to satisfy himself physically, he must now decide if he will allow himself to use her for his spiritual satisfaction. He dreams of lifting her out of her degradation but the truth is that his "pathetic speeches" were his way of showing his power over her; he laughed at her as he was laughed at by his colleagues. When Lisa comes to him for help, he tells her the ugly truth of his night at the brothel and reveals to her the motive of his alleged concern for her. At first she is horror-stricken by the reality of the situation, but then grasps that the posturing man before her is, in truth, unhappy. She responds to his despair with innocent love. The undergroundling, fully dominating her and possessing her love, takes her and pays her five rubles for her act of love. Lisa flees from him and he, "suppressing the living pain in his heart", 48 gives up the woman who loved him, and whom he loved in his perverse, dominating way.

Will it not be much better that she should now carry that insult away with her forever? What is an insult but a sort of purification? . . . Tomorrow I should have bespattered her soul with mud, I should have wearied her heart by thrusting myself upon her, while now the memory of the insult will never die in her, and however horrible the filth that lies in store for her, the memory of that humiliation will raise her and purify her--by hatred, and, well, perhaps

48Dostoyevsky, Notes, p.238.
also by forgiveness.\textsuperscript{49}

The hateful underground man could not be uplifted by Lisa's love but at least he would not let himself degrade her with his own. He asks, "Which is better: cheap happiness or exalted suffering?"\textsuperscript{50} The answer, for him, is obvious.

Kostoglotov's four months of treatment came to an end and Vera, as she dismisses Oleg, offers to let him stay at her apartment before he returns to Ush-Terek. He accepts, but after spending a day roaming Tashkent he realizes that he cannot sustain a personal relationship of great intimacy on the high-minded idealistic level.

Oleg realized his journey to see Vera would end as a torture and a deceit. It would mean his demanding more from her than he could ask from himself. They had come to a high-minded agreement that spiritual communion was more valuable than anything else; yet, having built this tall bridge by hand together, he saw now that his own hands were weakening. He was on his way to her to persuade her boldly of one thing while thinking agonizingly of something else.\textsuperscript{51}

Oleg cannot let Vera sacrifice her love to a marriage which will not satisfy either of them. He says in his farewell letter to her, "You slaughtered the first half of your life like a lamb. Please spare the second half!"\textsuperscript{52} And he confesses those feelings that lie hidden beneath his idealistic, spiritual love for her:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{49}Idem.
  \item \textsuperscript{50}Idem.
  \item \textsuperscript{51}Solzhenitsyn, \textit{Cancer Ward}, p.522.
  \item \textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p.529.
\end{itemize}
even when we were having the most intellectual conversations and I honestly thought and believed everything I said, I still wanted all the time, all the time, to pick you up and kiss you on the lips. So try to work that out. And now, without your permission, I kiss them. 53

Oleg, like the underground man, sacrifices the woman he loves and who loves him, and although his gesture of sacrifice is much nobler than the undergroundling's, it is no less final. The Dostoyevskian man could not overcome his needs to dominate, to possess, and to humiliate just as he is humiliated. Solzhenitsyn's hero is unable to completely triumph over the sexual part of his nature. Both choose exalted suffering over cheap happiness.

For it seems to me that the whole meaning of human life can be summed up in one statement that man only exists for the purpose of proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not an organ—stop! Even if it means physical suffering, even if it means turning his back on civilization, he will prove it. 54

The underground man has emerged from the dark hole of his despair long enough to catch a fleeting glimpse of real life only to immediately return. Dank though it is, the underground is preferable to the real world, because there is comfort in lonely suffering.

Is it not possible that man loves something besides prosperity? Perhaps he is just as fond of suffering? Perhaps suffering is just as good for him as prosperity? And man does love suffering very much sometimes. He loves it

53Idem.

54Dostoyevsky, Notes, pp. 136-37.
Man will never renounce real suffering, that is to say destruction and chaos. Suffering! Why it's the sole cause of consciousness.\textsuperscript{55}

Kostoglotov has returned from exile for four brief months during which time (from winter to spring) he gains knowledge, considers new ideas, acquires unexpected insights and is granted a brief glimpse of possible happiness. But on the first day of Oleg's release from the hospital he wanders about the city and is repulsed by the materialism that pervades it. "The dense complexity of this world was too much for him, a world where one had to know women's fashions, be able to choose women's jewelry, look respectable in front of a mirror and remember one's collar size..."\textsuperscript{56}

But asks Oleg, "What good was this refined sort of life?" Why go back to it? If you remember your collar size, doesn't it mean that you're bound to forget something else, something more important?\textsuperscript{57}

Kostoglotov goes to the zoo in order to escape the materialism that surrounds and seduces him, and in order to purify himself. There, just as in the hospital, he finds a world that mirrors Soviet society. There are proud, lowly goats who live on precipices, and squirrels caught on meaningless treadmills of work. There are beautiful

\textsuperscript{55}Dostoyevsky, \textit{Notes}, pp.139-40.


\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., p.499.
pheasants and peacocks as well as carrion-eating vultures. There are yellow-eyed, bewhiskered tigers and free, graceful Niglai antelopes. There are sad-faced monkeys, melancholy in captivity, and a blinded Rhesus monkey, a victim of "senseless cruelty". Solzhenitsyn is saying through the hospital image that "everyone who acts breeds both good and evil. With some it's more good, with others more evil." 58 Through his zoo imagery he maintains, "After all, one can work out who are the guilty ones of this world." 59

Although Dostoyevsky sought ways of understanding good and evil and of explaining "the core of malice and disaster in rational terms—psychological, philosophical, theological," 60 Solzhenitsyn simply describes good and evil, and "his descriptions are sometimes touching and sometimes harrowing but he is not given to elaborate speculation." 61 Regardless of their different methods of examining good or evil, and guilt or innocence in human life, Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn reach similar conclusions. For Dostoyevsky, the tragic plight of the underground man is meant to show modern man's need for faith and Christ. For Solzhenitsyn, man must go beyond material-

58 Ibid., p.88.
59 Ibid., p.509.
60 Muchnic, Russian Writers, p.447.
61 Idem.
ism and physical pleasures, beyond complexity and ambiguity to an organic wholeness and goodness which is love, or in Shulubin's words ethical socialism (a genuine affection for one another). Like the old couple that lives together in Ush Terek.

It is not our level of prosperity (or physical comfort) that makes happiness but the kinship of heart to heart and the way we look at the world. Both attitudes lie within our power, so that a man is happy so long as he chooses to be happy, and no one can stop him.62

Dostoyevsky calls for a return to a religion of love; Solzhenitsyn calls for a conscious, transcendent love. As in the cafe scene in Brothers Karamozov, the issues are the same.
In 1866 Dostoyevsky began working on another major novel, Crime and Punishment, which had its roots in Notes from the Underground as well as in The House of the Dead. The hero, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, lives in the same sordid, impoverished conditions that his literary brother, the underground man, does. Trapped by the injustices of the socio-economic system, he retreats into his room and into his mind to brood over his sorry circumstance. With venomously resentful words, reminiscent of the outcries in Notes, he describes his situation:

Yes, I turned nasty--that's the right word! Then I lurked in a corner like a spider. You've been in my wretched little hole, of course, you've seen it... But do you know that low ceiling and cramped rooms crush the mind and spirit? Oh, how I hated that hole. But all the same I would not leave it. I deliberately stayed in it! For days on end I didn't go out; I wouldn't work, I wouldn't even eat; I just lay there. If Natasha brought me food, I ate it; if not, I let the day go by without asking, on purpose, out of spite! I had no light at night, and I lay in the dark, because I wouldn't earn the money for candles. I should have been studying, but I had sold my books, and the dust is still lying inches thick on the notebooks and papers on my table. I preferred to lie and think. I spent all the time thinking...¹

But, unlike the underground man, Raskolnikov cannot con-

tent himself with resentful thoughts. He is not only a
thinker, he is a man of action. And Raskolnikov's des-
perate thoughts drive him to the most desperate of actions--
murder. Years before Dostoyevsky had anticipated, indeed,
he had witnessed in the house of the dead, the metamorph-
osis of an honest, humane man into a criminal:

A man lives quietly and peaceably and puts up
with a hard life. . . Suddenly something in him
seems to snap: his patience gives way and he
sticks a knife into his enemy and oppressor.
Then the strangeness begins: the man gets out
of all bounds for a time. The first man he mur-
dred was his oppressor, his enemy: that is crim-
inal but comprehensible; in that case there was
a motive. But later on he murders not enemies
but anyone he comes upon. . . The man is, as it
were, drunk, in delirium. It is as though, hav-
ing once overstepped the sacred limit, he be-
gins to revel in the fact that nothing is sacred
to him; as though he had an itching to defy all
law and authority at once, and to enjoy the most
unbridled and unbounded liberty, to enjoy the
thrill of horror which he cannot help feeling
at himself. He knows too that a terrible punish-
ment is awaiting him. . . He assumes a sort of
desperateness, and desperate character sometimes
looks forward to speedy punishment, looks for-
ward to being settled, because he finds it bur-
densome at last to keep up his assumed reck-
lessness. 2

Obviously Dostoyevsky had long since begun his dissection
of the criminal mind when he wrote to his publisher about
his plan for "a psychological account of a crime". 3 His
"police-thriller" would trace just such a criminal meta-

2Dostoyevsky, House, pp.99-100.
3Dostoyevsky, "Letter to M.N. Katkov", Crime, p.539
morphism, from a young bourgeois student's conception of a humanitarian murder, through the crime itself, to his final redemption and retribution. The unique suspense of his account would lie not in the discovery of who the criminal was but rather in the criminal's attempt to understand his motives for killing an old pawnbroker and her idiot sister. Within the framework of Raskolnikov's crime and punishment Dostoyevsky is actually engaged in the deepest speculation on human ethics and morality.

Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* is also a study of morality in the context of crime and conscience. The reader is introduced in the opening pages of his work, just as he is in Dostoyevsky's, to a man who intends to commit a crime. Although Innokenty Volodin's situation is radically different from Raskolnikov's (he is a foreign diplomat in the upper levels of the Soviet government) and the "crime" that he intends to commit (that of alerting a prominent doctor of the treasonous charges that will be brought against him if he goes through with his plan to share a Russian medical breakthrough with scientists of the West) is on an entirely different moral plane, the risks that both their actions entail could mean nothing less than their own personal destruction. Significantly, the motives that drive these men to break the laws of their country are very similar. Raskolnikov believes that his crime will serve humanity, for the money that he will take
from the murdered pawnbroker will, he hopes, save his mother from penury and his sister from sacrificing herself to a loveless but profitable marriage. With the blood money he could also finish his studies, he argues to himself, and then live an exemplary life of virtue and humanitarianism. His crime will, in fact, be a moral act for he is merely overstepping those legal barriers that ordinary men succumb to in order to bring justice to an unjust situation. Innokenty will warn Dr. Dobroumov regardless of the danger involved, because his conscience dictates it. It is not a prudent action but it is a humane one. Volodin asks,"If one is forever cautious, can one remain a human being?"\(^4\) The irony of Volodin's situation is that his crime is in reality a humane act; it is only "criminal" because it is being done in a system that forbids compassionate acts, a system so corrupt that there can be no room for free-thinking individuals whose allegiance is to their consciences. Innokenty Volodin will fall from his privileged position in the "first circle" of the Stalin regime; an honest man, who is, as his name suggests, innocent of any wrongdoing, will be tracked down, arrested, and condemned by a system that is itself criminal. Innokenty's story is a tragic one, for

he will be unjustly condemned for disobeying the demands of a degenerate governmental system and for obeying rather the higher commands of his own conscience. But Raskolnikov's story is perhaps the more tragic, for he is justly condemned for stepping beyond the moral and spiritual commandments of mankind, and for succumbing to the demands of a most imperfect and insidious system: his own fatal reason.

Seduced by the cold logic that his virtuous goals will justify the sinful means by which he attains them, Raskolnikov murders the greedy old pawnbroker and her sister, Lisaveta, who interrupts him in the act. He is pulled into this murderous crime "as if a part of his clothing had been caught in the wheel of a machine and he was being dragged into it." 5 There can be no turning back, for Raskolnikov is now inextricably caught in the trap he has set for himself. He must prove that he is indeed one of those extraordinary men like Julius Caesar or Alexander or Napoleon and that he, like them, has "the right to commit any crime and break every kind of law just because he is extraordinary." 6 He has separated himself from the rest of humanity, or from what he calls the "ordinary people", by aligning himself with the league of

5 Dostoyevsky, Crime, p.68.
6 Ibid., p.248.
superior men who may kill with impunity. These extraordinary men:

are all law-breakers and transgressors, or are inclined that way, in the measure of the capacities. The arms of these people are, of course, relative and very diverse; for the most part they require, in widely different contexts, the destruction of what exists in the name of better things. But if it is necessary for one of them, for the fulfillment of his ideas, to march over corpses, or wade through blood, then in my opinion he may in all conscience authorize himself to wade through blood—in proportion, however, to his idea and the degree of its importance.\(^7\)

Raskolnikov's is the sin of rational pride and his crime was, among other things, an expression of his Napoleonic ego. In confessing his crime to Sonya, the holy prostitute, he says, "I wanted to make myself a Napoleon, and that is why I killed her..."\(^8\) He tells her of the question that had tormented him: what if, he speculates, Napoleon were in my shoes, what if he had no Toulon, no Egypt, and no crossing of Mont Blanc with which to start his career, but only a "ridiculous old woman, who must be killed to get money from her trunk",\(^9\) would he shrink away from stepping over such an ignoble obstacle?

If there had been no other way open to him, he would have strangled her, without giving her a chance to squeak, and without a moment's hesitation!. . . Well, I also. . . stopped hesi-

---

\(^7\)Ibid., p.250.

\(^8\)Ibid., p.398.

\(^9\)Idem.
tating...strangled her...following the example of my authority...10

Solzhenitsyn in his First Circle has depicted three men who strongly reflect various Raskolnikovian feelings. In his second chapter, Solzhenitsyn's readers are given a glimpse of the hell that awaits the daring Volodin. If he is fortunate, he will fall, as these zeks have, into the first circle of the prison camp inferno, where the Stalinists have constructed a contemplative limbo for the top scientist prisoners of the USSR, just as Dante's solution for the virtuous pagans was to put them in the first circle of hell where they lived "without pain but always in desire;" tormented only by the knowledge that they are forever excluded from Paradise.11 The sharashka operated for and by the NKVD was a "kind of broiler farm, where some 300 scientists, like so many battery hens, produced ideas and inventions."12 Within this first circle, Solzhenitsyn shows frail, fearful men and men of the deepest inner strength; for if the men of One Day had to deal with cold, hunger and brutality, the men in First Circle must retain their human dignity and survive emotionally and intellectually in the face of the pressure of the secret police. Each prisoner is compelled

10Idem.

11Muchnic, Russian Writers, p.412.

12Berg and Feiffer, A Biography, p.75.
to make sense of his existence or, like Raskolnikov, must take measures to escape his condition.

Each of the novel's major figures is required in those four wintry days to make some personal decision about whether or not he will accept the regime's plans and methods, and whether or not he will cooperate with its representatives, in this case the secret police authorities who run the sharashka.13

It is, perhaps, Lev Rubin who bears the closest resemblance to Raskolnikov, for even though his crime consists in cooperating with his morally corrupt regime and Raskolnikov's consists in transgressing the moral codes of his society, each has used his intelligence to rationally excuse his crimes. Rubin is an honest man, a brilliant scholar, and a loyal Communist. He is, nonetheless, "morally defective" because like Raskolnikov, he is able to destroy the lives of two innocent people for the sake of a lofty and humane end. He had first betrayed his cousin to the secret police. Years later, after he is himself arrested and imprisoned for trumped up charges of conspiracy, he works at identifying the man who made the phone call to Dr. Dobroumov by analyzing the taped voices of the suspects. His rationalization is that "all the men would have been arrested without his complicity and without phonoscopy. So in fact, he had saved three men."14

13Rothberg, Major Novels, pp.63-4.
14Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.592.
Raskolnikov had rationalized that, by disposing of the worthless lives of the pawnbroker and her idiot sister, he had actually saved three lives, his mother's, his sister's, and his own. There is also a striking correlation between Raskolnikov's admiration for and emulation of Napoleon and Rubin's defense of Stalin and his methods.

Raskolnikov reflects approvingly on Napoleon's career:

> the real ruler, to whom everything is permitted, destroys Toulon, butchers in Paris, forgets an army in Egypt, expends half a million men in a Moscow campaign, shakes himself free with a pun in Wilno and when he is dead they put up statues to him; everything is permitted to him. No! Such people are plainly not made of flesh, but of bronze!¹⁵

Rubin, a doctrinaire, while speaking to his friend, the humanist Nerzhin, says of Stalin

> He's the greatest! Some day you will understand. He's the Robespierre and Napoleon of our Revolution wrapped up in one. He is wise. He is really wise. He sees far beyond what we can possibly see.¹⁶

Like Napoleon, Stalin had led his country from mediocrity to a position of power. Rubin reasons that under the direction of Stalin

> The Soviet Union succeeded in industrializing and collectivizing; the Soviet people, turned back the Nazis and went all the way to Berlin; the country then succeeded in repairing its war damage and in continuing its industrialization;

¹⁵Dostoyevsky, Crime, p.263.

¹⁶Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.41.
therefore, the Party and the leadership were 'right'!17

But Rubin is alone in his support of the regime and his crime of complicity has isolated him from his fellow zeks. They tell him he is the only one who believes "that the Plowman is right, and that his methods are normal and necessary."18 Raskolnikov and Rubin must both accept isolation and suffering for their crimes. Raskolnikov even equates greatness with suffering. "Suffering and pain are always obligatory on those of wide intellect and profound feeling. Truly great men must, I think, experience great sorrow on the earth."19 As assured as these men's arguments are, they are nonetheless besieged by doubts. Raskolnikov suffers, in his delirious dreams from a belief that the old woman could not be killed, that he has instead killed himself. Rubin spends a sleepless, painful night haunted by his unjust actions done "for the sake of the Party".

He felt a burning pressure in his head. Seared with a red-hot brand. And sometimes he had the feeling that his wounds were retribution, prison was retribution, his illnesses were retribution.20

Solzhenitsyn, in portraying this man corrupted by his intellect, interjects, "What will one sleepless night not

17Rothberg, Major Novels, p. 93.
18Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.41.
19Dostoyevsky, Crime, p.254.
20Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.481.
drain from the miserable soul of the man who has erred?²¹

In portraying a good, honest man who has turned his back on a higher morality, that is to say, on God, and who has given himself over to his intellect, Dostoyevsky has depicted what was for him the Russian tragedy of his time. Raskolnikov embodies the two major tenets of nihilism: atheism and rationality. Dostoyevsky discredits this unacceptable ideology and exposes its weaknesses through revealing the flaws in Raskolnikov. In much the same way Solzhenitsyn depicts Rubin as

a scholar who perverts his knowledge, an honest man who becomes an informer, a humane man who, because of his ideals, acts brutally, so that in him, more eloquently than if he had been by nature false, petty, and cruel, the basic principles of communism, the logic of dialectical materialism, and the official ethics of the Soviet State stand condemned.²²

As one of the characters in First Circle says, Dostoyevsky's characters are "as complex and incomprehensible as people in real life! How seldom we understand another human being right from the start, and we never do completely! Something unexpected always turns up."²³ Raskolnikov seems real because, schismatic as his name implies, he can be understood only in many different contexts:

He committed murder, yet he thinks of himself

²¹Idem.
²²Muchnic, Russian Writers, p. 422.
²³Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p. 442.
as an honorable man, despises other people and goes about like a martyred angel.  

He is at once a superman, beyond good and evil, and a moral man besiegged by doubts; he is a brooding philosopher and a defiant initiator; he is a conscious socialist and a self-centered individualist. He has the characteristics of Lev Rubin as well as those of Rubin's opposite, Dmitri Alexandrovich Sologdin.

Sologdin, Rubin's fellow zek, is a self-named member of that human elite to which Raskolnikov would belong. Raskolnikov covertly describes his own place among men when he says:

The great mass of men, the common stuff of humanity, exist on earth only in order that at last, by some endeavor, some process, that remains as yet mysterious, some happy conjunction of race and breeding, there should struggle into life a being, one in a thousand, capable, in however small a degree, of standing on his own feet. Perhaps one in ten thousand is born with a slightly greater degree of independence, and one in a hundred thousand with even more. One genius may emerge among millions, and a really great genius, perhaps, as the crowning point of many thousands of millions of men.  

This same elitism reappears in First Circle through the person of Sologdin, who knew perfectly well that 'the people' is an overall term for a totality of persons of slight interest, gray, crude, preoccupied in their unenlightened way with daily existence. Their multitudes do not con-

---


25 Ibid., p. 468.
stitute the foundation of the colossus of the human spirit. Only unique personalities, shining and separate, like singing star's strewn through the dark heaven of existence, carry within them supreme understanding.26

Raskolnikov chooses murder as a proof of his superiority over other men. Sologdin invents a bug-proof telephone and uses it to triumph over his captors. He produces the invention that Stalin has anxiously been awaiting (and thus gets the NKVD directors off the hook) in return for his own freedom. In a quarrel with Rubin, Sologdin bitterly mocks his "ends-justify-the-means" social philosophy.

Morality shouldn't lose its force as it increases its scope! That would mean that it is villainy if you personally kill or betray someone; but if the One-and-Only and Infallible knocks off five or ten million, then that's according to natural law and must be appraised in a progressive sense.27

But Sologdin esteems this same philosophy in his own life, for he has submitted to cooperating with the authorities for the sake of extorting his freedom from them. He, like Raskolnikov, is saying:

Demolish what must be demolished, once and for all, that is all, and take the suffering on ourselves!... Freedom and power, but above all, power! Power over all trembling creatures, over the whole ant-heap!... That is the goal! Remember this!28

Both Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn seem to find this

26Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.449.
27Ibid., p.468.
28Dostoyevsky, Crime, pp.316-17.
attitude incomplete, for Dostoyevsky introduces another, more compassionate side of Raskolnikov to mitigate the cold, dominating rationalist; and, along with Rubin the socialist and Sologdin the elitist, Solzhenitsyn creates Gleb Nerzhin, a humanist. Raskolnikov is too reflective to remain indefinitely impenitent. He is as accountable to his consciousness and conscience as the underground man is, and he shares the truth about himself, like the underground man did, with a humble prostitute. Dostoyevsky's Sonya is the image of purity, humility, selflessness and simple faith. It is largely through her that Raskolnikov finds the strength to repent his crime and confess it publicly and finally to accept the suffering of an eight year imprisonment. She cannot be taken in by well-phrased arguments about noble ends justifying a murderous act. Sonya responds with the wisdom of her pure heart when she counsels him:

Go at once, this instant, stand at the cross-roads, first bow down and kiss the earth you have desecrated, then bow to the whole world, to the four corners of the earth, and say aloud to all the world: 'I have done murder.' Then God will send you life again. Will you go? . . . Accept suffering and achieve atonement through it--that is what you must do.29

Only after several days of mental anguish, during which Raskolnikov is intermittently proud of his sin and revolted

29Ibid., p.403.
by it, does he submit to Sonya's advice and give himself up. His confession, like his crime, is done mechanically, with no real understanding of his reasons for doing it.

Raskolnikov goes to prison unrepentant but he already felt in his heart that there was something profoundly false in himself and his beliefs. He did not understand that that feeling might have been the herald of a coming crisis in his life, of his coming resurrection, of a future new outlook on life.  

It is in prison during the first year of his sentence that Raskolnikov discovers the meaning of freedom and cherishes life. "Tears and suffering--they after all were life."  

Through Sonya's devotion to him (she has followed him into exile in order to be near him) Raskolnikov humbles himself, finds peace in his suffering, and opens his heart to love. "Life had taken the place of logic."  

Ironically, Raskolnikov has proven himself an "extraordinary man" not by taking power and stepping beyond moral law but rather by humbling himself and accepting suffering as atonement for his transgression. If Dostoyevsky has demonstrated the flaws of nihilistic thought in Raskolnikov, he has also presented through him his belief that suffering is the instrument of redemption and that spiritual resurrection comes only through it. He affirmed

30Ibid., p.521.  
31Ibid., p.520.  
32Ibid., p.527.
that "the main and most fundamental spiritual need of the Russian people is the need of suffering, constant, and unquenchable suffering, everywhere, and in everything." \(^{33}\)

Solzhenitsyn, like Dostoyevsky, discredits the superman theory. He represents the great Stalin not as a superior to most men but actually as inferior: Stalin's noble plans for bringing happiness to mankind seem ridiculous. "Only he, Stalin, knew the path by which to lead humanity to happiness, how to shove its face into happiness like a blind puppy's into milk--there, drink up!" \(^{34}\) Solzhenitsyn maintains that happiness cannot be given, but that it must be earned through a purifying process of renunciation and suffering. Only that man who has been stripped to the inner core of his being is truly free, and only that free man who has risen above the petty struggles for power, for material comfort, and for security is truly superior. Such a man is Gleb Nerzhin. It is of him, and of the other zeks at the sharashka who refuse to comply with the injustices of the Stalinist regime (as Rubin has done) or even to use that system for their personal welfare (as Sologdin does) that Solzhenitsyn speaks when he says:

\(^{33}\)Yarmolinsky, Works and Days, p.219.

\(^{34}\)Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.130.
One can build the Empire State Building, discipline the Prussian army, elevate the state hierarchy above the throne of the Almighty, but one cannot get past the unaccountable spiritual superiority of certain people.\textsuperscript{35}

Of all the zeks portrayed in First Circle, Nerzhin is perhaps the happiest. His was

a life full of meaning in both big and small things, a life striding from one bold success to another, in which the most unexpected steps toward his goal were his departure for the war and his arrest, and his long separation from his wife. Seen from the outside it appeared an unhappy one, but Nerzhin was secretly happy in that unhappiness.\textsuperscript{36}

Gleb does not believe in the intellectual elite as do Rubin and Sologdin, for he had seen them fail in strength of character and in loyalty during the war. Nor does he believe in the innate goodness of the "Russian people". He has come to realize that it is

Not by birth, not by the work of one's hands, not by the wings of education that is one elected into the people.  
But by one's inner self.  
Everyone forges his inner self year after year.  
One must try to temper, to cut, to polish one's soul so as to become a human being.  
And thereby become a tiny particle of one's own people.\textsuperscript{37}

It is because of Nerzhin's decision to "become a human being" that he refuses to supervise a cryptographic project for NKVD authorities and, consequently, chooses another indeterminate, and perhaps final, term at hard labor.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p.61.  
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p.181.  
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p.452.
He resigns himself to the physical horrors of a prison camp in Siberia, rather than sacrifice himself and his precious time for reflection for the sake of theories of soul."\(^\text{38}\)

Nerzhin has given himself over completely to his passion for knowledge and independent thinking. "Nothing was left to Nerzhin but the knowledge of what he wanted to find out, neither his work, nor time, nor life--nor his wife."\(^\text{39}\) Unlike Raskolnikov, it is not the woman he loves who directs Gleb to his spiritual salvation in prison. Indeed, the lot of the prisoner's wives is not nearly as romantic as Sonya's was. Not only are they persecuted by the authorities and threatened with the loss of their jobs, their apartments, and their social standing; they are often forsaken (as Nadya was by Nerzhing) by their husbands who refuse to cooperate with the officials and consequently condemn these noble women to waiting year after tormenting year for the release of their husbands.

The person from whom Gleb takes his example and greatest support is Spiridon Yegorov. He, like Sonya, is the embodiment of pure, uncomplicated faith. The goodness of Spiridon's soul is unblemished by intellectual acrobatics.

---

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.38.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p.236.
Not one of the eternal questions about the validity of our sensory perceptions and the inadequacy of our knowledge of our inner lives tormented Spiridon. He knew unshakably what he saw, heard, smelled, and understood.40

His moral code is as elevated as Sonya's and his understanding of good and evil no less astute. When questioned about right and wrong by Nerzhin, he simply answers: "The wolfhound is right and the cannibal is wrong."41

It is the "spiritual superiority" of the peasant Spiridon and of Gerasimovich, who refused to cooperate with the secret police, of the young rebel Doronin and of Potapov who "chose death over well-being"42 that not so much inspired but reaffirmed Nerzhin's choice of mental freedom over physical freedom. Men of courage, dignity, intelligence, and individuality are undeserving of the "first circle" of hell. They, along with Innokenty Valodin, will be cast into the lower circles of the prison inferno where their physical suffering is greater but their spiritual salvation is more certain.

Both Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn have depicted men who are struggling to transcend their human weaknesses. Raskolnikov begins with confused and "incomplete" ideas and, having acted on them, is tormented by a sense of his guilt. Only after having submitted himself to his fate

40Ibid., p.460.
41Ibid., p.466.
42Rothberg, Major Novels, p.114.
does he realize that truth, justice, good, or evil cannot be grasped logically; to concern oneself with the process of life was to lose life itself. Raskolnikov rises above dialectics to understand with his soul those things that cannot be understood with reason. His has been "a conversion to life", "a belief in the grace of life". The life of each human being must be held inviolate. "There is something higher," Dostoyevsky concluded, "than the arguments of reason and the force of circumstance--before that everyone must bow." Solzhenitsyn's First Circle is a gallery of portraits. His characters are involved in no less heroic an effort than Raskolnikov's: to rise above their circumstances, to grapple with the problems of conscience, and, finally, to do what is right even if that should mean death. One wonders if Rubin will ever escape the prison walls of his reason, or if Sologdin can find the freedom that he would purchase with his conscience. Gleb Nerzhin has most succeeded in securing freedom and happiness by accepting his fate and by allowing himself to be "transported" to Siberia. Like Raskolnikov, he has saved himself by going to prison. Neither their happiness nor their freedom depend on "the external blessings that they have snatched from life." Dostoyevsky and

43 Payne, Human Portrait, p.212.
44 Yarmolinsky, Works and Days, p.222.
45 Solzhenitsyn, First Circle, p.37.
Solzhenitsyn, true to the Russian spirit, have both agreed: "For those who understand, human happiness is suffering."\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{46}Idem.
CONCLUSION

The similarities between Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn are numerous. Their lives, their works, and their ideas are strangely interlocked across the expanse of a century. But a major difference between them can be seen not in the ideas that their characters embody but in the direction that those characters take. Goryanchikov in The House of the Dead is an introspective man who sees the goodness and evil of the convicts around him reflected in himself. The underground man is an introverted social misfit whose complex personality encompasses passion and intellect as well as the most sublime and sordid of human experience. Raskolnikov is in many ways a combination of his precursors; he thinks, broods, and rationalizes, as the underground man does, and strikes out through devastating actions as the criminal does—both in an atmosphere of complete isolation. The action in these three works of Dostoyevsky is continually centered around and directed inward on his main character. Solzhenitsyn’s Ivan Denisovich, however, is very much a social being, a participant (almost a joyful one) in the life around him. Oleg Kostoglotov’s interest in and interaction with other people is the basic story line in Cancer Ward. Gleb Nerzhin’s abil—
lity to learn from every man around him is the foundation of his humanism. Although Solzhenitsyn's heros are always the foci of his works, they function as hubs from which the action may be directed outward. Using the individual man as a frame of reference, Dostoyevsky explores the complex world within each of us. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, establishes a microcosmic frame structure—a prison camp or a hospital ward—and within its boundaries paints the souls of individual men. These authors are engaged in the same task but are carrying it out on different levels. Their writings are a part of a cathartic process. Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* is much more than a picture of nineteenth century criminals, it is a portrait of the criminal that exists in embryo in every man. The bizarre self-villification of the underground man is, in reality, a public confession of his past sin and present guilt. Through Raskolnikov, Dostoyevsky's readers are shown the spiritual regeneration that awaits the man who confesses his crimes and atones for them through suffering. Indeed the main characters of these works are participants in a greater rite of purification.

Solzhenitsyn has presented in *One Day*, *Cancer Ward*, and *First Circle* the sins of a guilty society. One can only ask how and why an atrocity like Stalinism—"the past that is clawing to pieces Russia's present days"—could

---

happen in a state "created to end man's inhumanity to
man." Solzhenitsyn's novels dare to accuse the rulers in
the Soviet Union and to confess "the complicity of thousands
of ordinary Russians who suffered the terrorism in sil-
ence". His work is therefore emotionally painful but
spiritually healing.

The Orthodox nineteenth century placed its faith in
an apocalyptic vision of individual salvation; the commun-
ist twentieth century is concerned with a revolutionary
social salvation. But, though Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn
partake of their centuries' moods, they each pursue the
mystical themes common to the Russian soul: guilt,
confession, and redemption through suffering.

\[2^{\text{Ibid.}, \ p.\ 23.}\]
\[3^{\text{Idem.}}\]


_________________________. One Day in the Life of Ivan Deni-
