

KEVIN WINDLE

## The Theme of Fate in Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*

"Truth, Beauty, Good, Evil: ethical imperatives," runs the line that Innokentii Volodin finds in his mother's papers on the day of his arrest.<sup>1</sup> As ever, these are the aims to which Alexander Solzhenitsyn aspires in his latest novel. His account of the events in East Prussia as World War I begins is more than an extensive compilation of historical facts, more than their transmutation into fictional form. It is an attempt to capture the truth about certain elusive laws governing the movement and development of human society, best observed in times of crisis. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy attempted to expound and test a philosophy of history. Solzhenitsyn's purpose in *August 1914* is substantially the same. Some comparison of the two works is inevitable. Both writers take as their subject military campaigns that had an enormous influence on Russia. The time lag between the events described and the writing of the novels is approximately the same—about half a century. Both works include actual historical figures. Both writers present Russian society on a broad canvas, with characters selected from almost all levels of society.

Solzhenitsyn's novel is polyphonic in the fullest sense of the word. His array of characters is perhaps even more comprehensive than Tolstoy's (and we should not forget that this is only the first part of a projected trilogy). Peasants, middle-class intellectuals of varied political sympathies, landowners, numerous military leaders, a Jewish engineer, and even a member of the royal family are all deftly portrayed in little space. Nor do other nations go unrepresented: enemy generals and one British staff officer are also introduced.

Tolstoy is undoubtedly the greatest influence on Solzhenitsyn in this work—a work that he says has been his life's goal since he was very young. References to Tolstoy are frequent. For example, Isaakii Lazhenitsyn, who apparently represents the author's father (Solzhenitsyn's patronymic is Isaevich), has been to visit "the prophet" to seek the answers to certain moral questions. Isaakii is an ardent *Tolstovets* who abstains from dancing because it arouses lust and from eating meat because it is wrong to kill animals. He is tormented by the lies he must tell his family to explain his vegetarianism. Isaakii fully accepts Tolstoy's view of the church as a formal institution that bears no relevance to true belief. But it would be entirely wrong to see

1. A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 343.

Solzhenitsyn as an imitator, even if his earlier works had not proved the contrary. He retains his individuality as a writer, never letting himself be dominated by Tolstoy. Nor does he accept all of Tolstoy's theories. He refutes one of the main themes of *War and Peace*, "the force that moves nations"—the idea that any leader is powerless in himself and has significance only insofar as he expresses the will of the broad masses. One general in *August 1914*, Blagoveshchensky, consciously tries to emulate Kutuzov, as Tolstoy described him, by avoiding battle for as long as possible. But at another point in the novel Solzhenitsyn says that the dictators of the twentieth century, who ruled against the will of the people, have proved Tolstoy mistaken in his controversial views on this subject:

(И тут бы утешиться нам толстовским убеждением, что не генералы ведут войска, не капитаны ведут корабли и роты, не президенты и лидеры правят государствами и партиями — да слишком много раз показал нам XX век, что именно *они*.)<sup>2</sup>

Throughout *August 1914* Solzhenitsyn is preoccupied with history as a living force that directs human affairs and is not subject to the wishes of individuals or of nations. The continuity of history is repeatedly emphasized. In an important conversation with Isaakii and his friend Kotia, the middle-aged librarian Varsonofiev speaks of history as having an irrational, organic life of its own, which cannot be understood by reason or tampered with by presumptuous humans. When Kotia tells him that his favorite historical concept is Hegel's "razvitie cherez skachok" (p. 370), Varsonofiev feels himself sufficiently provoked to deliver an attack on revolution:

"История растёт как дерево живое. И разум для неё топор, разумом вы её не вырастите. Или, если хотите, история — река, у неё свои законы течений, поворотов, завихрений. Но приходят умники и говорят, что она — загнивающий пруд, и надо перепустить её в другую, лучшую, яму, только правильно выбрать место, где канаву прокопать. Но реку, но струю прервать нельзя, её только на вершок разорви — уже нет струи. А нам предлагают рвать её на тысячу саженей. Связь поколений, учреждений, традиций, обычаев — это и есть связь струи."<sup>3</sup>

2. "(And here we might find consolation in Tolstoy's conviction that it is not generals who lead armies, not captains who direct ships or companies of troops, not presidents or political leaders who rule nations and parties—but the twentieth century has shown us all too often that we are led by precisely *these people*.)" A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *August chetyrnadtsatogo* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1971), p. 350. All quotations in the text are from this edition.

3. "History lives and grows like a tree. For history, reason is an axe. You can't cultivate it with reason. Or, if you like, history is a river. It has its own laws governing its currents, its bends, its eddies. But these smart alecks come along and say it's a stagnant pond and that it must be redirected into another channel, a better one. All we

It is not for nothing that a professor of medieval history is introduced. Olga Andozerskaia is received with sympathy by the students, but they have their misgivings. Why has she chosen the dark, remote Middle Ages and turned away from the burning contemporary issues? What possible relevance can that period have to the problems of modern Russia and modern Europe? She answers that one event flows from another, and that to study history one must go back further than the French Revolution. Using the same metaphor as Varsonofiev, she says that it is necessary to study the tree from the root and not to mistake a branch for the whole tree. She warns against excessive concentration on material and social conditions at the expense of the spiritual life of a given period.

Ilia Isakovich Arkhangorodsky, a Jewish engineer, has a violent argument with his daughter Sonia and her friend Naum, a Social Revolutionary. Like Varsonofiev and Andozerskaia he stresses the complex ways of history and its essential continuity. His remarks on revolution and the destruction that always follows remind us of one of the themes of *The First Circle*. No end, however noble, can justify unworthy means:

“Но разумный человек не может быть за революцию, потому что революция есть длительное и безумное разрушение. Всякая революция прежде всего не обновляет страну, а разоряет ее, и надолго. И чем кровавей, чем затяжней, чем больше стране за нее платить — тем ближе она к титулу ВЕЛИКОЙ.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus history is a vital, illogical force against which man cannot rebel. In this sense the words “history” and “fate” are almost synonymous. The concept of fate has great importance in this work. Solzhenitsyn evokes a haunting, ever-present sense of doom, and one is aware that all actions and results are pre-determined. The Russian army moving into East Prussia is going to meet its end. Man is powerless to alter the preset pattern of history.

To all outward appearances the campaign begins promisingly. The Russian army marches into East Prussia in great strength and meets no resistance. The German army seems to have melted away. But Solzhenitsyn takes us into the headquarters and—more important—into the minds of the officers, and we realize that the Russian army is moving like a blind man. The officers know that German forces are present. Indeed, they have only made a

---

have to do is choose the right place to dig the trench. But the flow of the stream can't be broken off. If you move it just one inch the stream no longer exists. And they tell us to uproot it and move it a mile. The flow of generations, institutions, traditions, customs, is the flow of the stream” (p. 377).

4. “But an intelligent man cannot support revolution, because revolution is prolonged, mindless destruction. No revolution renews a country. It lays it in ruins first, and for a long time. And the bloodier it is, the longer it lasts, the dearer the country has to pay for it—the closer it comes to the title of GREAT” (p. 536).

tactical retreat and are not far away. But because of inadequate reconnaissance the Russians do not know where the Germans are. Russian communications are poor or nonexistent. Telephone lines work only intermittently. Because commanders cannot determine the positions of their own forces they frequently shell them by mistake. Vital reports on troop deployments are not in code and the Germans intercept them. Through these elementary oversights the Germans acquire precise information on the Russian advance and can plan accordingly, but the Russian forces grope unsteadily toward their goal.

The Russian commanders are well aware of their disadvantages but can do nothing to improve their situation. Though they feel they are moving into a trap, they cannot halt or turn back. Occasionally there are references to specific forebodings of disaster, but an atmosphere of doom is always present. Twice Solzhenitsyn interrupts the narrative to include chapters that are montages of newspaper cuttings in which chauvinistic headlines, confident of victory, are interspersed—often humorously—with advertisements. The brash war dispatches are full of irony, for their writer is not aware of the true situation at the front but the reader is.

Vorotyntsev ruminates on the folly of the war and on recent Russian history. He knows that from the simple soldier to the tsar himself no one realized that the war could not possibly be like earlier wars. The world had entered a new era and everything had changed—including military science. The Germans were well abreast of technical developments and were making full use of them, but the Russians were not. Vorotyntsev contemplates what the consequences of defeat will be in this campaign in view of the results of defeat in Russia's two previous military ventures:

Два-три таких поражения подряд — и искривится навсегда позвоночник, и погибла тысячелетняя нация. А два подряд уже и были — крымское и японское. . . . Оттого наступившая война могла стать или началом великого русского возрождения или концом всякой России.<sup>5</sup>

Solzhenitsyn sustains the feeling that defeat in this, the Russians' first battle of the war, is inevitable. It will decide the course of the whole war, and the consequences will be terrible.

No one feels the precariousness of the Russian position more acutely than General Samsonov. Like many of his colleagues he is still smarting from the shame of defeat by Japan. He is conscious that despite his rank he has no control over the course of events:

5. "After two or three such defeats in succession the spine would be bent forever. A nation a thousand years old would perish. There had already been two defeats in succession—the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War. . . . So the war which had just begun could become either the beginning of a great Russian renaissance or the end of the Russian nation" (p. 109).

Самсонов чувствовал, что он — не действитель, а лишь представитель событий, они же утекают по себе сами.<sup>6</sup>

Samsonov, far from confident of victory at the start, knows that his own personal fate is bound up with this campaign. His forebodings of disaster persistently grow, and with them the premonition of his own death. In rather the same way that we see death take its hold on Tolstoy's Prince Andrei, as he unconsciously detaches himself from earthly life, so we witness a change in Samsonov as the position worsens. Several times Solzhenitsyn mentions Samsonov's strange awareness of the shifting "layers of his soul" (*plast dushi*), as if he were inwardly preparing himself for his end. The crushing of Samsonov's army must mean his death.

One night, unable to sleep, Samsonov hears a mysterious voice telling him, "Ty uspish" (p. 295). The significance of this strange phrase is not immediately clear to him, but he soon decides that it means he will die the next day—the day of the Orthodox holiday of the Assumption (Usenie). Since he already has the feeling he will die soon, he is, as it were, preconditioned to accept this interpretation. Though he survives the dreaded day, he believes it is only a brief postponement of the inevitable.

Fate is a force that none can control and none can escape. This is stressed in a song quoted in the novel

А в груди таишь рану жгучую:  
Не избыть судьбу неминуемую<sup>7</sup>

and in the proverb "NE ROK GOLOVY ISHCET—SAMA GOLOVA NA ROK IDET."<sup>8</sup> At times fate is presented by means of a symbol—a wheel or a windmill. The wheel first appears humbly, as the wheel of a slow supply cart on which Vorotyntsev is traveling:

В штабе на картах стрелки дивизий черт-не-черти — вот этими колесами тележными решается сражение неслышно.<sup>9</sup>

Here the wheel acquires importance, if not as yet any symbolic meaning. Later, in two of the "cinematic chapters," a symbol becomes apparent. A German

6. "Samsonov felt that he was not a leader, not in command of the situation, but merely a representative of events. Events were taking their own independent course" (p. 85).

7. "You bear in your breast a burning wound: / there is no escape from fate" (p. 132).

8. "FATE DOESN'T NEED TO LOOK FOR YOUR NECK—YOUR NECK GOES TO ITS FATE BY ITSELF" (p. 299).

9. "It made no difference whether or not you marked the divisional arrows on the maps at headquarters—the outcome of the battle was being decided inaudibly by these cartwheels" (p. 108).

artillery bombardment sets a windmill on fire, and the rising heat from the flames begins to turn the burning sails:

КАК КАТИТСЯ ПО ВОЗДУХУ ОГНЕННОЕ КОЛЕСО.  
И — разваливается,  
Разваливается на куски,  
на огненные обломки.<sup>10</sup>

Later, a wheel falls off a cart and rolls away on its own. The “stage directions” demand that the camera focus on it:

КОЛЕСО!! всё больше почему-то делается,  
Оно всё больше!  
Оно во весь экран!  
КОЛЕСО! — катится, озаренное пожаром!  
— самостийное!  
неудержимое!  
всё давящее!  
КОЛЕСО!!!...  
Катится КОЛЕСО, окрашенное пожаром!  
= Радостным пожаром!!  
= Багряное КОЛЕСО!!  
= И — лица маленьких испуганных людей:  
почему оно катится само? почему такое  
большое?  
= Нет, еще нет. Оно уменьшается.  
Вот, оно уменьшается.  
= Это — нормальное колесо от лазаретной  
линейки,  
и вот оно уже на издохе. Свалилось.<sup>11</sup>

10. “LIKE A FIERY WHEEL ROLLING THROUGH THE AIR.

And—it’s crumbling,  
It’s crumbling into pieces,  
Into fiery fragments” (p. 228).

11. “A WHEEL!! growing inexplicably bigger and bigger,

It’s growing still bigger!  
It fills the whole screen!  
A WHEEL!—rolling, lit up by the fire!  
—self-propelled!  
uncontrollable!  
crushing everything.

A WHEEL!!!...  
A WHEEL rolling, colored by the flames!  
= By the joyfully dancing flames!!  
= A crimson WHEEL!!  
= And—the faces of little frightened people:  
why is it rolling by itself? why is it so big?  
= No, it still hasn’t stopped. It’s getting smaller.

In these passages the fiery wheel can be seen as a symbol of war, carried away by its own momentum, running on blindly to its inevitable collapse, or as the wheel of fate, striking mercilessly, indiscriminately. War or fate is presented more than once as the thresher, and artillery fire as *molot'ba*. The peasant Blagodarev suggests a comparison between the soldiers under fire and the heads of wheat on a threshing floor. The giant flails of war find victims at random, wherever they fall:

Гигантские цепи обходили их ряды и вымолачивали зернышки душ для употребления, им неизвестного, — а жертвам солдатским оставалось только ждать своей очереди.<sup>12</sup>

The burning windmill and the runaway cartwheel are a further development of the same image.

Solzhenitsyn presents a variety of views on the war. To Ensign Lenartovich, and to the Left as a whole, it is an immoral, pointless venture, bringing down needless bloodshed on innocent people. To Vorotyntsev the war is simply a mistake: Russia does not have the military strength to wage war against Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the same time. The monarchists are confident that the cause is just, that the campaign will be short and crowned with success, and even that society will be united in the struggle and morally purified by it.

The question naturally arises, who is to blame for the war? Some, including Isaakii Lazhenitsyn, see the German-Austrian side as the aggressor. To others the rulers of Russia are no less guilty than those of the enemy. In the final analysis, however, Solzhenitsyn does not apportion blame. He gives a strong impression that he is inclined to accept the view held by the peasants of Isaakii's native village near Mineralnye Vody:

В станице не оспаривали и не обмысливали войну как событие, которое будто бы в наших руках, могло бы быть или не быть допущено. Войну и вызовы воинского начальника там все принимали как волю Бога, как снежный буря, как пыльную бурю.<sup>13</sup>

The war is an act of God, a blow of fate that cannot be dodged and for which no earthly power can be held responsible. It was inevitable that Russia should

---

There, it's getting smaller.

= It's an ordinary wheel from an ambulance wagon, and now it has run itself out. It has fallen on its side" (pp. 287–88).

12. "The giant flails ran through their ranks, threshing out the seeds of their souls for purposes unknown to them—and the victims could do nothing but wait their turn" (p. 226).

13. "In the village they did not discuss the war, or question its causes, as if it were something within their power, something which could or could not be permitted. The war and the summonses from the conscription officer were accepted as the will of God, like a dust storm, like the violent winter snowstorms" (pp. 18–19).



enter this war and suffer disastrous losses, and that the revolution should come out of it, bringing destruction in its wake.

Occasionally the author steps back from the action of his story to survey the situation from the wider angle of the present day. At one point, when referring to the invention of concentration camps for the internment of prisoners of war, he inserts a personal note, calling the camps the harbingers of the twentieth century. On another occasion he considers the significance of the Battle of Tannenberg to World War I as a whole, leaving no doubt that in his opinion this first defeat destroyed the morale of the Russian people and set the pattern for the events that followed. Yet the consequences of the rout at Tannenberg, like the defeat itself, and like the decision to declare war in the first place, could not be avoided. Everything was decreed by fate.

Not even the leaders of great armies can turn aside the wheel of fate. We see Samsonov become ever more a victim of events, ever more helpless. This is emphasized by his appearance when he hears a depressing battle report from General Martos:

Как никогда, лоб его был крупен и беззащитен: белая мишень над беззащитным лицом.<sup>14</sup>

The outcome of the battle is a matter entirely beyond his control. His intentions had been the very best, but everything had gone wrong. His actions and their results are all in the hands of fate. He feels this so strongly that his last prayer before his suicide is almost an attempt to disclaim responsibility:

“Господи! Если можешь — прости меня и прими меня. Ты видишь: ничего я не мог иначе и ничего не могу.”<sup>15</sup>

Such passages recall Solzhenitsyn's earlier works. In *Cancer Ward* Dr. Dontsova ponders over the rights and responsibilities of a doctor:

Этот закон, вероятно, имеет и всеобщий характер: всякий *делающий* всегда порождает и то, и другое — и благо, и зло. Один только — больше блага, другой — больше зла.<sup>16</sup>

In *The First Circle* Nerzhin, in a conversation with Spiridon, tries to discover the standards by which Spiridon lives:

“Может быть люди-то все хотят доброго — *думают*, что доброго хотят,

14. “His brow was broad and defenseless as never before: a white target above a defenseless face” (p. 325).

15. “Lord. Forgive me if you can, and receive me. You see, there was nothing else I could do. There is nothing else I can do” (p. 430).

16. “It was a universal law: everyone who *acts* breeds both good and evil. With some it's more good, with others more evil.” A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus* (London: Bodley Head, 1968), vol. 1, p. 101 (the italics are in the original).



но все не безгрешны, не без ошибок, а кто и вовсе оголтелый — и вот причиняют люди друг другу столько зла. Убедят себя, что они хорошо делают, а на самом деле выходит худо. Ну, как вот по твоей пословице, что, мол, сеяли рожь, а выросла лебеда?"<sup>17</sup>

The best intentions may produce the worst results, since man's decisions and actions are predetermined. If the most well-meaning persons unwittingly produce evil, what value have their good intentions? What value has Christian love itself? Isaakii Lazhenitsyn takes his doubts on this point to Tolstoy, who is brief and uncompromising in his replies. The sole purpose of life, he says, is to serve good—through love. Isaakii asks,

“А что, если любовь не так сильна, не так обязательна во всех и не возьмет верха — ведь тогда ваше учение окажется . . . бесплодным?”<sup>18</sup>

But Tolstoy insists that there can be nothing else but love.

Isaakii's question, dealing with abstract, indefinable qualities like love, cannot be answered by reason, and only by deep-rooted faith can Tolstoy's answer be accepted. Here, as in most of his earlier work, Solzhenitsyn compels the reader to consider perennial problems of belief and morality. How much free will has man if his actions are ordained by God? Which is the more important area of the mind—the thinking, logical part or the emotional, irrational part? On the evidence of *August 1914* it seems that to Solzhenitsyn the free will is of little consequence and that like Dostoevsky he sets more store by the spontaneous, irrational mind than by reason.

A sharp conflict between reason and emotion is brought out early in the novel. Isaakii, who has done his utmost to follow Tolstoy's teachings in his own life, is known in his village as a *narodnik*, yet he decides that it is his duty to join the army and fight for Russia. How can this contradiction be explained? How can he reconcile his action with total pacifism and nonresistance to evil? His friend Varia, who had admired his uncompromising moral strictness, is dismayed at his decision and accuses him of betraying his principles, and of betraying Tolstoy. Isaakii can only answer feebly, “Rossiuzhalko” (p. 17), for he knows that Varia's objections cannot be answered rationally. But his decision has not been taken lightly. It springs from a powerful spiritual response, and though it may be at variance with his rational thought, he knows intuitively that it is right.

17. “Maybe everyone wants to do good or *thinks* he wants to, but not everyone is free of guilt or error, and some are totally conscienceless, and they do each other so much harm. They convince themselves they are doing good, but in fact it turns out to be evil. As you might say, they sow rye and grow weeds.” A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *V krugе pervom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 356 (italics in the original).

18. “But what if love isn't so strong? What if it isn't so compelling in everyone and can't overcome everything else? Then won't your teaching turn out to be . . . pointless?” (p. 23).

Reason seems not only inadequate to solve human problems but a positively hostile force. In Varsonofiev's metaphor, reason is an axe raised to strike at the tree of history. It is the weapon of those who take it upon themselves to change the course of history by violence instead of seeking spiritual harmony with the age in which they live, in accordance with Arkhangorodsky's maxim:

“Надо включиться в терпеливый процесс истории: работать, убеждать и понемножечку сдвигать.”<sup>19</sup>

Solzhenitsyn stresses that a man's spiritual wholeness, completely independent of reason and of material environment, is the most precious thing he has. In *August 1914*, which is the most overtly religious of Solzhenitsyn's works so far, the aim of human life as sought by Nerzhin and Kostoglotov is defined unequivocally by Varsonofiev:

“Мы всего-то и позваны — усовершенствовать строй своей души.”<sup>20</sup>

Nerzhin's conclusion in *The First Circle* differs only slightly from this:

Надо стараться закалить, отгранить себе такую душу, чтобы стать человеком.

И через то — крупицей своего народа.<sup>21</sup>

Solzhenitsyn also stresses that man's material condition has no bearing on his spiritual life. In *The First Circle*, in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and, through Alex, in *The Candle in the Wind*, he illustrates, in the tradition of Russian asceticism, how physical adversity can be beneficial because it turns man inward and causes him to think and examine his soul. In *August 1914* it is Andozerskaia who tells the students how, in historical studies, the spiritual tradition is far more important than the concrete background. The inner world of any person bears no relation to his standard of living. This is a clear rejection of the slogan “Being determines consciousness.”

Preoccupations with man's physical surroundings, together with proposals for an ideal society, are received with equal skepticism by Varsonofiev and Arkhangorodsky. What precisely is meant by “the good of the people?” asks Varsonofiev of Kotia and Isaakii. Is an ideal society possible? “NE ISKAL BY V SELE, A ISKAL BY V SEBE”<sup>22</sup> runs the proverb by which Solzhenitsyn stresses yet again the importance of the soul.

19. “We must join in the unhurried process of history. We must work, convince others, and move things gradually” (p. 537).

20. “That's man's only calling—to perfect the harmony of his own soul” (p. 376).

21. “One must try to temper, to cut, to polish one's soul in order to become a human being. And thereby become a tiny particle of one's own people” (*V krugе pervom*, p. 346; italics in the original).

22. “YOU SHOULD SEEK NOT IN THE VILLAGE, BUT IN YOURSELF” (p. 505).

Imbued with this Christian spirit, *August 1914* is true to the age that it describes, when the Christian faith was still an accepted part of Russian life, irrespective of social class. The characters have a sense of God as an almost physical presence. Before he commits suicide in the forest Samsonov feels at peace, secure in the knowledge that the forest belongs neither to the Germans nor to the Russians, but to God, and gives shelter to all God's creatures. Colonel Kabanov, whose body his men have carried for days, is buried in the forest when they can carry him no farther. Despite the danger that the Germans will surprise them, the burial is not a hurried affair but a simple ceremony of great dignity. Blagodarev's powerful voice fills the forest as he chants the prayers, and most of those present are deeply moved.

Two characters in the novel are out of tune with this Christian spirit. One is the young landowner Roman Tomchak, a worldly cynic who is opposed to the monarchy, opposed to the war, and suspicious of patriots, but too attached to his own property to be a socialist. His favorite writer is Gorky, but his admiration for him is restrained because Gorky is a socialist. Tomchak is a rich dilettante—without ideals, without beliefs, and loving only himself. In Tomchak, Solzhenitsyn shows a vast spiritual emptiness. It is sensed by all around him. His father sees it clearly, and finally grows exasperated enough to cut him off from his inheritance. The son has no faith in God—his soul is a blank space. The continuity that Zakhar Tomchak deems essential would end if Roman were to inherit:

Не деньги, не имение гибло — Роман не вертопрах, но нарушался главный ясный стержень дела, душа его. Чтоб наследовать и верно вести — душа должна продолжать душу. А для этого чужого, черного — зачем было всё сделано и налажено?<sup>23</sup>

A character more deserving of admiration, but in some respects similar, is Lenartovich, a young army officer from a family with strong socialist tendencies. He is depicted, not without sympathy, as a rational idealist who has not quite the courage of his convictions. He hates the war, which he sees as an international swindle aimed at the working classes, and detests the patriotic slogans that go with it. All his actions at the front are half-hearted and in danger of appearing cowardly, because though he would be more than willing to die for the revolution, he cannot bear the thought of dying for nothing in a pointless struggle with Germany. A prisoner of his reason and his instinct for self-preservation, he is the very opposite of Kharitonov, a young officer not unlike Tolstoy's Nikolai Rostov, who overflows with spontaneous generosity

23. "It was not the money, it was not the estate which had gone to ruin—Roman was not a scatterbrain. But the most important thing, the crux of the matter, had given way—his soul. In order to inherit, and to manage one's inheritance properly, one soul must continue another. But why had everything been arranged and prepared for this dark, alien spirit?" (p. 70).

and self-sacrifice. Even Lenartovich's abortive attempt to desert to the German side to work for the revolution in the safety of emigration is half-hearted, because his reason tells him that left-wing agitators will be no more welcome behind the German lines than they are on his own side.

Just as Roman Tomchak's spiritual condition is sensed by his family, so an alien spirit in Lenartovich is felt almost instinctively by all who come in contact with him. When Vorotyntsev and Kharitonov and their small group of men meet him in the forest, they immediately distrust him. They take him with them, but exclude him from discussions on how to get back to their own lines. Nowhere is his alienation more apparent than at the burial of Kabanov, where the fourteen other men take part in a moving Christian ceremony while Lenartovich skulks in the background and does not join in the prayers:

И невидим был лишь последний, самый задний, не подпевший ни разу, с кривоватой улыбкой сожаления, но все же голову обнаживший Ленартович.<sup>24</sup>

Like Tomchak he is set apart from his contemporaries by his lack of faith.

The Orthodox faith, which Tomchak and Lenartovich lack, is a vital element of the Russia that Solzhenitsyn loves. (It is significant that Samsonov's thick voice is like the sound of Russian church bells.) Solzhenitsyn admires the solid, reliable peasant, like Blagodarev, whose faith is inborn and unquestioning. Yet his portrayal of Blagodarev never becomes sentimental, unlike Tolstoy's Karataev. Solzhenitsyn loves the rich language of the peasants, their songs, proverbs, and popular sayings:

Во всем многотысячном комплексе своих пословиц народ был более откровенен о себе, чем даже Толстой и Достоевский в своих исповедях.<sup>25</sup>

Nine chapters of *August 1914* end with proverbial sayings, all in capital letters. The novel as a whole ends with such a saying, one that is essential to the meaning of the work: "NE NAMI NEPRAVDA STALAS', NE NAMI I KONCHITSIA."<sup>26</sup> The author's feeling for the land of his birth is clear in the opening chapters, as Isaakii drives out of his native village on a fine summer morning headed for Moscow to enlist.

In the closing chapters Solzhenitsyn's concern for the fate of his country

24. "Only the very last one could not be seen, the one right at the back, with a crooked smile of pity on his face, not joining in the chanting. He had, however, bared his head. It was Lenartovich" (p. 451).

25. "In their thousands of proverbs the Russian people were more candid about themselves than Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in their confessions" (*V krughe pervom*, p. 507).

26. "WE DID NOT INVENT UNTRUTHS, AND WE CANNOT DESTROY THEM" (p. 571).

emerges with renewed emphasis. The sense of impending doom that preceded the defeat at Tannenberg returns. One is reminded that Tannenberg was only the first in a series of catastrophes, and that several more must come before the final blow. Vorotyntsev, the only officer qualified to give a realistic appraisal of the situation, is ejected from a conference of the High Command by Grand Duke Nikolai himself, because his attempts to impress upon his superiors the true magnitude of the disaster are not welcome, and because he maintains that it is not right to place all the blame on Samsonov. There are both pathos and gentle humor in Solzhenitsyn's description of the grand duke's delight at receiving a telegram from the tsar expressing sympathy and promising to send the icon that Peter the Great took to Poltava. The tsar's gesture is genuinely well-meant, but under the circumstances hopelessly naïve. His good intentions are not enough. The grand duke's confidence that with this icon further defeats will be unthinkable is touching, yet to the reader, who has the advantage of hindsight, this passage must seem as ironic as the predictions of victory that Solzhenitsyn picks from the newspaper headlines. Given such an attitude toward the war, one feels that it is already too late to prevent the defeats that are to follow.

In a conversation with General Nechvolodov, Colonel Smyslovsky tries to see the events of the war in a broader perspective. He speaks of the insignificance of Serbia and East Prussia on a universal scale, of the fragility of human existence on the earth's thin crust, and of the fact that the human race must eventually become extinct as the chemical nature of the planet changes. Seen in this light, even man's most disastrous wars seem petty. Smyslovsky wonders about the origin of life on earth and about the eternal mystery of creation—subjects on which Tolstoy so often dwells.

Solzhenitsyn is drawing our attention to the unfathomable ways of God, who to him is the sole arbiter of human destiny—the main theme of his novel. He says that man has practically no control over his own deeds or his own fate. No amount of rational thought can influence human affairs. Only faith can bring one to a limited understanding of them. *August 1914* is the author's attempt to illuminate the ways of history through his own faith.