

# Conscience, Lie, and Suffering in Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*

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THE HAUNTING CHOICE: to live with power, women, and money by concealing truth, or to be arrested and possibly to die in prison by revealing truth. Innokenty Volodin, state counselor second rank of Soviet Russia, is caught in this ethical dilemma at the beginning of Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*.<sup>1</sup> He is a young diplomat who knows that in a few days he will be assigned to a new post in Paris. As an official working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he also knows the government's secret plan to trap an innocent man, Dr. Dobroumov, who happens to be a family friend. Should he telephone his friend and expose this secret or not? This question has captivated him for several hours. It is a matter of conscience.

Having been brought up in the Soviet system and carefully shielded from so-called outcast books, Innokenty Volodin had believed until recently that pity and compassion were shameful emotions. In recent years, however, he had discovered that something was lacking in himself, and that "something" finally assumed a more precise identity a few days before while he was reading the diaries of his deceased mother. The diaries seemed to speak directly to him: "Pity is the first action of a good soul. . . . What is the most precious thing in the world? Not to participate in injustice. . . . You also have only one conscience. And just as you cannot recover a

lost life, you cannot recover a wrecked conscience" (FC 397-99). This awareness of conscience makes Volodin realize that he cannot ignore the injustice of the trap intended for Dr. Dobroumov and that he should save the life of the innocent man despite the danger to his own life. Thus he comes to believe that one cannot "remain a human being" without conscience (FC 4).

In the same novel readers find another character who holds Volodin's view on conscience: Gleb Nerzhin. Actually Nerzhin is the main character and is often identified with Solzhenitsyn himself. Toward the end of *The First Circle* Nerzhin defines his perceptions of conscience:

I had no idea what good and evil were, and whatever was allowed seemed fine to me. But the lower I sink into this inhumanly cruel world the more I respond to those who, even in such a world, speak to my conscience [FC 600].

As their subsequent actions reveal, both Volodin and Nerzhin are willing to experience physical suffering in order to live according to their consciences. For both characters it is conscience that enables them to live as human beings. Solzhenitsyn does not define exactly what conscience is, nor does he even question where it originates. He is neither a

philosopher nor a theologian. As a novelist he believes out of his own experience that "convictions based on conscience are as infallible as the internal rhythm of the heart."<sup>2</sup> He thinks that conscience is a moral quality "inherent" in the human heart, a moral quality that must be awakened and polished, however. For those who take it seriously, conscience provides a tremendously strong inner force that asserts the meaning of life even in unendurable situations. On the other hand, unfortunately, conscience can be repressed or totally denied in the minds of those who never seriously acknowledge the meaning of human life. Until he read his mother's diaries, Volodin's conscience was dormant. Once awakened, though, it rebelled against injustice.

According to Solzhenitsyn, in *The First Circle* as well as in his other writings, conscience is a moral quality that basically works in an individual's mind and leads him to a sense of justice. When injustice is accompanied by overwhelming political power, so that an innocent man is arrested, what can make the man "stronger than the whole trap?" Solzhenitsyn's answer is this: only his "spirit and conscience remain precious and important" to him, and when "confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogator will tremble."<sup>3</sup> How can a man who has lost nearly all things on earth, including his family and friends, make injustice tremble? Solzhenitsyn sees the answer in one's consciousness of spirit and of conscience. By placing conscience on the same level as spirit, Solzhenitsyn treats the moral quality of conscience as a spiritual quality that arms one to fight even the most severe injustice.

Conscience and injustice are integrated concepts in Solzhenitsyn. For example, in his *Letter to Three Students*, Solzhenitsyn explains their interdependence:

There is nothing relative about justice, as there is nothing relative about conscience. Indeed justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but conscience of the whole of humanity.

Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice. I consider that in all questions, social or historical, justice will always suggest a way to act (or judge) which will not conflict with our conscience.<sup>4</sup>

Examined carefully, this statement reveals conscience and justice as axiomatically absolute: conscience is related to the personal whereas justice is related to the social and "the whole of humanity." Thus, an individually conscientious man can be a socially just man without any internal conflicts. In Solzhenitsyn's philosophy there is no wall between the individual and society. Although he does not in this particular statement indicate a priority between them, his strong opposition to the collective value of Marxism obviously indicates his preference for the individual over society. Thus, consciousness of the individual conscience is a prerequisite to social justice, a view clearly demonstrated in Solzhenitsyn's sketches of individuals such as Shukhov in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Matryona in *Matryona's House*, and Spiridon in *The First Circle*.

Another of Solzhenitsyn's tenets is that before individuals respond to their personal conscience, they first need to be conscious of it. Among the individuals portrayed in his novels and short stories, Solzhenitsyn depicts different degrees of awareness of conscience and of the individual responses to it. Unfortunately, in a Communist state like the Soviet Union individuals are not allowed to seek any personal meaning for their lives; and thus innate qualities such as conscience and spirit are intentionally (or rationally) denied. Therefore, the majority of the followers of communism try, or pretend, not to be conscious of conscience; and although some do gain such consciousness, they have either to deny it or to ignore it. Since conscience is innate, their denial of it is therefore tantamount to the denial of their inner lives. Can one be a human being without recognizing one's own inner life? Solzhenitsyn does not

believe so. For instance, in *The First Circle* Kondrashev says, "A human being possesses from his birth a certain essence, the nucleus, as it were, of this human being. His 'I'" (FC 297). As an inherent quality, conscience is for Solzhenitsyn this very "certain essence." When a person denies consciousness of this "essence," he is not a human being. He is no different from an animal. Thus Solzhenitsyn often compares Stalin's followers to dogs. The denial of this innately human quality is more conspicuous among rationally oriented intellectual Communists such as Rubin in *The First Circle* and Rusanov in *Cancer Ward*. Solzhenitsyn, however, finds evidence of unpolished conscience among peasants.

Solzhenitsyn's fiction, however, does not idealize peasants. He discovered personally during World War II that peasants, without intellectual guidelines, act instinctively for the most part according to the principle of self-preservation. And yet Solzhenitsyn is attracted to peasants for their simple lives in which they appear to have "retained and not perverted their human nature, as much of the intelligentia has done."<sup>5</sup>

Nerzhin's compassion for Spiridon in *The First Circle*, for example, is generated by his discovery of that essence of human nature in Spiridon. Nerzhin asks Spiridon:

After all, life changes, doesn't it? I mean, if a person can't always be sure that he is right then how can he act? Is it conceivable that any human being on earth can really tell who is right and who is wrong? Who can be sure about this [FC 466]?

And to this philosophically relativistic question, Spiridon replies readily, "I will tell you: the wolf-hound is right and the cannibal is wrong" (FC 466). Nerzhin, who is "struck by the simplicity and force of the answer," now realizes that Spiridon's sense of right and wrong as a peasant is deeply based on that inherent quality of a human being — his conscience — not on an intellectually indoctrinated ideology. Spiridon is half-blind and cannot read. On

June 15, 1970, in protesting the government policy on censorship, Solzhenitsyn warned:

The lawless, the evildoers, must remember that there is a limit beyond which a man becomes a cannibal! It is short-sighted to think that one can live by constantly relying on force alone, constantly ignoring the protests of conscience.<sup>6</sup>

Adherence to conscience by peasants is more vividly portrayed in Shukhov's life in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. With all the hardship and physical sufferings he has to endure every day under the freezing temperature of the labor camp, Shukhov never takes a bribe, and he willingly helps other prisoners. Similarly, the conscientious life of Matryona, a peasant, is impressively described in *Matryona's House*. No one can deny that these are righteous people. "Without them," Solzhenitsyn concludes at the end of *Matryona's House*, "no city can stand. Neither can the whole world."<sup>7</sup> In other words, without people of conscience, no human society can stand, nor can the whole world of mankind stand.

## II

A COUNTERPART to his theme of conscience is Solzhenitsyn's personification of dishonesty and deceit. Compared with Nerzhin's constant search for truth and Volodin's self-criticism in search of conscience, for instance, Stalin is portrayed in *The First Circle* as the epigone of the Grand Inquisitor.<sup>8</sup> The seventy-year-old dictator thinks of himself as the greatest benefactor of humanity ever born. Doubting that Christ ever existed, he regards himself as the Omnipotent and the Immortal. Even at that age, he refuses to believe that he is getting old, not trusting the doctor's report. Believing that he is the only benevolent leader who can bring the Communist ideal of total happiness to all mankind, this character cannot die because he does not know "in whose care" he can leave humanity.

In describing Solzhenitsyn's portrait of Stalin, Vladislav Krasnov illustrates numerous satanic elements in this character, in many ways paralleling Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor: "Satan who spoke through the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's novel now appears to be speaking through Stalin."<sup>9</sup> In fact, the deceptive nature of Satan as a great liar is found everywhere in Solzhenitsyn's descriptions of Stalin's self-concept, life-style, and relationships with his subordinates.

Stalin's self-concept is simply a self-deception. Denying that he is growing old and that he will die indicates his desire to deny reality. Even resigning himself to eventual death, he thinks that he will die as "the greatest of the Great, without equal in the history of the earth." He even fantasizes that people will build a monument to him on the peak of "Mount Kazbek and another on Mount Elbrus — so that his head would always be above the clouds."

Suddenly he stopped.

And up there? Higher? He had no equals, of course, but if there, up there. . . . [FC 131].

Aspiring to be man-god, Stalin subscribes to an absolute dogmatism which does not allow him to respect anyone else on earth. He has low respect for people who he believes cannot govern themselves, a point on which he disagrees with Lenin. He thinks that every cook is a cook and every housewife a housewife, so that their participation in meetings of the provincial executive committee is unthinkable. As for a cook, "Her job is to prepare dinner. As for governing people, that's high calling" (FC 110). He does not trust anyone. Solzhenitsyn summarizes his character with "Mistrust was his world view," and then describes him in more detail:

He had not trusted his mother. And he has not trusted that God before whom he had bowed his head to the stone floor for eleven years of his youth.

Later he did not trust his own fellow Party members, especially those who spoke well. He did not trust his fellow exiles. He did not trust the peasants to sow grain and reap harvest unless they were coerced and their work was regularly checked on. He did not trust workers to work unless production norms were set for them. He did not trust members of the intelligentsia not to commit sabotage. He did not trust soldiers and generals to fight without the threat of penalty regiments and machine guns in their rear. He did not trust his intimates. He did not trust his wives and mistresses. He did not trust his children. And he always turned out to be right [FC 122].

Stalin's disrespect for and mistrust of people and officials increase his suspicion about the motivations for their actions and thus intensify his use of terrorism in ruling them. General Abakumov, minister of State Security, knows this fact very well. In his meeting with Stalin at 2:30 in the morning he is afraid of telling the truth on the secret telephone project he now supervises under Stalin's order. One mistake means the end of Abakumov's life; and if asked about it, he has no choice but to tell a lie. As the head of State Security he knows better than anyone else that his government poses no obstacles to arresting and killing people. Thus, Abakumov resorts to lies and pretensions as the safest and most efficient way to survive personally and to get anything approved through Stalin's office. At one point, waiting to meet Stalin in the hallway, Abakumov asks Stalin's secretary what the leader's mood is. Even during his meeting with Stalin, he has a constant feeling of fear; and he knows that it is essential to respond immediately to his questions because Stalin interprets "any kind of hesitation as a confirmation of . . . evil thoughts" (FC 125).

Ironically but consistently, Abakumov's relations with his own subordinates are no different from Stalin's: he too is suspicious of his subordinates' answers. Demanding

from them the completion date of the secret project, he says, "Don't lie. I don't like lies" (FC 82). There is no mutual trust among these Communist leaders at all.

According to Solzhenitsyn's description, trust is the last thing that concerns officials in the Soviet government. Submission of reports on time seems to be more important than reporting the truth, and the end result is always more important than the means. The government does not care how many innocent citizens are arrested to find one criminal. Even in the case of detecting the person who telephoned Dr. Dobroumov's house, the authorities arrest six or seven suspects. After they find that those suspects are the wrong ones, instead of releasing them, they still attempt "to pin the case on one of them." The concern of the authorities, then, is not to find the real criminal. Rather, their chief concern is their own promotions and winning of prizes, selfish goals pursued through lies and the arrest of innocent people. In fact, Solzhenitsyn calls the three subordinates of Abakumov "the troika of liars," a chapter title in *The First Circle*; and this chapter vividly describes the deceptive nature of the operation of the Soviet security system.

David M. Halperin, in his article "The Role of the Lie in *The First Circle*," makes the following observation:

In *The First Circle* Solzhenitsyn examines both the omnipresence of lying as a demonstrable feature of Soviet society and as a metaphysical, demonic device. By uniting these two aspects of the Lie, he has effectively forged his central metaphor—Hell; for it is from Stalin just as from the devil that lies emanate to poison a whole society.<sup>10</sup>

Halperin's interpretation is so true that anyone reading *The First Circle* cannot avoid discovering how the lie can be institutionalized as a political system. In the three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn untiringly discloses various functions of the lie in the Soviet government; *The First Circle* portrays just one

case of several dozen included in that monumental work.

Since individual Soviet citizens do not have freedom to speak openly against government policies, Solzhenitsyn's fiction seems to depict the entire nation as a prison. Ironically, Nerzhin finds more freedom for exchanging opinions and thoughts in Mavrino, the special Soviet prison established after World War II to house scientist-prisoners so that the government might use their skills as well as their brains. At least in prison, in contrast with Soviet society at large, the prisoners are free to speak since they have already lost their freedom and need not be afraid of losing more. Most of them, like Nerzhin, are innocent prisoners, known as "zeks," arrested by Stalin for their conscientious actions. They know that what they read in books and newspapers and what they hear through communication media from the so-called free society outside Mavrino are lies and propaganda. Thus, in the gigantic system that protects the deceptive figure of the satanic Stalin and his policies, one can hardly distinguish between truth and lies. Solzhenitsyn reflected upon this fact in a 1975 speech to an American audience: "When so many lies have accumulated over the decades, we forget the radical and basic lie which is not on the leaves of the tree but at its very roots."<sup>11</sup>

The imagery of lie is just as vivid, with two elements in particular symbolizing deception in *The First Circle*: the Mavrino buildings and the orange and blue van that carries the prisoners through the streets of Moscow. The buildings were once an old church and a seminary, and the government must have been afraid of revealing to the public that they are now being used as a prison. Family visits with the prisoners are not held at Mavrino; the prisoners are transported to other prisons for these visits. Even the van that moves the prisoners through the streets is symbolic of this deception. Written on its side are names of foods, advertisements prompting a French correspondent to write in his notebook:

On the streets of Moscow one often sees vans filled with foodstuffs, very neat and hygienically impeccable. One can only conclude that the provisioning of the capital is excellent [FC 674].

These symbols emphasize that in the materialistic sense of Marxism, human beings, like these prisoners, can be no more than mere meat since their spiritual element is not recognized. Solzhenitsyn challenges this ideology. To him a human being is a human being regardless of his status as long as he possesses "the essence," the innate quality with which he was born. He cannot be reduced to a thing or to an animal. For example, Nerzhin's skepticism about Stalin and the Soviet ideology is traceable back to his adolescence. He can accept neither the deterministic theory of communism nor the lies of Stalin. Even in prison, in spite of the prison officer's offer of his early release, Nerzhin refuses to cooperate with Stalin's subordinates in a project that would eventually harm innocent people. Contrary to the Communist dictum, he believes that circumstance should not dictate his consciousness. His consciousness is dictated by his own conscience. Because of his conscience Nerzhin is finally sent away to a northern labor camp. Symbolically, then, he is moved down to a lower hell, since Mavrino is the first circle of Dante's hell. Nevertheless, Nerzhin cannot give up his spirit and conscience because he would rather suffer in hell and die as a human being than live in a deceptive society and die as an animal.

### III

WOVEN INTO THE interdependent themes of conscience and the lie is Solzhenitsyn's complicated portrayal of suffering. Three levels of suffering are depicted in *The First Circle*: physical, psychological, and spiritual. Compared with his other major novels such as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *Cancer Ward*, and *The Gulag Archipelago*, *The First Circle* has the least description of physical suffering. Prisoners

in Mavrino, for example, no less than scientists in the general populace, are well fed and supplied with technical and professional journals appropriate for their work. Their fingers are not frozen, and they have meat at dinner. They live in the special first circle of Dante's hell. They are at Mavrino not for physical but primarily for mental work. Nerzhin's cutting wood in the chilly morning, in fact, is not forced labor but rather voluntary work to preserve his physical condition. In contrast, the most shuddering scenes of physical suffering in *The First Circle* occur when Volodin is arrested and interrogated at the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow. Still, physical suffering is the last significant category of suffering in this novel.

Nerzhin and his inmate friends, however, do experience significant psychological suffering. Separated from their families for several years and without much hope of being released in the near future, the majority of the prisoners are indifferent to one another as they struggle for daily survival. Among them some are opportunistically trying to gain more favorable treatment from the prison officials. Among the few who have not lost their psychological vivacity, there is one prisoner, Rubin, who still believes in the superiority of communism; he thinks that his imprisonment by Stalin must certainly be some mistake. Every year he pleads with the authorities for reconsideration. Gradually, however, through conversations with other inmates, he comes to realize the flaws of communism. Even though the flaws become clear in his mind, he is afraid of confronting his conscience and admitting them publicly. Another prisoner, Sologdin, stands in clear opposition to Rubin's view. He is a man of strong will, exceptional strength, and vitality. Sologdin even commits adultery with a female employee of the prison. He rejects Rubin's confidence in the philosophy of communism and takes the opposite view, which emphasizes self-centered individualism. Nevertheless, when he is offered an early release if he cooperates with the prison authorities,

Sologdin deceives himself and accepts. Thus Solzhenitsyn dramatizes that preserving psychological integrity in prison life is very difficult.

Among the 281 inmates only a few overcome the psychological anguish and preserve their personal integrity. Gleb Nerzhin and the prison artist Kondrashev are two of them. How do they maintain their integrity? With their belief in the human spirit. The physical and psychological suffering of prison life forges their spirit rather than breaks it. Solzhenitsyn demonstrates in this novel that only spirit can overcome suffering. He believes that every human being needs to possess this spirit so that, even in this age of terrorism and violence, he can still live with dignity and with love for his fellow man.

Solzhenitsyn believes that the human spirit is forged through physical and psychological suffering, a process that can be understood only by understanding the spiritual meaning of any suffering. Solzhenitsyn's fiction relates the meaning of human suffering to the preservation of the human spirit, a concept closely related to the complementary themes of the conscience, acting against injustice, and the lie. The metaphysical meaning of human suffering must be understood in terms of the tension between conscience and lie in order to achieve a full appreciation of this novel.

*The First Circle* dramatizes the tension between conscience and lie prevalent not only in the Soviet Union but also in all other authoritarian nations. When political and social power is in the hands of liars who have the privilege of exercising violence and terrorism, the obvious victims are the innocent. And why do the innocent suffer? A perennial question in human history, it is a harsh paradox. Without the suffering of the innocent, however, very little in human history would be worthy of respect. In this novel the innocent suffer, and conscience is violated by terrorism. Volodin is arrested, and his interrogation is horrifying and hideous. Nerzhin, in his fifth year in

prison, is sent to Siberia or an Arctic labor camp where he can hardly expect to survive. What is the meaning of these sufferings?

This fundamental question in Solzhenitsyn's writings is related to his belief that a man is not born merely to live. All animals are born to live, but what makes a human being different is that he chooses to live *humanly*. A human being is compelled to realize "how to live" as the ultimate concern. For prisoners, to "survive by whatever means" seems an instinctive order to themselves, and it is true that their desire to survive is more acute and desperate than that of anyone living in free society. And yet Solzhenitsyn asks: "Survive! At any price?"<sup>12</sup> Survival should not be "at the price of someone else."<sup>13</sup> Then, with deep passion, he concludes, "It is not the result that counts! It is not the result — but the spirit! Not *what* — but *how*."<sup>14</sup> His message is clear: the idea valued only for its result is a lie.

In Solzhenitsyn's view, "the spirit" and "how" are identical. The spirit, like conscience, allows a man to be a reflective and critical being. With spirit man is autonomous. Thus, Solzhenitsyn's moral man cannot accept any deterministic ideology that attempts to break the spirit. Clearly this view poses a direct confrontation between the moral man and the totalitarian system of Soviet communism.

Under Stalin the intention of Soviet communism was to eliminate any individual critical of government policies. Human beings were simply tools working for goals set by Stalin and supported by the communist ideology. Whoever resisted being a tool in this system was arrested and imprisoned as a forced laborer. Solzhenitsyn himself was arrested, as was Nerzhin in *The First Circle*. Since violence and terrorism were part of the state system, a moral man within this system could not avoid suffering. This suffering was fundamentally and necessarily the human act of refusing to be a "thing."

In *The First Circle* Gleb Nerzhin obviously cannot accept the deterministic theory of communism. He is a skeptic, but not a

pessimistic one. In his response to the young prisoner Ruska, Nerzhin says:

"No matter how clever and absolute the systems of skepticism or agnosticism or pessimism, you must understand that by their very nature they doom us to a loss of will. They can't really influence human behavior because people cannot stand still. And that means they can't renounce systems which affirm something, which summon them to advance in some direction. . . . I personally believe that people seriously need skepticism. It's needed to split the rockheads. To choke fanatical voices. But skepticism can never provide firm ground under a man's feet. And perhaps, after all, we need firm ground" [FC 78].

In Nerzhin's mind it is clear that one needs, but must also go beyond, skepticism. Why? "Because people cannot stand still." As long as they live and have blood and feeling and the desire to live humanly, there have to be "systems which affirm something," a firm foundation, a firm ground on which a human being can stand. Ruska, as a young man, once had high hope; but that hope was overwhelmed by the winds of society. Circumstance now controls his consciousness until he is imprisoned and becomes a pessimistic skeptic. But Nerzhin advises Ruska not to lose hope, but to search for the meaning of life — advice implying that, without the ground of personal conscience, one can be blown away by the winds of social circumstances. To struggle against the winds causes suffering, but one cannot give up the ground because the ground gives meaning to one's life.

The symbolic meaning of human life and this "ground" of the conscientious spirit is vividly described in Kondrashev's painting "The Maimed Oak." Following his wife's visit, Nerzhin stops to see Kondrashev, the prison painter, at his studio. There Nerzhin finds a six-foot-high painting, disdained by the officials at Mavrino, but impressive to Nerzhin. He describes it with a sense of awe:

It showed a solitary oak which grew with mysterious power on the naked face of a cliff, where a perilous trail wound upward along the crag. What hurricanes had blown here! How they had bent that oak! And the skies behind the tree and all around were eternally storm-swept. These skies could never have known the sun. This stubborn, angular tree with its clawing roots, with its branches broken and twisted, deformed by combat with the tireless winds trying to tear it from the cliff, refused to quit the battle and perilously clung to its place over the abyss [FC 290].

In this painting, Nerzhin observes that the spirit of the maimed oak in refusing "to quit the battle" with "the tireless winds" is like a human being stubbornly refusing to lose the battle against the terrorism of the Soviet Union. This act of refusal, which characterizes the suffering of the stubborn and conscientious man, embodies the growth of a "mysterious power."

Solzhenitsyn's description of the painting emphasizes symbolically that the conscientious man, like the maimed oak, cannot lose the battle; and the mysterious power growing within him brings him dignity. For the one who suffers because of conscience, to win the battle is important. But more important is it to recognize that mysterious power that helps a man survive as a human being. Without this recognition one cannot survive humanly. The significance of suffering is found in a man's consciousness of that power — that power of spirit, conscience, and "the essence" forged from whatever suffering a man experiences.

For Solzhenitsyn suffering is an opportunity through which a man can test his spirit. When a man is imbued with that mysterious inner power that grows stronger as he refuses to compromise, he becomes too honest to lie even when it seems he should. When human beings stop lying, there will be no violence and terrorism in the world, the ideal world Solzhenitsyn dreams about. The author

knows, however, that this world of individual and societal imperfections is far from realizing his ideal. Until mankind arrives at this insight wherein conscience overcomes the lie, suffering will be the inevitable path that the man of conscience must follow. In the thematic complexities of *The First Circle* Solzhenitsyn personifies his somber philosophy through vividly

memorable characters and their perceptions of the world in which they struggle. To live humanly is a heavy burden that one cannot easily relinquish — for it is very difficult to be a human being — but to grow into truth through suffering is the purest good attainable for the human conscience.

<sup>1</sup>The edition used for this article is *The First Circle*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York, 1969). All the passages cited are indicated following each passage by "FC" and the page number. <sup>2</sup>Leopold Labedz, ed., *Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record* (New York, 1971), p. 101. <sup>3</sup>Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation I-II*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York, 1973), p. 130. <sup>4</sup>Labedz, p. 151. <sup>5</sup>John B. Dunlop, "The Odyssey of a Skeptic: Gleb Nerzhin," in Dunlop, Haugh, and Klimoff, eds., *Alexandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (Belmont, Mass., 1973), p. 252. <sup>6</sup>Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union*, trans. Harry Willetts (New York, 1979), p. 495. <sup>7</sup>Solzhenitsyn, *Stories and Prose Poems*, trans.

Michael Glenny (New York, 1972), p. 42. <sup>8</sup>A detailed description of Stalin from this view is made in chapter 2 of Vladislav Krasnov's *Solzhenitsyn and Dostoevsky* (Athens, Ga., 1980). <sup>9</sup>Krasnov, p. 27. <sup>10</sup>David M. Halperin, "The Role of the Lie in *The First Circle*" in Dunlop, Haugh, and Klimoff, pp. 262-63. This article is very helpful to an understanding of the functional aspect of the lie. My approach, however, is different from Halperin's. I attempt to explain the inevitability of lies as a consequence of disrespect and mistrust in the personal relationship between superiors and subordinates. <sup>11</sup>Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West* (New York, 1976), p. 7. <sup>12</sup>Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, p. 602. <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 603. <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 609.

## Index to Reviews and Comments

- |     |  |                      |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 354 | "Henry James's Book of Changes"<br>Leon Edel, ed., <i>Henry James: Letters, Volume IV: 1895-1916</i>                           | George A. Panichas   |
| 361 | "Dante in Translation"<br>C. H. Sisson, trans., <i>The Divine Comedy</i>   | Clara Claiborne Park |
| 365 | "The Mediterranean and the Desert"<br>Fouad Ajami, <i>The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967</i> | Antony T. Sullivan   |
| 369 | "The Thinking of the Ages"<br>John H. Hallowell, <i>Main Currents in Modern Political Thought</i>                              | René Williamson      |
| 372 | "The Problem of Romanticism"<br>Folke Leander, <i>Romantik och moral</i>   | Carl Johan Ljungberg |
| 374 | "Fidelity and Loneliness"<br>Zdzislaw Najder, <i>Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle</i>  | Larry Williams       |
| 378 | "The Edmund Burke of Massachusetts"<br>W. B. Allen, ed., <i>Works of Fisher Ames</i>   | James M. Banner, Jr. |
| 380 | "Anthony Powell and Michael Oakeshott"   | John W. Osborne      |

# Henry James's *Book of Changes*

George A. Panichas

*Lordly men are to earth o'ergiven — Ezra Pound, Canto LXXIV*

**Henry James: Letters, Volume IV: 1895–1916**, edited by Leon Edel, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. xxxiv, 835 pp. \$30.00.

BETWEEN 1895, the year in which his play *Guy Domville* failed in London, precipitating Henry James's feeling that he had fallen upon evil days and was not "in the least *wanted*, anywhere or by any one," and 1916, the year in which he died, James enacted his own *Book of Changes*. He was to purchase a typewriter in 1897, for example, and start to dictate his writings to a typist: "The use of my hand, always difficult, has become impossible to me; and since I am reduced to dictation, this form of dictation is best. May its distinctiveness make up for its indirectness," he confided to Grace Norton. He was to leave London and to move into Lamb House, Rye, Sussex, in 1898:

I marked it [Lamb House] for my own two years ago at Rye — so perfectly did it [he writes to Mrs. William James], the first instant I beheld it, offer the solution of my long unassuaged desire for a calm retreat. . . . It is the very calmest and yet cheerfulness that I could have dreamed — in the little old, cobble-

stoned, grass-grown, red-roofed town, on the summit of its mildly pyramidal hill and close to its noble old church — the chimes of which will sound sweet in my goodly old red-walled garden.

He was, in the spring of 1900, to shave off his beard, which he had worn since the Civil War. As he announced to his brother William: "I have totally shaved off my beard, unable to bear any longer the increased hoariness of its growth." He was to begin a series of intimate friendships with gifted young men like Hendrik C. Andersen, Rupert Hart-Davis, Jocelyn Persse, and Hugh Walpole: "I not only love him — I *love* to love him," he said of Persse. He was to return to the United States in 1904–5, traveling widely and becoming "the restless analyst" of the "American scene." "Out of the midst of *this* unalterable or incalculable Democracy," he writes, "I don't, I confess, at all ardently democratise! The U.S.A. are prodigious, interesting, appalling." During the first year of the Great War of 1914–18 he was to assist the war effort by working with Belgian Relief, visiting the wounded in hospitals and supporting the American Volunteer Ambulance Brigade: "Horrors encompass us, I mean above all in the