Title: The Tolstoy Connection: The Role of the Russian Proverb in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *V kruge pervom*

Author: Kevin McKenna, University of Vermont

Most scholars agree that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's fiction reflects an affinity for the structure of the polyphonic novel often associated with his predecessor, Fyodor Dostoevsky. In terms of the thematics and moralistic viewpoint in Solzhenitsyn's writing, however, his work bears a far closer resemblance to Leo Tolstoy's predilection for didactic messages often embedded in the form of a Russian proverb. My paper will present some of the conclusions I have reached in this regard over the course of my current sabbatical research year devoted to a book I am writing on the Role of the Russian Proverb in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Fictional Writing. While my book addresses all the major works of the Nobel Prize laureate, my panel presentation will limit its scope to the Russian author's second novel, *В круге первом*.

I will address my thematic analysis specifically to the peasant wisdom contained in the proverb statement uttered at the close of the novel by Spiridon Yegorov to Gleb Nerzhin, the story's principal protagonist: Волкоед прав, а людоед нет. This timeless Russian proverb functions as a solution of sorts to the perplexing riddle that Nerzhin has wrestled with since the beginning of the novel: how must one conduct oneself in life maintaining one's personal integrity? Similarly, the peasant characters at the close of Tolstoy's Война и мир (Platon Karataev) and Анна Каренина (Fyodor) impart peasant wisdom in the form of Russian proverbs to Pierre Bezukhov and Konstantin Levin as the latter confront the moral/existential challenges that have plagued them throughout their respective novels.

In my analysis of the two Russian authors' works, I will make a case for the underlying reciprocal relationship between the didactic message of each novel and the vehicle of the Russian proverb, which functions to focus and articulate the central message that each author strives to present in his work.