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FEATURES

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"Books: Solzhenitsyn," Edmund Wilson, The New Yorker, 14 August 1971.

We are reissuing this 2 1/2 year old survey of Solzhenitsyn's writings as background on his accomplishments and stature by one of America's pre-eminent men-of-letters. With current attention focussed on "Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956," Wilson's review discusses Solzhenitsyn's major works of fiction with the exception of "August, 1914," which had not appeared at the time. Station officers and media assets not too familiar with Solzhenitsyn's biography and literary record should find Wilson's article a succinct and sympathetic understanding of the man and his writings.

An additional reason for resurrecting the Wilson piece at this time is that he illuminates an aspect of Solzhenitsyn that Wilson calls "his somewhat masochistic point of view." Wilson argues Russians are conditioned to accept this implicitly, but for "an Anglo-Saxon reader, there is something that rebels against this... Reading Solzhenitsyn in bulk, we are given the impression that nothing can ever come out right... The unvaried frustration in Solzhenitsyn becomes in the long run monotonous; one feels that it is systematic, that, except for his recognition of the virtue of sheer endurance, it is Solzhenitsyn's only theme. We always expect what is going to happen: someone is going to be cheated, to be disappointed, squelched." To this we would only add that, appropriate as it may seem to non-Russian readers, Solzhenitsyn is directing "Gulag Archipelago" at his fellow countrymen, and that as non-fiction, "Gulag" grows in significance to the extent these cited remarks by Wilson are substantiated by Solzhenitsyn's evidence.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

COPYRGHT

A CONSCIENTIOUS CALENDAR OF EVENTS OF INTEREST

THE THEATRE

(E. and W. mean East and West of Broadway.)

PLAYS

THE BASIC TRAINING OF PAVLO HUMMEL—This play by David Rabe, about the progress of a young soldier through training camp to combat (and death) in Vietnam, is a remarkable achievement indeed. William Atherton is the soldier, Albert Hall is his invisible mentor, and Joe Fields is his first sergeant. All of them are fine. The rest of the large and capable cast performs very well under Jeff Bleckner's direction. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 677-6350. Nightly, except Mondays, at 7:30. Matinées Saturdays and Sundays at 3.)

BLACK GIRL—J. E. Franklin's short, rich play, which is both poignant and funny, about a seventeen-year-old who, faced with many obstacles, manages to leave her bickering black family in Texas and go North to college. Kishasha gives a superior performance in the title role, and she receives strong support from, among others, Gloria Edwards, Arthur French, Minnie Gentry, and Louise Stubbs. Shauneille Perry directed. (Theatre de Lys, 121 Christopher St. WA 4-8782. Tuesdays through Fridays at 8:30; Saturdays at 7:30 and 10; and Sundays at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)

A FESTIVAL OF BLACK THEATRE—Friday through Sunday, Aug. 13-15: Bed-Stuy Theatre, Inc. ... Monday, Aug. 16: New Federal Theatre. ... Friday through Sunday, Aug. 20-22: Afro-American Total Theatre. (St. Marks Playhouse, 133 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. OR 4-3530. Mondays and Fridays at 8, and Saturdays at 7 and 10. Matinées Sundays at 3. Mondays are free.)

THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES—John Guare's ferocious, sad, and very funny farce deals with various aspects of the American dream, as made manifest in Sunnyside, Queens, in a story about a zoo attendant who longs to leave his insane wife and escape with his mistress to Hollywood. (Truck and Warehouse Theatre, 79 E. 4th St. 533-0010. Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30; Saturdays at 7 and 10; and Sundays at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)

LENNY—An American "Orlando Furioso" about the life and death of the bedevilled comic Lenny Bruce. Tom O'Horgan is the director, and the brilliant star of the show is Cliff Gorman. (Brooks Atkinson, 47th St., W. 245-3430. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT—John Beal, Carol Teitel, Donald Gantry, and Dan Hamilton are now the anguished Tyrones, and Paddy Croft is their maid. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. YU 9-2020. Nightly, except Mondays, at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 2.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST—Dale Wasserman's hack adaptation of Ken Kesey's novel, set in an insane asylum. The performances, though strenuous, don't amount to much. (Mercer-Hansberry, 240 Mercer St., at 3rd St. 673-3030. Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30, and Fridays and Saturdays at 7 and 10:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)

WAITING FOR GODOT—Tom Ewell in Beckett's comedy. (Sheridan Square Playhouse, 99 Seventh Ave. S., at Sheridan Sq. CH 2-3432. Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30; Saturdays at 7:30 and 10; and Sundays at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)

LONG RUNS—BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE: A comedy by Leonard Gershe, filled with surefire jokes and the merest pinch of life. With Rosemary Murphy, Kipp Osborne, and Pamella Bellwood. (Booth, 45th St., W. 246-5969. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)... THE DIRTIEST SHOW IN TOWN: An inflated claim. (McAlpin Rooftop Theatre, Broadway at 34th St. 239-6688. Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30; Fridays at 8 and 10:30; Saturdays at 7 and 10:30; and Sundays at 7:30.)... THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS: What matters most in this domestic drama is the character of its wisecracking, scornful, and very touching heroine—the down-at-heels mother of two cowed daughters. (New Theatre, 154 E. 54th St. 752-0440. Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30; Saturdays at 7 and 10; and Sundays at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)... LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS: Neil Simon's patented Little Wonder Laugh Machine, cranked up and set in motion by Dom DeLuise, Cathryn Damon, Carol Richards, and Doris Roberts. (Eugene O'Neill, 49th St., W. 246-0220. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)... SLEUTH: Anthony Quayle and Keith Baxter in Anthony Shaffer's intricate melodrama about one way of stamping out adultery in the English countryside. Starting Monday, Aug. 16, Donal Donnelly will fill in for Mr. Baxter for five weeks. (Music Box, 45th St., W. 246-4636. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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MUSICALS

FOLLIES—A disappointing show, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by James Goldman. Alexis Smith is very good as an old Follies girl, and several of Mr. Sondheim's songs are delightful. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 245-4878. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)

GODSPELL—A musical adaptation of the Book of Matthew, and once a numbing prologue is over, it becomes a joyful celebration of theatre itself. The troupe is young, refreshing, and versatile. Songs by Stephen Schwartz. (Promenade, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 799-7600. Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30; Saturdays at 7 and 10; and Sundays at 7:30. Matinées Sundays at 3.)

NO, NO, NANETTE—Burt Shevelove's ingeniously tailored revival of a nineteen-twenties smash hit. Raoul Pène du Bois has provided sets and costumes that literally scintillate, and the splendid cast includes Ruby Keeler, Jack Gilford, Helen Gallagher, and Bobby Van. Starting Monday, Aug. 16, Penny Singleton will substitute for Miss Keeler for two weeks. (46th Street Theatre, 46th St., W. 246-4271. Nightly, except Sundays, at 7:30. Matinées Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.)

THE PROPOSITION—An improvised revue with six good-humored young players from Boston. It is all pretty amateurish, but Jane Curtin and Judy Kahan provide a few bright spots of mimicry, and Danny Troob provides an enchanting musical accompaniment at the piano. (Mercer-Shaw Arena, 240 Mercer St., at 3rd St. 673-3937. Thursdays at 7:30; Fri-

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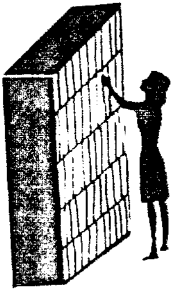
BOOKS

Solzhenitsyn



WE have known about the Russian purges, but we have not really been able to imagine them. The Nazi concentration camps have confronted us more immediately, since they were opened up by the Americans, and we have seen the photographs of piles of emaciated corpses. We were not aware that the Russians, with their undiscourageable literary gifts, had been assiduously writing up what had happened to them under Stalin's insane tyranny: Anna Akhmatova's harrowing "Requiem," which seems almost too intimate to be published; Miss Chukovskaya's "Abandoned House," which deals with a similar situation, of a woman whose son has been snatched away with no explanation and no possibility of communication; the memoirs of Mrs. Avinov, Mrs. Ginsburg, and Mrs. Mandelshtam (which last, in its protracted misery, becomes at last almost unbearable), together with other first-hand accounts of hardship and humiliation. But the most thoroughgoing exposé has of course been that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Solzhenitsyn had graduated with honors in physics and mathematics from the University of Rostov and had taught physics in a school at Rostov. (I mainly follow the short biographical sketch in the collected works, published in Germany.) His career was interrupted in 1942 by the war, and he became commander of an artillery battery. He distinguished himself in the field, received a commission as captain, and was decorated with the Order of the Red Star. In February of 1945, he was arrested for criticizing Stalin in his diary and in letters to a friend, and for alleged "anti-Soviet agitation." He was charged with having participated in "the creation of an anti-Soviet organization," and sentenced to eight years in labor camps and afterward to "perpetual exile." It was only after the [illegible] masking of the 'personality cult'" of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress that he was at last "rehabilitated." He now went back to teaching physics in Ryazan. Friends tried to persuade him to come to Moscow, but he refused, "because he feared that he would be deprived of the quiet and repose so necessary to him in the literary work to which he had decided to devote himself." When, later, he did want to go to Moscow, the authorities refused him permission. His imprisonment had, however, been somewhat alleviated by permission to teach physics. Solzhenitsyn's long short story "One Day of Ivan Denisovich" (the title is so in Russian), a description of life in a labor camp, was published in *Novy Mir* under the somewhat looser regime of Khrushchev, in 1962. But his more elaborate novels, so damaging in their criticism of Soviet society—"The Cancer Ward" and "The First Circle"—have never been published in Russia. What happened to Solzhenitsyn as a result of these books is well known. He was expelled from the Writers' Union; he was awarded the Nobel Prize but he would not go to Sweden to get it, because he was afraid of not being allowed to return to the Soviet Union. He was determined to remain in Russia and to work for a more enlightened regime.

One can well understand how embarrassing Solzhenitsyn must seem to the Writers' Union, who are committed to representing the regime in the most favorable possible light. Solzhenitsyn, who had fought against the Germans, whose activities as a scholar had been abruptly cut off by the war, who had been condemned for a long term of years to the waste of his time and energies on rudimentary forms of labor, resolved to spare nothing and nobody, to make known what had been going on in those years of meaningless repression, and to continue to protest against the Stalinist practices which were still being imposed in Russia. One cannot beyond a certain point sweep the crimes of the past under the carpet. If Stalin's reign, while it lasted, constituted one of the blackest patches of human history, if its followers are functioning today, we must face it, we cannot blot it out. Let the repulsive story be told. There is a man of great [illegible] tell it. And the Russians have too long been masters of making the most sordid, the most painful, the most degrading aspects of their lives absorbingly dramatic stories.

In Solzhenitsyn's case, "The Cancer Ward" presented, surely, from the literary point of view, a very peculiar challenge. How would it be possible, one might wonder, to provide an interesting narrative out of the materials furnished by a lot of patients suffering from, many dying of, cancer, with their staff of doctors and nurses? The subject is unpleasant, depressing—in its medical aspects, highly technical. The scene is a provincial hospital, far from Moscow and attached to Tashkent, with all the deficiencies and ineptitudes characteristic of such an institution. The reviewer has had first-hand experience of a similar hospital in Odessa, where he was quarantined for nearly six weeks, and he can vouch for the veracity of Solzhenitsyn's picture, which is also based on first-hand experience. True, the central Solzhenitsyn-figure is finally cured and dismissed. The story has been somewhat enlivened by two incipient love affairs, with a nurse and a woman doctor, both of whom have practically invited him to live with them. But although the excitement of emergence from the hospital, the renewal of the colors and movements of life—he is fascinated in watching a zoo and made to feel the personalities of the animals—intoxicates the ex-patient, he neglects to visit either of his women, and, his senses and ambitions blurred, ends by simply writing to one of them a friendly note, and at last, stretching out on the baggage rack, with his duffelbag under his head, takes a train to the little Eastern town to which, like the author, he has been exiled "in perpetuity" and in which he has made for himself a quiet, fairly comfortable life. Yet an interest on the part of the reader in the life of the cancer ward is created. We want to know how the people will behave, how each of them will meet his fate. An official who is a patient, accustomed to certain privileges, is disposed at first to resent what he regards as unwarranted indignities; he calls the Solzhenitsyn-figure a "class enemy," and in the end drives off in his car. The Uzbeks and Kazaks can hardly speak Russian, and keep up their spirits by playing cards. The old men are almost past caring about anything but their treatments; a young man who has lost a leg and who has been "thinking pleasant thoughts—[illegible] briskly and smartly,

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to walk on crutches"—has a crippled erotic passage with a girl who is about to lose her breast. Solzhenitsyn's constant resourcefulness at sustaining our interest in all this, shifting our attention and varying the mood from one of these wretched groups to another, is an impressive exhibition of skill.

This novel, in spite of its gruesome subject, seems to me the better, perhaps because it was the first written, of Solzhenitsyn's two large-scale works. The characters are more vivid, the emotions are conveyed more tellingly. It is a long book—it seems to me a little too long. "The First Circle" is even longer; in the Russian German-published edition, it runs to two volumes. Though the action covers only three days in 1949, it involves so many characters and so many "confrontations" that it seems to go on for years. We are again confined to an institution—a special prison for technicians and scientists who are still supposed to be useful—and the relations and personalities of the inmates, here on a much higher level, are traced with the same particularity as those of "The Cancer Ward." A suspense ought to be kept up by the doom that, without his knowing it, hangs over the State Counsellor Innokenty Volodin, but by the time we have got to the end we are likely to have forgotten the opening incident, in which Volodin incurs official displeasure by warning a colleague, a professor, that he is himself in danger for having promised to "give something"—actually, "some kind of medicine"—to his fellow-professors in Paris, any traffic with any kind of foreigners being at that time, of course, suspect. Volodin, however, has every reason to believe that he has been assigned to the ambassadorship in Paris, but he finds that instead of this he has been condemned to the dreaded Lubyanka Prison. His realization of this, his confinement in a narrow cell, in which he is watched constantly through a peephole, his being stripped, searched, and otherwise humiliated provide one of the most horrible scenes in literature. The Solzhenitsyn-character, a mathematician who is thought to be unfaithful to the official line, is transferred to an even worse prison, and Solzhenitsyn is said—*Time*, March 21, 1969—to have written a sequel, "Arkhipelag Gulag" (Gulag is the labor-camp administration), which deals with his experiences there. This has not yet been translated, though it is reported to have been circulated in an underground way in Russia. One wonders how many non-Russians will be able to face something even more oppressive than "The First Circle."

IN all these chronicles of frustration and injustice, however, a few positive elements appear. Ivan Denisovich, enduring, sticks stoutly to his métier and persists in doing sound rather than slipshod work (though it seems to me just as boring to read about his conscientious bricklaying as about any other kind of bricklaying). Nerzhin, the Solzhenitsyn-character in "The First Circle," maintains his intellectual dignity and makes friends with the gatekeeper at the prison, who—recurring theme in Russian fiction since Tolstoy's worthy peasant Karataev—in spite of having been subjected to endless ordeals of disaster and deprivation which would crush a less humble, less resilient soul still also endures and is not discouraged. Nerzhin, when he is sent away to another prison, gives this man what he has come to regard as his only precious possession, a volume of Essenin's poems. But the sole trace to be found in these books of the original Soviet ideology is Solzhenitsyn's conviction, or the conviction of one of his characters, that capitalism is doomed.

And it is evident, though not allowed to become too insistent, that Solzhenitsyn is sincerely religious, and that, as in the case of other Russian writers, it is his faith, something quite alien to the cant of the Soviet doctrine, that has helped him to survive and reject the official propaganda. A prayer of his, not included among his collected works, has been circulated, and it sounds authentic: "Thou wilt give me what I need," he ends his appeal to God, "to reflect them [the radiance of thy rays of light to humanity]. And so far as I may fall short, Thou wilt assign the task to others." In such sketches as "Travelling Along the Oka" and "Easter Procession" (the latter of these was lopped of its bitter ending in the translation published by *Time*), it is clear that he resents the profanation of the churches and the rites of the Orthodox Church. The best treatment I have seen of Solzhenitsyn, which brings out the pattern of his work and emphasizes these positive elements, is the study in Miss Helen Muchnic's "Russian Writers: Notes and Essays."

BUT Miss Muchnic, too, is a Russian, and it is true of most of the Russians I know that they perfectly understand Solzhenitsyn and are in sympathy with what seems to me his somewhat masochistic point of view. In an Anglo-Saxon reader, there is something that ultimately rebels against this.

It is not that the incidents of his picture are false. The horrors that he tells of are fully confirmed by the testimony of other writers, who, like him, have known them at first hand. But such a reader, who is outraged at first by these chronicles of senseless suffering, of protracted degradation and torment, who is stirred to indignation against the oppressors, may end by becoming impatient with the beings who are thus oppressed. Such a state of things, feels the Anglo-Saxon reader, should not be allowed to exist. Such relations between human beings are certainly quite abnormal. The existence of a Stalin, after all, implies the existence of a nation that will stand for the horrors he inflicts. That many of these people have been led to believe that they were paving the way to a glorious future, to a regeneration of humanity, and that this will demand the survival through periods of formidable hardship, the resolute extirpation of the class enemy, and that one cannot doubt the wisdom of the leader who has been appointed by the Communist Party to enforce its discipline and accomplish its tasks—one has to allow for all this. And yet would not Anglo-Saxons have put up somewhat more resistance? The religion of Protestants is more pugnacious. In characterizing the poet Nekrassov, the Vicomte Melchior de Vogüé, who probably in his time knew Russia better than any other foreigner, writes that "you will not find in him the common fund of mysticism [of other Russian writers], of resignation, of love for the suffering which they denounce." The Russian religion itself, all obedience and resignation to inevitable misfortune, involves a humiliation. And the unvaried frustration in Solzhenitsyn becomes in the long run monotonous; one feels that it is systematic, that, except for his recognition of the virtue of sheer endurance, it is Solzhenitsyn's only theme. We always expect what is going to happen: someone is going to be cheated, to be disappointed, squelched. Ford Madox Ford calls attention, in his book on Henry James, to the apparently abnormal unhelpfulness of the

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narrator-observer of James's "Four Meetings," to whom it never occurs to offer to lend five or six pounds to the little New England schoolteacher who has been stranded at Le Havre and cheated of her dream of a visit to Paris, or to tip her off to the fraudulence of the supposed French countess who is swindling her. So in Solzhenitsyn's "Matryonin Dvor" (translated as "Matryona's Home," or "House") we wonder why *his* narrator-observer—even when Matryona complains that she has not "a man to stick up for me"—should never lift a finger to intervene when his long-suffering peasant woman is clearly being exploited and robbed. Though he is lodging all through this in her house, he simply looks on at the outrages, to which she makes no resistance. This lodger, like Solzhenitsyn's other heroes, has emerged from a long term in prison and is consequently under a cloud, so that for him to try to protest would be futile and only make for her more trouble; and we have been told that when Matryona in the past has attempted to appeal for a pension that has been due her she has invariably been given the runaround by the Soviet bureaucrats. But we recognize that we are here inescapably in Solzhenitsyn country as soon as we learn that Matryona's cat is lame in one paw and unable to catch the mice that hide behind the layers of wallpaper, that when she does succeed in catching the cockroaches she eats them and they make her sick. Of course, she eventually gets out, and gets killed, and Matryona is deeply grieved. But these are the least of Matryona's trials. She is willing to work in the fields without pay. The representatives of the government—an unhelpful woman doctor, who comes when she is very ill; the wife of the chairman of the local collective, who forces her to help shift manure—are, naturally, very snippy and unpleasant. (It is true that officials in the Soviet Union habitually treat with the greatest contempt the peasants in the name of whose prestige the Revolution is supposed to have been made. Each item in Solzhenitsyn's picture is derived from a real condition.) Matryona allows her rapacious relatives to take down an annex to her *izba*, which leaves one side of her house very flimsy, and when they are dragging the boards away on sleds she goes with them in order to help them, and, as [illegible] of this, is horribly mangled and killed, at an unguarded crossing, by locomotives driven backward with no lights. Yet for Solzhenitsyn, when he reflects on her, Matryona becomes a heroine. "We all lived by her side," he concludes, "and failed to understand that she was that most righteous person without whom, according to the proverb, the village cannot stand. Nor the city. Nor all our earth." But to the kind of Anglo-Saxon I have mentioned, Matryona seems a simpleminded and too devoted victim who allows herself to be exploited and crushed. It is not that this exhibition of peasant brutality and meanness is any darker than Chekhov's "Muzhiki" or than Leskov's "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensky District," and it is impossible to overrate the prodigies of incompetence and bureaucratic indolence of which the Russians are capable. But, reading Solzhenitsyn in bulk, we are given the impression that nothing can ever come out right, and that the disappointments have been somewhat contrived. In the story called "The Right Hand," a veteran of the Revolution, incapacitated by dropsy but equipped with the correct certificates, is refused admission to a hospital by one of Solzhenitsyn's snooty officials, a young woman who is reading a comic about an exploit by a Soviet soldier. In the play of which the title has been translated "The Love-Girl and the Innocent," we are again in a labor camp, where an incipient amorous relation between two of the finer-grained inmates is frustrated when it turns out that the girl, by a camp convention, is supposed to be at anyone's disposal and is claimed by the camp doctor, so that she can only go to meet her lover surreptitiously in off hours. In another story, "For the Good of the Cause," a new technical-school building built with enthusiasm by the students for their own use is suddenly assigned without a qualm on the part of the bureaucrats to an institution for research. Here the story is merely a mechanical instance of official callous indifference. It makes its point but is rather abstract. It helps to pile up the indictment, to show how all human values are being sacrificed to inhuman planning, but it is itself rather lacking in human interest, as, for example, "The Cancer Ward" is not. One does not know how to criticize the dryness of some of these pieces of Solzhenitsyn's. In this dryness they are different from Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago," with its central theme of rebirth, but Pasternak was never in prison, and his book was the product of a more hopeful moment. One is curious to see Solzhenitsyn's next novel, which has been announced as abandoning the present and dealing with the wars of the Revolution.

In the meantime, one must congratulate the Nobel Prize judges on honoring this very courageous man and very gifted writer, who, even with all the forces of Soviet stupidity and conservatism against him, is finally in a position to defy the ridiculous Writers' Union and the publishers who will not print his writings, because he has been penalized already with all possible appalling punishments and can hardly be frightened by further threats.

—EDMUND WILSON

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