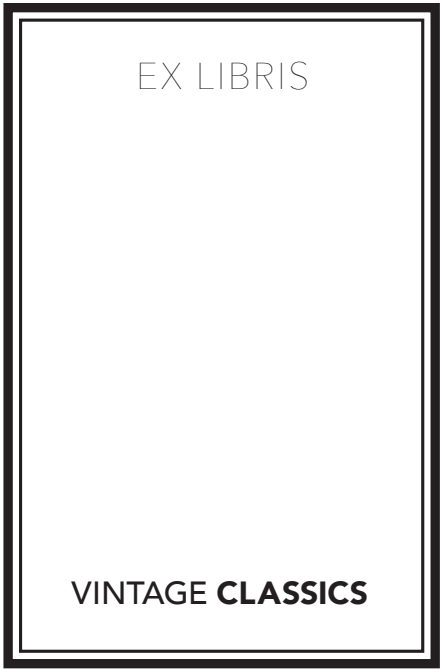
50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

The Gulag Archipelago

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

VINTAGE CLASSICS



ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was born in 1918 and grew up in Rostov-on-Don. He graduated in Physics and Mathematics from Rostov University and studied Literature by correspondence course at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History. In World War II he fought as an artillery officer, attaining the rank of captain. In 1945, however, after making derogatory remarks about Stalin in a letter, he was arrested and summarily sentenced to eight years in forced-labour camps, followed by internal exile. In 1957 he was formally rehabilitated, and settled down to teaching and writing, in Ryazan and Moscow. The publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in *Novy Mir* in 1962 was followed by publication, in the West, of his novels *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*. In 1970 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and in 1974 his citizenship was revoked and he was expelled from the Soviet Union. He eventually settled in Vermont, USA, and completed his great historical cycle *The Red Wheel*. In 1990, with the fall of Soviet Communism, his citizenship was restored and four years later he returned to settle in Russia. He died in 2008 near Moscow, at the age of eighty-nine.

ALSO BY ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

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Nobel Lecture
Letter to the Soviet Leaders
Harvard Address
Rebuilding Russia
'The Russian Question' at the End of the Twentieth Century

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56

An Experiment in Literary Investigation
50th Anniversary Abridged Edition

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
Thomas P. Whitney and Harry Willetts

ABRIDGED AND INTRODUCED BY
Edward E. Ericson, Jr

WITH A FOREWORD: THE GIFT OF INCARNATION BY
Natalia Solzhenitsyn

VINTAGE

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The Gift of Incarnation: Foreword by Natalia Solzhenitsyn

In the autumn of 1961 a strange-looking manuscript turned up at the offices of the Moscow journal *Novy Mir*. Single-spaced with no margins, typed on both sides, it bore the odd title *Shch-854*[1] but no indication of the author's name. Despite all of this, the editor of the journal's prose section, Anna Berzer, was quick to grasp the significance of the unusual submission, and passed it on to *Novy Mir*'s editor-in-chief, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, with the remark that it was about "a prison camp though the eyes of a peasant, a very national kind of work." That night Tvardovsky's quest to publish the story of Ivan Denisovich's day in his journal began.

> To publish, to publish! There is no other goal. To overcome all odds, to go to the very top . . . To prove, to convince, to make objections impossible . . . It's been said that Russian literature is dead. Baloney! Here it is, right in this folder with ribbon ties. But who is he? No one has yet seen him.[2]

Of course, this "he" turned out to be Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—a schoolteacher teaching physics and astronomy in Ryazan who had, before that, been permanently exiled in Kazakhstan, and rescued only in 1956 by Khrushchev's "thaw."

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was born in 1918 in Kislovodsk. His parents, both of whom were of peasant stock and were the first in their families to gain an education, were married in August 1917 at the front, where Solzhenitsyn's father was a second lieutenant in an artillery brigade. In 1914 he had left Moscow University in order to enlist in the military in the First World War, putting in three and a half

years of service and returning to the Kuban region in early 1918. He died as a result of a hunting accident six months before the birth of his son. The writer's mother raised the boy by herself in dire circumstances, living in drafty tumble-down shacks that had to be heated with coal and needed water to be carried in by bucket.

Sanya, as the boy was called at home, read a great deal and at the age of eight or nine had decided that he was to become a writer, although of course he had no real understanding of what such a life might entail. His childhood and youth were spent in Rostov-on-Don. Upon graduating from a local secondary school, he enrolled in Rostov University, majoring in mathematics and physics, and combined this with a correspondence course in literature at Moscow's Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature. The outbreak of the war with Nazi Germany found him in Moscow at the beginning of a summer session at this institute. Joining the military as a private, he completed a short-term course in artillery school in December 1942, was promoted to lieutenant and was placed in command of a sound-ranging battery. He served first on the northwest front, then on the Bryansk front, receiving the Patriotic War medal after the battle of Kursk and the Red Star medal after the capture of Rogachyov in Belorussia. Solzhenitsyn's battery participated in front-line action throughout the war, and he remained in command until February 1945 when he, now a captain, was arrested for intercepted correspondence with a friend from his school years. In their letters, the two officers had criticized Stalin for "betraying the cause of the Revolution" as well as for his treachery and cruelty, calling him *Pakhan*, a head of a criminal organization. The retribution was swift. The twenty-six-year-old Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to eight years of forced-labor camp with "perpetual exile" to follow after the end of that term.

Imbued as he was with memories of his earlier youth, with images of the war, with the impressions made by what he heard from his wartime friends, by the cruel reality of prisons and camps, Solzhenitsyn began to write, or more exactly to compose in his head, without leaving a record on paper. In response to the question how he became a writer, Solzhenitsyn said that this did not take place until he found himself in prison.

> I had tried my hand at literary writing even before the war, and had made determined efforts of this kind while I was a university student, but this could hardly be called serious writing because I lacked life experience. I began to

> write in earnest in prison, doing it in a conspiratorial fashion, concealing the very fact that I was writing—this was absolutely crucial. My method involved remembering the texts composed and learning them by heart. I started doing this with verse, then with prose as well.[3]

Solzhenitsyn spent part of his sentence in a so-called *sharashka*, a prison research institute where prisoners with specialized training were put to work on projects bearing on radio and telephone communications. This experience gave birth to the novel *In the First Circle*.

From 1950 to 1953 Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned in the forced-labor camp of Ekibastuz in Kazakhstan. Here, prisoners were stripped of their names and were addressed instead by the identifying number inscribed on patches sewn to their caps, chest, back, and knee. The writer was assigned to a masonry brigade, then to a foundry, and this is the camp described in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Solzhenitsyn recalled that:

> On one long winter workday in camp, as I was lugging a handbarrow together with another man, I asked myself how one might portray the totality of our camp existence. In essence it should suffice to give a thorough description of a single day, providing minute details and focusing on the most ordinary kind of worker; that would reflect the entirety of our experience. It wouldn't even be necessary to give examples of any particular horrors. It shouldn't be an extraordinary day at all, but rather a completely unremarkable one, the kind of day that will add up to years. That was my conception and it lay dormant in my mind for nine years.[4]

In 1952, a year before the formal end of Solzhenitsyn's labor-camp sentence, he developed a cancerous tumor that was surgically removed in the camp's clinic, but the cancer had had time to spread. Exiled to the settlement of Kok-Terek (Dzhambul oblast) after his release from camp, Solzhenitsyn taught mathematics, physics, and astronomy in a local secondary school. And wrote. But the cancer continued spreading and Solzhenitsyn, now racked by pain, managed to obtain permission from the authorities to travel to the oncological clinic in Tashkent, where he arrived "virtually a dead man." Despite a prognosis offering no hope of survival, he was restored to life with the

help of massive doses of radiation therapy. (This experience of dying and recovery found later reflection in *Cancer Ward*.) The treatment lasted several months and Solzhenitsyn came to look upon his miraculous return to health as a "postponement" granted from on high.

In May 1959, while Solzhenitsyn was living in Ryazan, he finally sat down to write *Shch-854* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*). He wrote it and then put it away. It was only two years later, after Khrushchev's vociferous attack on Stalin's "cult of personality" at the Twenty-Second Party Congress, that Solzhenitsyn risked sending it to *Novy Mir*.[5] For his part, Tvardovsky began gathering appraisals of the work from the most authoritative writers of the day, in order to pass their testimonials to the powers-that-be. Kornei Chukovsky titled his review "A Literary Miracle" and wrote that:

> Shukov exemplifies the character traits of a simple Russian man: he is steadfast, resistant to evil, hardy, cunning but kind, and a jack-of-all-trades to boot . . . This story marks the entry of a powerful, original, and mature new writer into our literature . . . I shudder to think that such a wonderful tale might remain unpublished.[6]

And Samuil Marshak added this to his review: "Judged by the criteria of clarity and courage, the author can perhaps be compared to Archpriest Avvakum . . . In his work the Russian people themselves have begun to speak."[7] Asked her opinion of the manuscript, Anna Akhmatova responded by emphasizing each syllable of her verdict: "Every single citizen of the two hundred million inhabitants of the Soviet Union has the duty to read this text and commit it to memory!"[8]

And so, a year after the uncivilized-looking typescript had turned up at *Novy Mir*, the story appeared in the November 1962 issue of the journal. It was a miracle. As Solzhenitsyn put it in an interview twenty years after *One Day*'s first appearance, "the 1962 publication of my tale in the Soviet Union is akin to a phenomenon defying physical laws, something like objects falling upwards of their own accord or cold stones becoming red hot without any external stimulus."[9]

Novy Mir was inundated with phone calls that November. Readers were expressing gratitude or just weeping; some were trying to contact the author. Libraries were forced to institute sign-up lists, and Moscow's newspaper and magazine kiosks were mobbed. Memories of this phenomenon are still vivid, as the recollections of Academician Sergei Averintsev testify:

> The unforgettable appearance of that eleventh issue of *Novy Mir* for 1962 had the effect of a jolt delivered to our disheartened generation: wake up and look around—history has not yet come to a halt! Just walking through Moscow at the time was exciting, there were crowds of people at every newspaper kiosk, all asking for the same sold-out journal. I'll never forget a man who was unable to recall the journal's name and was asking for "the one, you know, the one where the whole truth is printed." And the saleslady understood what he meant—this had to be seen to be believed. It was no longer the history of literature, but the history of Russia.[10]

In that same month, Varlam Shalamov wrote Solzhenitsyn a letter that began as follows:

> I have not slept for two nights; I kept reading and rereading your tale, and recalling the past . . . Your tale is like a poem, everything in it is perfect, all its parts serve the same goal. Every line, every episode, every character sketch is so laconic, so intelligent, so subtle, and so profound that in my opinion *Novy Mir* has not published anything as organically coherent and as powerful in the course of its entire existence as a journal.[11]

Khrushchev's "thaw" proved to be short-lived, however. By the second half of the 1960s libraries were withdrawing their copies of *One Day* from circulation in accordance with secret instructions, and soon enough (January 1974) the Central Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press issued an administrative order banning all works by Solzhenitsyn published in the Soviet Union. But by then *One Day* had of course been read by millions of our countrymen and had been published in dozens of languages all over the world.

One Day seemed to have broken a dam and Solzhenitsyn remained stunned by the response:

> There were letters to me, hundreds of them! Endless packets of letters were being forwarded by *Novy Mir*, others were brought in daily by the Ryazan postal service—some of them had been sent simply to "Ryazan" with no indication of the street address . . . It was an explosion of letters from the whole of Russia, one that could not

> possibly be contained in any single breast. It provided a vantage point for an overview of *zek* lives, a subject previously quite beyond reach. Biographies, events, and episodes kept unfolding before me one after the other.[12]

With this huge mass of material that kept arriving, it is hardly surprising that Solzhenitsyn fell upon the writing of *The Gulag Archipelago* as an ineluctable moral duty.

But before Solzhenitsyn could begin this new project, he needed to find a method for giving shape to the work. Every bit of information that came to him—unplanned, unpredictable, and disorganized—needed to be accepted, and a way had to be found to determine the appropriate place for each episode.

> At one point in camp I had the job of breaking up cast iron, shattering heavy cast-iron objects into smaller pieces that were then thrown into the smelter, producing iron objects with different properties. I jokingly refer to my materials as lumps of cast iron of a particularly valuable kind. Melting them down permitted them to reappear in a new form.[13]

The task then was to choose the form or mold into which this molten material would be "poured." Solzhenitsyn was a principled opponent of inventing literary structures for the sake of novelty alone. He believed that the appropriate form, compactness, and texture of a particular work would be suggested by the constituent material itself if one makes a determined effort to attune one's ear to its essence. That was exactly what happened in this case:

> I had never thought about the form that a "literary investigation" should take, but the material making up *The Gulag Archipelago* imposed it on me. A literary investigation involves the use of factual (non-transfigured) life data in such a way that discrete facts and fragments *connected to each other by the aesthetic means at the disposal of a writer* coalesce in presenting a case that is no less convincing than a scholarly investigation of the traditional type.[14]

However, it proved impossible to work on this explosive material in an open and orderly fashion. The very fact that work on a book of this type

was in progress had to be concealed, and Solzhenitsyn never had all the materials he had collected to hand at any one time. Most of *Gulag* was written in the winters of 1965/6 and 1966/7 in a secret location Solzhenitsyn called his Hiding Place. He could identify this site without endangering faithful friends only in 1991, a quarter of a century later: It was a farmhouse near Tartu, Estonia, a roomy cottage with large windows and a supply of firewood that stood empty in the winter.

> I arrived in my beloved Tartu on a snowy and frost-covered morning when the medieval features of the university town were particularly prominent, and the whole city seemed to be a part of Europe, entirely beyond Soviet borders . . . For the first time in my life I felt as if I were safely abroad, as though I had left the USSR and broken away from the accursed surveillance of the KGB. This feeling calmed me and helped me begin my work.[15]

During the first of these two winters Solzhenitsyn spent sixty-five days in the Hiding Place; the following year he stayed for eighty-one days. Here, the hundreds of preparatory fragments he had received were transformed into a fiery text, a typescript of more than one thousand pages.

> During those 146 days at the Hiding Place, I worked as I never have worked in my whole life. It even seemed as if it was no longer I who was writing; rather I was swept along, my hand was being moved by an outside force and I was only the firing pin attached to a spring that had been compressed for half a century and was now uncoiling . . . During the second winter, when the temperature outside dipped to thirty below, I caught a bad cold, with chills and gnawing body aches. But even though I ran a fever, I continued to split logs for firewood, stoke up the stove, and do part of my writing standing up (with my back pressed to the hot mirror-like tiles of the stove in lieu of mustard plasters), while the rest of the time I wrote lying in bed under a blanket. In this way I produced the only humorous chapter ("The Zeks as a Nation") . . . I allowed myself no links with the outside world . . . what was happening out there could in no way concern me: I had merged with my cherished material, and my single goal was that this union should give birth to *The Gulag Archipelago* . . . I was

> even prepared to accept death if need be upon my return to the outside world. Those weeks represent the highest point in my sense of victory and my sense of estrangement from the world.[16]

After another year of making additions and revisions to the text of *The Gulag Archipelago*, in May of 1968 the writer met with three assistants to edit and type out the final copy in a small summer cottage near Moscow. (There were no neighbors to hear the clatter of typewriters.) Here is how Solzhenitsyn recalled it:

> The editing and typing of *Gulag* went on from dawn to nightfall . . . On top of everything a typewriter started breaking down daily and I would either solder it myself or take it to be repaired. The most frightening part of the whole undertaking was that we had the only authoritative text as well as all the typed copies of *Gulag* there with us. If the KGB had suddenly swooped down, the many-throated groan, the dying whisper of millions, the never-expressed testaments of those who had perished would all be in their hands, and I would never be able to reconstruct it all . . . They had been so lucky for so many decades—surely God would not let them succeed once again? Was justice never to be done in the Russian land?[17]

But finally the work was completed, the text was photographed, and the rolled-up film was inserted into a capsule. It would be easier to preserve it that way, and—at some appropriate future time—to send it to an inaccessible and safe place. However, on that same day Solzhenitsyn received the news that a chance of sending it abroad would present itself within days:

> We had just sat back contentedly because we had polished off the job when a bell started pealing! On that very day and almost at the same hour! No human planning could have brought these events so close together. It was the bell of fate and history, pealing deafeningly—though as yet no one could hear it in the tender green woods of June.[18]

Aleksandr Andreev, a resident of Paris and a grandson of the writer Leonid Andreev,[19] had come to Moscow with a UNESCO delegation

for a weeklong visit, and Solzhenitsyn's friends knew the family well. Could he be approached? Would he agree to help smuggle the photographed manuscript out of the country? If the film were discovered at customs control, the book would be destroyed, as would Solzhenitsyn, Andreev, and everyone else involved. But then, would another opportunity of this kind ever present itself? It was decided to go ahead with the attempt. "The heart had emerged from one anxiety only to plunge into another. No rest for the weary."[20] A gloomy and tension-filled week passed before they learned that the operation had been successful. Solzhenitsyn was jubilant:

> Freedom! Relief from pressure! The whole world was now mine to embrace. Who says that I am shackled hand and foot? That I am constrained in my writing? On the contrary, whichever way I turn, roads open up before me! Everything that has been weighing me down for years has been cast off, a gate has been flung open giving unimpeded access to the most important thing in my life—*The Red Wheel*.[21]

In October 1970 a radio broadcast from Stockholm brought explosive news—Solzhenitsyn had been awarded the Nobel Prize in literature "for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian Literature" (to quote the citation). "The Nobel Prize tumbled on my head like a merry load of snow falling off a branch," was how Solzhenitsyn remembered it.[22] But one might wonder at the "merriness" here: It had now been five years that the writer's name had been banned from public mention, his personal papers had been impounded, not a single line of his writings could be published in the USSR. After *One Day*, only four of his stories had appeared in the Soviet press, while *In the First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, the plays, and even the poems in prose had all been confronted with an impenetrable wall blocking publication, even though the samizdat network had gratefully absorbed them all. And a year earlier Solzhenitsyn had been expelled from the Writers' Union. Yet despite all this, Solzhenitsyn felt exhilaration—he was on the point of finishing *August 1914*, the first "knot" of his long-cherished epic about the Russian Revolution.[23] He decided against going to Stockholm to claim the Nobel Prize, fearing that his return to Russia would be barred.

The writer viewed the fact that the prize had in effect been awarded too soon as a piece of luck.

> I had received it without showing the world much of my writing, there were just *One Day*, *Cancer Ward* and the "lightened" version of *In the First Circle.* All the rest I had kept in reserve. Given my newly elevated position, I could now roll out book after book, as it were helped by gravity . . . But my conscience ached badly concerning *Gulag*. I had earlier planned to publish it at Christmas 1971. But that date had come and gone . . . I now had the Nobel, but why was I deferring the publication still more? My reasons could not have appeared viable to those who had been tipped off a sled into camp burial pits like a load of frozen logs. Could it still be untimely in 1971 to speak of what had happened in 1918, in 1930, in 1945? Was it still too soon to redeem their deaths by at least telling their stories?[24]

But then the Archipelago is merely the heir and child of the Revolution. And concerning the latter, we have even greater distortions, lies, and cover-ups. Future generations would have even greater difficulty digging up the truth. To reveal the existence of *Gulag* is to put one's head on the executioner's block; this is a book the regime won't wink at. The author will pay for it, and there will be severe trouble for the *zek* witnesses as well. *After* the appearance of *Gulag*, the regime will certainly cut short all work on the epic of the Russian Revolution, and that means only one thing: Maximum efforts must be expended to complete as much as possible of the epic *before* that time. *The Gulag Archipelago,* he now decided with finality, would appear in May 1975. But events were fated to take a different course.

In August 1973, after lengthy surveillance of one of Solzhenitsyn's assistants, a sequence of tragic circumstances led to the KGB's discovery and seizure of a draft typescript version of *Gulag*. Solzhenitsyn quickly learned of this development through his network, and on September 5 he sent instructions to Paris to start the process of printing *Gulag*. The following text appeared on the very first page of the book:

> For years I have with reluctant heart withheld from publication this already completed book: my obligation to those still living outweighed my obligation to the dead. But now that State Security has seized the book anyway, I have no alternative but to publish it immediately.[25]

The book was typeset and printed in total secrecy by YMCA Press in Paris, the oldest Russian émigré publishing house, and on December 28, 1973, news agencies around the world announced that the first volume of *Gulag* had appeared in France. The immediate reaction of the powers-that-be in the Soviet Union was stunned silence, explainable in part by the New Year's holiday, but by the middle of January a noisy campaign of vilification had been set in motion in the media, the degree of "popular anger" increasing daily. Responses also came thick and fast from across Europe: "A flaming question mark over the entire Soviet experiment from 1918." "At some future moment, perhaps, we shall look upon the appearance of *Gulag* as the sign marking the beginning of the collapse of the communist system." "Solzhenitsyn calls for repentance. This work could become a guidebook of national rebirth if only the Kremlin were capable of reading it." Western journalists in Moscow were eager to interview him. "In your opinion, what actions will the regime take against you?" His response:

> I have no way of predicting . . . I have fulfilled my obligation to those who have perished, and that takes a heavy load off my mind and brings me calm. The truth revealed in *Gulag* was supposed to be utterly destroyed; it had been beaten down, drowned, set on fire, ground to a powder. But here it is, whole and alive, published in black and white, and no one can ever erase it again.[26]

Amongst the global fanfare and fallout, Solzhenitsyn announced that he would not collect any royalties from the sale of *Gulag*; all proceeds would go toward the memorialization of those who perished and to help the families of political prisoners in the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, the regime was frantically searching for a means of ridding itself of Solzhenitsyn. It did not dare to crush him in sight of a world that was already reading *Gulag*, and on February 12, 1974 he was arrested, taken to Lefortovo prison, and charged with "treason to the fatherland." The next day, Solzhenitsyn was officially informed that he was being stripped of Soviet citizenship, taken under guard to the airport, and expelled from the country.

So what kind of book is *The Gulag Archipelago*? What was the result of melting down those heavy cast-iron fragments?

"The Archipelago Rises from the Sea" is the title of a chapter about the legendary Solovki camp of the early Soviet period.[27] What are the contours of this risen archipelago?

We follow the author as he steps into a vessel that will take us from island to island, at times squeezing through narrow passages, at times sailing rapidly down straight canals, at times battling the waves of the open sea. The force of his art is such that we are soon transformed from observers into participants of the journey: we shudder at the hiss of "You're under arrest!", we agonize throughout our first sleepless night in a prison cell, we are marched with rapidly beating hearts to our first interrogation, we flounder helplessly in the meat-grinder that is the investigation process, we steal a peek at the neighboring death-row cells, and, after the farce of a "trial" or even without it, we are cast out on to the islands of the Archipelago.

Or else, we spend days on end in an overcrowded boxcar converted for transporting prisoners, tormented by thirst; we are robbed by professional criminals at transfer points; we freeze in the camps of Siberia or Kolyma performing "general duties" in our emaciated state. If we have strength enough, we look around us and listen to the stories of peasants and priests, intellectuals and factory workers, former Party functionaries and military men, informers and trusties, common criminals and juveniles, representatives of every religion and every nationality in the USSR. We also see the camp administration, the guards, "the kids with tommy-guns,"[28] and the special-regime camps for political prisoners with columns of *zeks* marching with their prisoner numbers on rags affixed to their clothes, surrounded by German shepherds straining on their leashes. We ourselves shall perhaps never risk trying to escape, but we experience passion, hope, and despair as we follow the attempts of those who have dared to do so. When the time comes for prisoner uprisings, we are convinced that we would have been with everyone when "behind the wire the ground is burning."[29] Those of us who survive camp are subject to exile, a fate that can be even more difficult to bear than camp. Here we discover to our astonishment that millions of our compatriots were uprooted from their places of habitation: The "peasant plague"[30] destroyed the best, hardest-working independent peasants together with their families. Every twitch of the party line due to internal struggles resulted in the deportation of hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent townspeople, while during and after the Second World War entire ethnic groups were exiled.

But above and beyond this gigantic canvas, illustrated as it is with hundreds of concrete human destinies, Solzhenitsyn brings to light the history of the waves and streams of arrests—what he calls "the history of our sewage disposal system"[31]—tracing its evolution from Lenin's decrees to Stalin's edicts, and demonstrating with grim

clarity that the accursed Archipelago was not at all produced by some sequence of errors or "violations of legality," but was the inevitable outcome of the System itself, because without its inhuman cruelty it would not have been able to hold on to power.

If the above features summed up all that is significant about *The Gulag Archipelago*, the book would share the fate of historical treatises that become sources of information about past epochs or, at best, monuments to them. The three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*, however, "cannot be approached *just* as a work of literature, even though they are literature, and very great literature indeed . . . The work is in a genre that is absolutely *sui generis*, without precise precedent in either Russian or Western literature," as one of the early critical comments puts it.[32] So what is it? A historical inquest? Personal reminiscences? A political treatise? A philosophical meditation? No, it is more like an amalgam combining each of these genres, with the resultant product being more significant than the sum of its constituent parts. Closest to the mark are those who have called *The Gulag Archipelago* an epic poem. What is the poem about? Solzhenitsyn has provided an answer:

> Let the reader who expects this book to be a political exposé slam it shut right now . . . If only it were so simple! If only it were true that there exist evil people insidiously committing evil deeds, whom it is necessary simply to separate out and destroy. But the line dividing good from evil cuts through the heart of every human being . . . This line is not static within us; it sways to and fro over the years. Even in a heart imbued with evil, it allows a small bridgehead of good to remain. And it permits a small niche of evil to survive even in the kindest of hearts.[33]

The book is about the ascent of the human spirit, about its struggle with evil. That is the reason why, when readers reach the end of the work, they feel not only pain and anger, but an upsurge of strength and light.

Here is what a Western critic wrote about the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*:

> [The book] is extraordinary in still another respect. *Gulag* has become an instant multinational and multilingual best-seller, with total sales running into the millions of copies—a record approached by no other writer, living or

> dead, in any language—and yet it never has been published in the author's native land.[34]

Gulag was translated into dozens of languages, published and republished numerous times, discussed in hundreds of articles, but just reading faint copies of the text in the USSR could land you in jail. Despite this risk, brave souls persisted in making more and more copies, using typewriters or photographic paper. One person managed to make illicit photocopies of the Paris edition while a second made use of his carpentry shop to cut the pages to size and bind them together. One of their custom-made books produced in this manner was delivered to the author with the following note:

> I'm delighted to present to you the local publication of the Book. The print run will be 1,500 copies, with 200 produced in the first printing. I firmly believe that God will not permit this undertaking to be cut short. The edition is intended less for Moscow snobs than for the provinces. We have already taken into consideration Yakutsk, Khabarovsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Sverdlovsk, Saratov, Krasnodar, Tver, and some smaller cities . . .[35]

As Solzhenitsyn has written, it was an extraordinary experience to receive this book when he was already abroad. It was, he said, "an amazing publication, with deadly danger for its publishers. This is how Russian young men are ready to sacrifice themselves to assure the movement of *Gulag* into the depths of Russia. Just imagining it brings tears to my eyes . . ."[36]

Sixteen years after *The Gulag Archipelago*'s first appearance, the Soviet Union collapsed. The charges of treason against Solzhenitsyn were withdrawn and he was able to return to Russia, where *The Gulag Archipelago* was finally officially published. Much, though not everything, has now been declassified. The words of Anne Applebaum, who spent many months pursuing research in Russian archives, are significant in this connection. Re-examining *The Gulag Archipelago* more than fifteen years after the Soviet Union collapsed and the files of the Soviet past were opened, Applebaum notes that various errors in Solzhenitsyn's work have come to light. "Nevertheless," she continues,

> what is most extraordinary about re-reading *The Gulag Archipelago* . . . is how much he does get right [given that]

> he did not have access to archival documents and government records. Solzhenitsyn's general outline of the history of the Gulag . . . has been proven correct. His description of the moral issues faced by the prisoners has never been disputed. His sociology of camp life . . . is unquestionably accurate. [The work's] truthfulness continues to give the book a freshness and an importance that will never be challenged.[37]

And yet, as Father Alexander Schmemann has written,

> what must be borne in mind is that however truthful and objective an "investigation"—any investigation—might be, none is capable of becoming a *living presence* of the truth if it lacks the power of incarnation. The whole point is that the gift of transfiguration and incarnation is granted only to a writer—indeed that is his calling, his purpose, and his manner of serving humanity. It is in the process of transformation and incarnation, as the text fills out with flesh and blood, with new life and strength, that "art" takes up residence.[38]

Could the melancholy prophecy made by Lidia Chukovskaya in a letter to Solzhenitsyn, written after she had read *The Gulag Archipelago*, come to pass?

> [The book] is a miracle that resurrects the dead, that alters the very composition of one's blood, and creates new souls. But there is a problem: You have lived long enough to experience everything—war, prison, special-regime camps, fame, love, hate, and exile. There is only one thing you will not live long enough to experience: literary analysis. Delight and indignation are both obstacles to an evaluation of literary genius and to the understanding of its essence . . . When will a critic be born who will be capable of explaining Solzhenitsyn's phrase, Solzhenitsyn's paragraph, Solzhenitsyn's chapter? Dealing with issues of vocabulary is the easy part, but what about his syntax? Or the concealed rhythm of his prose, in the absence of any visible one? Or the richness of his word choices? Or the novelty of the way he develops a thought? Who could undertake such a task or even begin it? In

> order to analyze [a text] one must become accustomed to it and stop being burnt—whereas we are chained to issues of meaning and information, and are continually seared with pain . . .[39]

And perhaps Russia's fifth Nobel laureate in literature, Joseph Brodsky, had good reason to forewarn:

> If the Soviet regime did not have its Homer, it received him in the person of Solzhenitsyn . . . Perhaps two thousand years from now a reading of *Gulag* will provide the same kind of pleasure as a reading of *The Iliad* provides today. But if *Gulag* were not to be read today, it is quite possible that much sooner than in two thousand years no one will be around to read either book.[40]

Natalia Solzhenitsyn
April 2010

Translated from the Russian by Alexis Klimoff from Natalia Solzhenitsyna, "Dar voploshcheniia," Foreword in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag GULAG 1918–1956*: *Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniya*. *Sokrashchyonnoe izdanie*, ed. N. D. Solzhenitsyna (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2010), pp. 5–16. N.B.: All annotations are the translator's.

Editor's Note: The above text, revised for this 2023 Vintage edition, was written by Solzhenitsyn's widow Natalia as a preface to her own Russian-language abridgment of *The Gulag Archipelago*, created at the behest of Solzhenitsyn himself. It was first published in 2010 and has been continuously in print in Russia, where the book remains in the high-school curriculum. French and Portuguese editions have since brought this abridgement to a broader readership worldwide, even as the Ericson abridgement presented in this volume remains the standard in English.

Notes on the Foreword

1. This prisoner identification number was the original title of the manuscript that in its published form was titled *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.
2. Tvardovsky's words according to Viktor Nekrasov, see *Kontinent*, no. 18 (1978), p. 4.
3. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika*, 3 vols. (Yaroslavl: Verkhne-Volzhskoe kn. izd., 1995–7), vol. II, p. 417.

4. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika*, vol. III, p. 21.
5. The Twenty-Second Congress of the Soviet Communist Party took place in October 1961 and featured Nikita Khrushchev's second official denunciation of the Stalinist legacy. (The first one had taken place at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956.)
6. Chukovsky's appraisal is reproduced in full in Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, 2 vols. (Paris: YMCA Press, 1976–80), vol. II, pp. 608–9.
7. Marshak's review appeared in *Pravda* on 30 January 1964. The additional phrase is recorded in Vladimir Lakshin's memoirs, *Golosa i litsa* (Moscow: Geleos, 2004), p. 213.
8. This was Akhmatova's spoken response to Lidia Chukovskaya's question. See *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, vol. II, p. 431.
9. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika*, vol. III, p. 25.
10. *Novy mir*, no. 12 (1998), p. 3.
11. Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Vagrius, 1998), vol. IV, p. 434.
12. An unpublished piece from the Solzhenitsyn Archives.
13. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika*, vol. II, p. 420.
14. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika*, vol. II, p. 422.
15. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom: Ocherki literaturnoi zhizni* (Moscow: Soglasie, 1996), pp. 433–4.
16. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, pp. 435–6.
17. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 207.
18. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 212.
19. Russian prose writer and playwright, 1871–1919.
20. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 212.
21. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 213.
22. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 277.
23. The first edition of *August 1914* came out in Paris in 1971. A much-expanded second edition appeared in Vermont in 1983, and the revised third and final edition was published in Moscow in 2006.
24. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 287. The Christmas mentioned here refers to the date according to the Julian calendar, i.e., to January 7, 1971.
25. "Author's Note," in Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, tr. Thomas P. Whitney, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974–8), vol. I, p. vi.
26. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 663.
27. Part III, ch. 2.
28. Chapter heading, Part V, ch. 9.
29. Chapter heading, Part V, ch. 10. This chapter describes the atmosphere leading up to camp revolts.
30. Chapter heading, Part VI, ch. 2.
31. Chapter heading, Part I, ch. 2.
32. Martin Malia, "A War on Two Fronts: Solzhenitsyn and the Gulag Archipelago," *Russian Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 (1977), p. 50 (original emphasis) .
33. *The Gulag Archipelago*, Part I, ch. 4, and Part IV, ch. 1. (Cf. vol. I, p. 168, and vol. II, p. 615, in the English translation).
34. Malia, "A War on Two Fronts," pp. 46–7.
35. Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsya telyonok s dubom*, p. 527.

36. Ibid.
37. Anne Applebaum, "Foreword," in Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, 3 vols. (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007–9), p. xv. This foreword is included in each of the three volumes. Anne Applebaum is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
38. *Vestnik RSKhD*, no. 108–10 (1973–4), pp. 172–3 (original emphasis).
39. *Novy mir*, no. 9 (2008), p. 105. Chukovskaya wrote this letter after reading volume 3 of *Gulag*.
40. *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 1 (1999), p. 5. The published English version of Brodsky's review of *Gulag*, vol. 2, in *Partisan Review*, vol. 44, no. 4 (1977), pp. 637–45, is shorter and does not contain the quoted passage.

Author's Foreword to the Abridgment

If it were possible for any nation to fathom another people's bitter experience through a book, how much easier its future fate would become and how many calamities and mistakes it could avoid. But it is very difficult. There always is this fallacious belief: "It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible."

Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.

Yet I have not given up all hope that human beings and nations may be able, in spite of all, to learn from the experience of other people without having to live through it personally. Therefore, I gratefully accepted Professor Ericson's suggestion to create a one-volume abridgment of my three-volume work, *The Gulag Archipelago*, in order to facilitate its reading for those who do not have much time in this hectic century of ours. I thank Professor Ericson for his generous initiative as well as for the tactfulness, the literary taste, and the understanding of Western readers which he displayed during the work on the abridgment.

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn

Cavendish, Vermont
December 1983

Introduction by Edward E. Ericson Jr

In 1994, after twenty years of forced exile in the West, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia. At one town meeting held on his trans-Siberian whistle-stop tour to reacquaint himself with his homeland, he was confronted by this rebuke: "It is you and your writing that started it all and brought our country to the verge of collapse and devastation. Russia doesn't need you. So … go back to your blessed America." Solzhenitsyn instantly replied that to his dying day he would keep fighting against the evil ideology that was capable of slaying one-third of his country's population. The meeting erupted in applause.

That sort of exchange was unimaginable when the present abridgment of *The Gulag Archipelago* first appeared in 1985. Almost no one expected then that within a few years the Soviet Union would collapse—and almost in a day, like the legendary one-horse shay. Yet now the dramatic events that put the closing punctuation mark on the Soviet parenthesis in Russian history have also, we may say, brought an end to what the great Russian poet Anna Akhmatova called "The True Twentieth Century." This foreshortened century, running from 1914–1917 to 1989–1991, was the era when utopian dreams rooted in Enlightenment optimism came to rely on brute force to make ideological schemes prevail.

The twentieth century has proven, in quantitative terms at least, the most murderous in human history, as governments killed their subjects at record rates. For decades the word *Holocaust* served as shorthand for modern man's inhumanity to man. Then one lone man added a second such term, *gulag*, which now appears in dictionaries as a common noun.

Solzhenitsyn was one of the precious few who did anticipate the demise of the Soviet experiment, and he thought his book would help: "Oh, yes, *Gulag* was destined to affect the course of history, I was sure of that." On one of his darkest days, February 12, 1974, the day before he was forced into exile, and precisely because *Gulag* had appeared in the West, he mused, "You Bolsheviks are finished—there are no two ways about it."

What satisfaction he felt, then, when some early reviews, such as one from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, a leading German newspaper, caught his intentions: "The time may come when we date the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet system from the appearance of *Gulag*." American diplomat and scholar George F. Kennan hailed the work as "the greatest and most powerful single indictment of a political regime ever to be leveled in modern times," one sure to stick in "the craw of the Soviet propaganda machine . . . with increasing discomfort, until it has done its work."

Solzhenitsyn has proven prescient on other matters as well. Not only did he reiterate, in the teeth of the prevailing opinion of Western specialists on Soviet affairs, that he was "absolutely convinced that Communism will go"; he also insisted most resolutely, and against all seeming reason, that he expected to be reunited with his beloved Russia: "In a strange way, I not only hope, I am inwardly convinced that I shall go back. . . . I mean my physical return, not just my books. And that contradicts all rationality." His improbable prerequisites were that his citizenship be restored, that the charge of treason against him be dropped, and that all his books be published in his homeland. After his prophecies were fulfilled, a friend of his reminisced, "It seemed crazy to me at the time, but it was a real conviction, a poet's knowledge. He *sees*. The man *sees*."

However historians ultimately apportion the credit for ending the Cold War, Solzhenitsyn indubitably played a part in bringing the Soviet edifice down to rubble. His writings delegitimized Communism in his homeland and discredited it abroad. He was much too modest in depicting himself as a little calf foolishly butting a mighty oak and thinking this could bring it down. As David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, declares, "In terms of the effect he has had on history, Solzhenitsyn is the dominant writer of this century. Who else compares? Orwell? Koestler?" Remnick concludes that "to some extent, you have to credit the literary works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn with helping to bring down the last empire on earth."

It might be supposed that if Solzhenitsyn won his argument with history—or even precisely because he did win it—his relevance is now over. But that would be to presuppose that we have successfully come to terms with the twentieth century and have learned its lessons well. Unfortunately, if understandably, civilized society, after the brief euphoria of 1989–1991, has generally averted its gaze from the dreadful record. As one former denizen of the gulag, Lev Razgon, put it, "People are tired of the past."

A review of Solzhenitsyn's record will highlight the historical impact of two of his books. When *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* appeared in 1962, the world's attention was drawn to the cruelty of the Soviet gulag. At a stroke, a hitherto-unknown high school teacher of mathematics and physics was catapulted into newspaper headlines around the globe. In retrospect, that novella can be seen as the first crack in the Berlin Wall. From the platform of fame, the author could launch *The Gulag Archipelago*. And it now stands as the indispensable text revealing the distinctive character of the age. Through herculean research efforts into Soviet atrocities, Solzhenitsyn has sketched the panorama and provided many details. Other witnesses and scholars have answered his call to fill in blank spots in the picture, and the literature of the gulag continues to be written. The recently published *Black Book of Communism*, with its global analysis of Communism's crimes and repressions, has put a frame around the unfinished picture—a black border, to be sure.

Among the gaping blank spots that remain, we have yet to determine roughly how many politically induced deaths the Soviet regime inflicted. Solzhenitsyn publicizes a demographer's estimate of some 60 million. Aleksandr Yakovlev, a high official in the Gorbachev regime and now chairman of Russia's Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression, estimates the number at perhaps 35 million. Also, he admits that his generation "allowed those monsters Lenin and Stalin to kill us" and that it is "high time" for him and others "to repent, to apologize to those who survived, [and] to kneel before the millions who were shot."

Yakovlev's penitential posture accords with Solzhenitsyn's moral vision. A key passage in *Gulag* proclaims, "So let the reader who expects this book to be a political exposé slam its covers shut right now." The passage proceeds to specify that moral matters are fundamental, because "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." Given the nature of the Soviet

experiment, the political dimension of life is never far from Solzhenitsyn's mind. But he always approaches politics in moral terms. Anyone, then, who views human reality primarily through the prism of politics will misread *Gulag*. Elsewhere, Solzhenitsyn complains about those who "always insist on regarding me in political terms . . . completely missing the point that this is not my framework, not my task, and not my dimension." Far from limiting himself to politics, he attends primarily to "the timeless essence of humanity," to those "fixed universal concepts called good and justice."

To read *Gulag* through a moral lens is to understand that government power can perpetrate all sorts of atrocities upon human beings, body and soul, but it can never fully succeed in quenching the human spirit. Yes, some people will submit and will die spiritually. But others, like Ivan Denisovich, will endure and prevail. Despite all of the indignities inflicted upon them, their innate human dignity will remain intact. In this sense, *total*itarianism must always fail.

In Solzhenitsyn's case, the moral vision grows organically from a religious commitment. Passages in *Gulag* describe his move from Marx to Christ during his years of incarceration, a change of heart amplified in subsequent writings. Because religious faith is his bedrock conviction, the greatest impediment to appreciating and appropriating Solzhenitsyn has been the error of listening to his sad music of Russia with ears attuned solely to secular wavelengths.

Many Western admirers, who in the early years of Solzhenitsyn's fame had lionized him as an anti-totalitarian freedom fighter, reacted with shock and dismay when in 1972 he publicized his Christian faith. The static interfering with his Western reception increased when the now exiled writer, in speaking to Western audiences about the West, voiced moral criticism in tones many judged to be overly harsh. Intellectuals and journalists developed a negative consensus about him, which was memorably captured by American critic Jeri Laber's complaint in 1974 that "he is not the 'liberal' that we would like him to be." That consensus hardened over the following two decades. By the 1990s the Western response to Solzhenitsyn could be called schizophrenic. On one hand, the misrepresentations encased within the negative consensus caused David Remnick to lament that "when Solzhenitsyn's name comes up now it is more often than not as a freak, a monarchist, an anti-Semite, a crank, a has-been, not as a hero." On the other hand, Solzhenitsyn was widely reported to be "the most admired living Russian" by a Western press that couldn't quite fathom why.

Now that the abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago* returns to print—the 25–30 percent of it that survived my knife—readers can form their judgments afresh. The usual first reaction to any act of abridgment is that it is a bad business, almost a desecration. Yet here is a book that has been translated into thirty-five languages and has sold more than 30 million copies, nearly three million in the United States alone, and nonetheless remains more known about than known. On the many occasions when I have lectured on Solzhenitsyn, members of the audience have told me that they have read the first hundred or so pages of Volume I but never, despite good intentions, returned to read the rest.

We can identify three obstacles that deflect readers. First, the work is very long—more than eighteen hundred pages. Second, some parts depend upon more knowledge of Russian and Soviet history than all but a few Western readers have. Third, the many accumulated horror stories engender a sense of depression that overwhelms all but the most persevering readers.

Therefore, my work of abridgment has been governed by several specifiable principles and procedures. First and foremost, I have kept in mind a Western readership, one with only a limited knowledge of Russian history. Of course, it is impossible to take the "Russianness" out of this book, and I would not want to do so if I could; the work is, after all, written by a Russian and primarily for Russians. But the sections that highlight universal moral values preponderate in this volume. Second, I have retained the seven-part structure of the original, which actually can be perceived more clearly in a one-volume abridgment than in its three-volume entirety. I have sought to provide a sense of the whole work and its developing argument, not merely a series of disconnected excerpts. Third, I have resisted the urge to explain and comment. The few interpolated words of my own are strictly transitional. Fourth, I have tried to leave as few marks of excision as possible. Wherever possible, I have given no indication that passages have been deleted. Where the stitching is obvious, I have resorted to the semi-apology of inserting ellipsis points. For the most part, I hope that, without consulting the original, it is not apparent where the stitching occurred. Chapters that have been deleted entirely are summarized in a sentence or two. The same is true of the few chapters which are cut so deeply that the sense of them cannot be gleaned from the remaining passages. At Solzhenitsyn's own suggestion, I have eliminated much of his personal story, though parts of it I treasure too much to drop.

In sum, I have striven for maximum readability. This abridged text is designed for the general reader, not for the scholar. The full text, including footnotes and explanatory glosses, remains available for all who wish to consult it.

Surprisingly, this abridgment contains several short passages that have still not appeared in translations of the work as a whole, though they do appear in the author's collected works in Russian. We now know the fascinating story of how Solzhenitsyn composed *The Gulag Archipelago*—on the run and largely while at his Hiding Place in Estonia—from *Invisible Allies*, his tribute to his co-workers in the literary underground. This material will eventually appear in its proper place as part of an augmented edition of his autobiographical *The Oak and the Calf*. Just as he "lightened" that work by holding parts out, so he initially withheld parts of *Gulag*. Such was the nature of the clandestine literature of the Soviet gulag.

The one obstacle that an abridgment should not try too hard to resolve is the cumulative effect of unrelieved horror. Solzhenitsyn knows what he is up against. Does it seem, he asks at various times, that I am repeating myself? It is the gulag, he explains, that keeps repeating itself. Anyone who stays the course, however, will discover that the final note of this work, as of virtually all his works, is the note of hope. So if even the abridged version is too long for some readers, they should skip ahead to such chapters as "The Ascent" and "The Forty Days of Kengir" to discover why Solzhenitsyn is hopeful. There they will discover why, despite the common misimpression of him as a Jeremiah figure, he considers himself "an unshakable optimist." As he wrote to me in a letter of advice about my work of abridging, "the main goal, the main sense of *Archipelago* [is] a moral uplifting and *catharsis*" (emphasis his).

I must add that the author gave me considerably more help on this project than I ever could have hoped for. I deeply appreciate his many personal kindnesses. Any errors of omission or commission are mine alone. Solzhenitsyn once told me he thought that in the long run he would be best remembered in the West through this abridgment of *The Gulag Archipelago*. Perhaps one who has been so right so often about so much will turn out to be right about this hope, too.

EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR

Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2001 A.D.

THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO

I dedicate this
to all those who did not live
to tell it.
And may they please forgive me
for not having seen it all
nor remembered it all,
for not having divined all of it.

In 1949 some friends and I came upon a noteworthy news item in *Nature*, a magazine of the Academy of Sciences. It reported in tiny type that in the course of excavations on the Kolyma River a subterranean ice lens had been discovered which was actually a frozen stream—and in it were found frozen specimens of prehistoric fauna some tens of thousands of years old. Whether fish or salamander, these were preserved in so fresh a state, the scientific correspondent reported, that those present immediately broke open the ice encasing the specimens and devoured them *with relish* on the spot.

The magazine no doubt astonished its small audience with the news of how successfully the flesh of fish could be kept fresh in a frozen state. But few, indeed, among its readers were able to decipher the genuine and heroic meaning of this incautious report.

As for us, however—we understood instantly. We could picture the entire scene right down to the smallest details: how those present broke up the ice in frenzied haste; how, flouting the higher claims of ichthyology and elbowing each other to be first, they tore off chunks of the prehistoric flesh and hauled them over to the bonfire to thaw them out and bolt them down.

We understood because we ourselves were the same kind of people as *those present* at that event. We, too, were from that powerful tribe of *zeks*, unique on the face of the earth, the only people who could devour prehistoric salamander *with relish*.

And the Kolyma was the greatest and most famous island, the pole of ferocity of that amazing country of *Gulag* which, though

scattered in an Archipelago geographically, was, in the psychological sense, fused into a continent—an almost invisible, almost imperceptible country inhabited by the zek people.

And this Archipelago crisscrossed and patterned that other country within which it was located, like a gigantic patchwork, cutting into its cities, hovering over its streets. Yet there were many who did not even guess at its presence and many, many others who had heard something vague. And only those who had been there knew the whole truth.

But, as though stricken dumb on the islands of the Archipelago, they kept their silence.

By an unexpected turn of our history, a bit of the truth, an insignificant part of the whole, was allowed out in the open. But those same hands which once screwed tight our handcuffs now hold out their palms in reconciliation: "No, don't! Don't dig up the past! Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye."

But the proverb goes on to say: "Forget the past and you'll lose both eyes."

Decades go by, and the scars and sores of the past are healing over for good. In the course of this period some of the islands of the Archipelago have shuddered and dissolved and the polar sea of oblivion rolls over them. And someday in the future, this Archipelago, its air, and the bones of its inhabitants, frozen in a lens of ice, will be discovered by our descendants like some improbable salamander.

I would not be so bold as to try to write the history of the Archipelago. I have never had the chance to read the documents. And, in fact, will anyone ever have the chance to read them? Those who do not wish to *recall* have already had enough time—and will have more—to destroy all the documents, down to the very last one.

I have absorbed into myself my own eleven years there not as something shameful nor as a nightmare to be cursed: I have come almost to love that monstrous world, and now, by a happy turn of events, I have also been entrusted with many recent reports and letters. So perhaps I shall be able to give some account of the bones and flesh of that salamander—which, incidentally, is still alive.

In this book there are no fictitious persons, nor fictitious events. People and places are named with their own names. If they are identified by initials instead of names, it is for personal considerations. If they are not named at all, it is only because human memory has failed to preserve their names. But it all took place just as it is here described.

This book could never have been created by one person alone. In addition to what I myself was able to take away from the Archipelago—on the skin of my back, and with my eyes and ears—material for this book was given me in reports, memoirs, and letters by 227 witnesses, whose names were to have been listed here.

What I here express to them is not personal gratitude, because this is our common, collective monument to all those who were tortured and murdered.

From among them I would like to single out in particular those who worked hard to help me obtain supporting bibliographical material from books to be found in contemporary libraries or from books long since removed from libraries and destroyed; great persistence was often required to find even one copy which had been preserved. Even more would I like to pay tribute to those who helped me keep this manuscript concealed in difficult periods and then to have it copied.

But the time has not yet come when I dare name them*.

The old Solovetsky Islands prisoner Dmitri Petrovich Vitkovsky was to have been editor of this book. But his half a lifetime spent *there* —indeed, his own camp memoirs are entitled "Half a Lifetime"— resulted in untimely paralysis, and it was not until after he had already been deprived of the gift of speech that he was able to read several completed chapters only and see for himself that everything *will be told*.

And if freedom still does not dawn on my country for a long

time to come, then the very reading and handing on of this book will be very dangerous, so that I am bound to salute future readers as well—on behalf of *those* who have perished.

When I began to write this book in 1958, I knew of no memoirs nor works of literature dealing with the camps. During my years of work before 1967 I gradually became acquainted with the *Kolyma Stories* of Varlam Shalamov and the memoirs of Dmitri Vitkovsky, Y. Ginzburg, and O. Adamova-Sliozberg, to which I refer in the course of my narrative as literary facts known to all (as indeed they someday shall be).

Despite their intent and against their will, certain persons provided invaluable material for this book and helped preserve many important facts and statistics as well as the very air they breathed: M. I. Sudrabs-Latsis, N. V. Krylenko, the Chief State Prosecutor for many years, his heir A. Y. Vyshinsky, and those jurists who were his accomplices, among whom one must single out in particular I. L. Averbakh.

Material for this book was also provided by *thirty-six* Soviet writers, headed by *Maxim Gorky*, authors of the disgraceful book on the White Sea Canal, which was the first in Russian literature to glorify slave labor.

*Solzhenitsyn was finally able to name his invaluable secret helpers in his *Invisible Allies*, trans. Alexis Klimoff and Michael Nicholson (Washington: Counterpoint, 1995). Then, in 2007, the author published, for the first time, the complete list of "Witnesses of the *Archipelago*," those of them who appear in this abridgement can be found incorporated into the Name & Place Index at the end of the present volume. (*Editor's note*.)

PART I

The Prison Industry

Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn—in the army

. . . in detention

. . . after his release from camp

Chapter 1

Arrest

How do people get to this clandestine Archipelago? Hour by hour planes fly there, ships steer their course there, and trains thunder off to it—but all with nary a mark on them to tell of their destination. And at ticket windows or at travel bureaus for Soviet or foreign tourists the employees would be astounded if you were to ask for a ticket to go there. They know nothing and they've never heard of the Archipelago as a whole or of any one of its innumerable islands.

Those who go to the Archipelago to administer it get there via the training schools of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Those who go there to be guards are conscripted via the military conscription centers.

And those who, like you and me, dear reader, go there to die, must get there solely and compulsorily via arrest.

Arrest! Need it be said that it is a breaking point in your life, a bolt of lightning which has scored a direct hit on you? That it is an unassimilable spiritual earthquake not every person can cope with, as a result of which people often slip into insanity?

The Universe has as many different centers as there are living beings in it. Each of us is a center of the Universe, and that Universe is shattered when they hiss at you: "*You are under arrest.*"

If *you* are arrested, can anything else remain unshattered by this cataclysm?

But the darkened mind is incapable of embracing these displacements in our universe, and both the most sophisticated and the veriest simpleton among us, drawing on all life's experience, can gasp out only: "Me? What for?"

And this is a question which, though repeated millions and millions of times before, has yet to receive an answer.

Arrest is an instantaneous, shattering thrust, expulsion, somersault from one state into another.

We have been happily borne—or perhaps have unhappily dragged our weary way—down the long and crooked streets of our lives, past all kinds of walls and fences made of rotting wood, rammed earth, brick, concrete, iron railings. We have never given a thought to what lies behind them. We have never tried to penetrate them with our vision or our understanding. But there is where the *Gulag* country begins, right next to us, two yards away from us. In addition, we have failed to notice an enormous number of closely fitted, well-disguised doors and gates in these fences. All those gates were prepared for us, every last one! And all of a sudden the fateful gate swings quickly open, and four white male hands, unaccustomed to physical labor but nonetheless strong and tenacious, grab us by the leg, arm, collar, cap, ear, and drag us in like a sack, and the gate behind us, the gate to our past life, is slammed shut once and for all.

That's all there is to it! You are arrested!

And you'll find nothing better to respond with than a lamblike bleat: "Me? What for?"

That's what arrest is: it's a blinding flash and a blow which shifts the present instantly into the past and the impossible into omnipotent actuality.

That's all. And neither for the first hour nor for the first day will you be able to grasp anything else.

Except that in your desperation the fake circus moon will blink at you: "It's a mistake! They'll set things right!"

And everything which is by now comprised in the traditional, even literary, image of an arrest will pile up and take shape, not in your own disordered memory, but in what your family and your neighbors in your apartment remember: The sharp nighttime ring or the rude knock at the door. The insolent entrance of the unwiped jackboots of the unsleeping State Security operatives. The frightened and cowed civilian witness at their backs. (And what function does this civilian witness serve? The victim doesn't even dare think about it and the operatives don't remember, but that's what the regulations call for, and so he has to sit there all night long and sign in the morning. For the witness, jerked from his bed, it is torture too—to go out night after night to help arrest his own neighbors and acquaintances.)

The traditional image of arrest is also trembling hands packing for

the victim—a change of underwear, a piece of soap, something to eat; and no one knows what is needed, what is permitted, what clothes are best to wear; and the Security agents keep interrupting and hurrying you:

"You don't need anything. They'll feed you there. It's warm there." (It's all lies. They keep hurrying you to frighten you.)

The traditional image of arrest is also what happens afterward, when the poor victim has been taken away. It is an alien, brutal, and crushing force totally dominating the apartment for hours on end, a breaking, ripping open, pulling from the walls, emptying things from wardrobes and desks onto the floor, shaking, dumping out, and ripping apart—piling up mountains of litter on the floor—and the crunch of things being trampled beneath jackboots. And nothing is sacred in a search! During the arrest of the locomotive engineer Inoshin, a tiny coffin stood in his room containing the body of his newly dead child. The *"jurists"* dumped the child's body out of the coffin and searched it. They shake sick people out of their sickbeds, and they unwind bandages to search beneath them.

For those left behind after the arrest there is the long tail end of a wrecked and devastated life. And the attempts to go and deliver food parcels. But from all the windows the answer comes in barking voices: "Nobody here by that name!" "Never heard of him!" Yes, and in the worst days in Leningrad it took five days of standing in crowded lines just to get to that window. And it may be only after half a year or a year that the arrested person responds at all. Or else the answer is tossed out: "Deprived of the right to correspond." And that means once and for all. "No right to correspondence"—and that almost for certain means: "Has been shot."

That's how we picture arrest to ourselves.

The kind of night arrest described is, in fact, a favorite, because it has important advantages. Everyone living in the apartment is thrown into a state of terror by the first knock at the door. The arrested person is torn from the warmth of his bed. He is in a daze, half-asleep, helpless, and his judgment is befogged. In a night arrest the State Security men have a superiority in numbers; there are many of them, armed, against one person who hasn't even finished buttoning his trousers. During the arrest and search it is highly improbable that a crowd of potential supporters will gather at the entrance. The unhurried, step-by-step visits, first to one apartment, then to another, tomorrow to a third and a fourth, provide an opportunity for the Security operations personnel to be deployed with the maximum efficiency and to

imprison many more citizens of a given town than the police force itself numbers.

In addition, there's an advantage to night arrests in that neither the people in neighboring apartment houses nor those on the city streets can see how many have been taken away. Arrests which frighten the closest neighbors are no event at all to those farther away. It's as if they had not taken place. Along that same asphalt ribbon on which the Black Marias scurry at night, a tribe of youngsters strides by day with banners, flowers, and gay, untroubled songs.

But those who *take,* whose work consists solely of arrests, for whom the horror is boringly repetitive, have a much broader understanding of how arrests operate. They operate according to a large body of theory, and innocence must not lead one to ignore this. The science of arrest is an important segment of the course on general penology and has been propped up with a substantial body of social theory. Arrests are classified according to various criteria: nighttime and daytime; at home, at work, during a journey; first-time arrests and repeats; individual and group arrests. Arrests are distinguished by the degree of surprise required, the amount of resistance expected (even though in tens of millions of cases no resistance was expected and in fact there was none). Arrests are also differentiated by the thoroughness of the required search; by instructions either to make out or not to make out an inventory of confiscated property or seal a room or apartment; to arrest the wife after the husband and send the children to an orphanage, or to send the rest of the family into exile, or to send the old folks to a labor camp too.

No, no: arrests vary widely in form. In 1926 Irma Mendel, a Hungarian, obtained through the Comintern two front-row tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre. Interrogator Klegel was courting her at the time and she invited him to go with her. They sat through the show very affectionately, and when it was over he took her—straight to the Lubyanka. And if on a flowering June day in 1927 on Kuznetsky Most, the plump-cheeked, redheaded beauty Anna Skripnikova, who had just bought some navy-blue material for a dress, climbed into a hansom cab with a young man-about-town, you can be sure it wasn't a lovers' tryst at all, as the cabman understood very well and showed by his frown (he knew the *Organs* don't pay). It was an arrest. In just a moment they would turn on the Lubyanka and enter the black maw of the gates. No, one certainly cannot say that daylight arrest, arrest during a journey, or arrest in the middle of a crowd has ever been neglected in our country. However, it has always been clean-cut—and, most surprising

of all, the victims, in cooperation with the Security men, have conducted themselves in the noblest conceivable manner, so as to spare the living from witnessing the death of the condemned.

Not everyone can be arrested at home, with a preliminary knock at the door (and if there is a knock, then it has to be the house manager or else the postman). And not everyone can be arrested at work either. If the person to be arrested is vicious, then it's better to seize him *outside* his ordinary milieu—away from his family and colleagues, from those who share his views, from any hiding places. It is essential that he have no chance to destroy, hide, or pass on anything to anyone. VIP's in the military or the Party were sometimes first given new assignments, ensconced in a private railway car, and then arrested en route. Some obscure, ordinary mortal, scared to death by epidemic arrests all around him and already depressed for a week by sinister glances from his chief, is suddenly summoned to the local Party committee, where he is beamingly presented with a vacation ticket to a Sochi sanatorium. The rabbit is overwhelmed and immediately concludes that his fears were groundless. After expressing his gratitude, he hurries home, triumphant, to pack his suitcase. It is only two hours till train time, and he scolds his wife for being too slow. He arrives at the station with time to spare. And there in the waiting room or at the bar he is hailed by an extraordinarily pleasant young man: "Don't you remember me, Pyotr Ivanich?" Pyotr Ivanich has difficulty remembering: "Well, not exactly, you see, although . . ." The young man, however, is overflowing with friendly concern: "Come now, how can that be? I'll have to remind you. . . ." And he bows respectfully to Pyotr Ivanich's wife: "You must forgive us. I'll keep him only *one minute.*" The wife accedes, and trustingly the husband lets himself be led away by the arm—forever or for ten years!

The station is thronged—and no one notices anything. . . . Oh, you citizens who love to travel! Do not forget that in every station there are a GPU Branch and several prison cells.

This importunity of alleged acquaintances is so abrupt that only a person who has not had the wolfish preparation of camp life is likely to pull back from it. Do not suppose, for example, that if you are an employee of the American Embassy by the name of Alexander Dolgun you cannot be arrested in broad daylight on Gorky Street, right by the Central Telegraph Office. Your unfamiliar friend dashes through the press of the crowd, and opens his plundering arms to embrace you: "Saaasha!" He simply shouts at you, with no effort to be inconspicuous. "Hey, pal! Long time no see! Come on over, let's get out of the way."

At that moment a Pobeda sedan draws up to the curb. . . . And several days later TASS will issue an angry statement to all the papers alleging that informed circles of the Soviet government have no information on the disappearance of Alexander Dolgun. But what's so unusual about that? Our boys have carried out such arrests in Brussels—which was where Zhora Blednov was seized—not just in Moscow.

One has to give the *Organs* their due: in an age when public speeches, the plays in our theaters, and women's fashions all seem to have come off assembly lines, arrests can be of the most varied kind. They take you aside in a factory corridor after you have had your pass checked—and you're arrested. They take you from a military hospital with a temperature of 102, as they did with Ans Bernshtein, and the doctor will not raise a peep about your arrest—just let him try! They'll take you right off the operating table—as they took N. M. Vorobyev, a school inspector, in 1936, in the middle of an operation for stomach ulcer—and drag you off to a cell, as they did him, half-alive and all bloody (as Karpunich recollects). In the Gastronome—the fancy food store—you are invited to the special-order department and arrested there. You are arrested by a religious pilgrim whom you have put up for the night "for the sake of Christ." You are arrested by a meterman who has come to read your electric meter. You are arrested by a bicyclist who has run into you on the street, by a railway conductor, a taxi driver, a savings bank teller, the manager of a movie theater. Any one of them can arrest you, and you notice the concealed maroon-colored identification card only when it is too late.

Sometimes arrests even seem to be a game—there is so much superfluous imagination, so much well-fed energy, invested in them. After all, the victim would not resist anyway. Is it that the Security agents want to justify their employment and their numbers? After all, it would seem enough to send notices to all the rabbits marked for arrest, and they would show up obediently at the designated hour and minute at the iron gates of State Security with a bundle in their hands —ready to occupy a piece of floor in the cell for which they were intended. And, in fact, that's the way collective farmers are arrested. Who wants to go all the way to a hut at night, with no roads to travel on? They are summoned to the village soviet—and arrested there. Manual workers are called into the office.

Of course, every machine has a point at which it is overloaded, beyond which it cannot function. In the strained and overloaded years of 1945 and 1946, when trainload after trainload poured in from Europe, to be swallowed up immediately and sent off to *Gulag,* all that

excessive theatricality went out the window, and the whole theory suffered greatly. All the fuss and feathers of ritual went flying in every direction, and the arrest of tens of thousands took on the appearance of a squalid roll call: they stood there with lists, read off the names of those on one train, loaded them onto another, and that was the whole arrest.

For several decades political arrests were distinguished in our country precisely by the fact that people were arrested who were guilty of nothing and were therefore unprepared to put up any resistance whatsoever. There was a general feeling of being destined for destruction, a sense of having nowhere to escape from the GPU-NKVD (which, incidentally, given our internal passport system, was quite accurate). And even in the fever of epidemic arrests, when people leaving for work said farewell to their families every day, because they could not be certain they would return at night, even then almost no one tried to run away and only in rare cases did people commit suicide. And that was exactly what was required. A submissive sheep is a find for a wolf.

This submissiveness was also due to ignorance of the mechanics of epidemic arrests. By and large, the *Organs* had no profound reasons for their choice of whom to arrest and whom not to arrest. They merely had over-all assignments, quotas for a specific number of arrests. These quotas might be filled on an orderly basis or wholly arbitrarily. In 1937 a woman came to the reception room of the Novocherkassk NKVD to ask what she should do about the unfed unweaned infant of a neighbor who had been arrested. They said: "Sit down, we'll find out." She sat there for two hours—whereupon they took her and tossed her into a cell. They had a total plan which had to be fulfilled in a hurry, and there was no one available to send out into the city—and here was this woman already in their hands!

Universal innocence also gave rise to the universal failure to act. Maybe they *won't take* you? Maybe it will all blow over? A. I. Ladyzhensky was the chief teacher in a school in remote Kologriv. In 1937 a peasant approached him in an open market and passed him a message from a third person: "Aleksandr Ivanich, get out of town, *you are on the list!*" But he stayed: After all, the whole school rests on my shoulders, and *their own* children are pupils here. How can they arrest me? (Several days later he was arrested.) Not everyone was so fortunate as to understand at the age of fourteen, as did Vanya Levitsky: "Every honest man is sure to go to prison. Right now my papa is serving time, and when I grow up they'll put me in too." (They put him in when he