

Solzhenitsyn and His Silent Circle

Invisible Allies

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Counterpoint / 344 pages / \$29.50

REVIEWED BY

Hilton Kramer

Given the political and spiritual climate of American cultural life in the last decades of the twentieth century, we should not be surprised that even a writer as heroic in stature and as formidable in accomplishment as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—who, incidentally, observed his 77th birthday in December—has virtually disappeared from the collective consciousness of our fickle and often foolish literary scene. It is, after all, beyond question that Solzhenitsyn has little to contribute to the discussion of race, class, and gender or to the many other politically correct issues that nowadays so beguile so many of our high-reputation writers and their cheerless champions in the media and the academy. Solzhenitsyn isn't chic, and there is no use pretending otherwise.

It is worth recalling, however, that even in the heyday of Solzhenitsyn's celebrity as an admired dissident, he was always looked upon with a good deal of suspicion by our own intellectual and media elite. He might be respected for opposing the Soviet establishment, but he could not be forgiven for his fierce and fundamental criticisms of the Revolution itself. That, in the eyes of the American literary left, was going way too far. Thus, in the very year that Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union—1974—he was attacked by George Steiner in the pages of the *New Yorker* for showing insufficient reverence for Lenin's great achievement in establishing the Soviet state. This unconscionable attack was made, amazingly enough, in the course of a review of *The Gulag Archipelago*.

HILTON KRAMER is editor of the *New Criterion*.

The situation didn't get any better, either, when Solzhenitsyn came to live in the United States, where, as I well remember, in 1980 the late Irving Howe, proud editor of the writings of Leon Trotsky, offered some moral instruction to the author of *The Gulag Archipelago* in the pages of the *New Republic*. And it wasn't only our literary critics who were sorely vexed by Solzhenitsyn's outspoken opinions. It should not be forgotten that it was our then-secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, who, in the interests of an ill-fated policy of détente, advised the White House not to receive Solzhenitsyn upon his arrival in America, lest such a reception offend the delicate sensibilities of the Soviet leadership—a decision that, to his credit, Kissinger later deeply regretted.

None of this, fortunately, did anything to deter Solzhenitsyn from his steadfast pursuit of the literary and historical mission he had set for himself, which was nothing less than to write a moral history of the Bolshevik Revolution and the catastrophic consequences it visited upon the Russian people. What that mission entailed, not only in the way of intellectual stamina and political courage but in the assortment of skills and risks required to outwit powerful adversaries while completing vast literary projects under the most unforgiving circumstances—that whole story is one of the most extraordinary in the annals of totalitarianism, and one of the few to end in a clear-cut triumph over Soviet villainy. Whatever may happen to, or in, Russia in the future, *The Gulag Archipelago* is one of the books that changed the history of the twentieth century, and the tale of how it was written, copied, preserved, secretly circulated at home, and smuggled abroad for publication throughout the free world is itself a special kind of thriller.

Now, with the publication of *Invisible Allies*, some very important chapters of this tale are recounted for the first time. Solzhenitsyn wrote the book in Zurich, in 1974-75, immediately upon completing *The Oak and the Calf*. The latter, which

told the story of his open opposition to the Soviet regime in the years preceding his arrest and expulsion in February 1974, was promptly published at the time—the Russian edition in Paris in 1975, the English translation here in 1980. What could not be published until the collapse of the Soviet Union itself was the story of the improvised clandestine network of individuals who, at great risk to themselves, supported Solzhenitsyn's endeavors in an unrelenting battle of wits with the KGB. Some, like Solzhenitsyn himself, were former *zeks*, inmates of the Gulag who had survived its punishing regimen. Others occupied quite respectable positions in Soviet society. It was in the nature of their clandestine tasks, moreover, that many remained unknown to each other—both for their own protection and to provide Solzhenitsyn and his subversive manuscripts with as much security as this precarious and swiftly changing situation allowed. In *Invisible Allies*, Solzhenitsyn has given us a group portrait of these brave souls that contains some of his tenderest writing. Inevitably, the book is also in some respects a self-portrait, and on this score, too, *Invisible Allies* is one of its author's most riveting works.

Toward the close of the first chapter of *Invisible Allies*, which was written only a few months after Solzhenitsyn was forcibly expelled from his homeland, he gives us a sense of the spirit of moral obligation in which the book itself has been conceived:

I sit down to write these pages and in my mind's eye all my loyal companions in arms, my collaborators, my helpers, almost all of them still alive and still in danger, gather around me like affectionate shadows. I see their eyes and listen intently to their voices—more intently than I ever could in the heat of battle.

Unknown to the world, they risked everything without receiving in recompense the public admiration that can mitigate even death. And for many of them the publication of these pages will come too late.

The irony of it! Here I am safe and sound, while they continue to live with an ax suspended over their heads.

Invisible Allies is indeed a chronicle of the men and women who, with few

exceptions, remained undaunted by that "ax suspended over their heads," and of the ingenious stratagems that were devised by these amateur conspirators to elude detection by what Solzhenitsyn also calls "the Unsleeping Eye" of the state apparatus. To understand the scope and complexity of this underground network and the hazards it faced in every one of its activities, it has to be recalled that in the period that is recounted in *Invisible Allies* Solzhenitsyn was writing or constantly revising an immense, unpublished literary *œuvre*—not only the three stout volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago* and two sizable novels *Cancer Ward* and *First Circle*, but plays, poetry, shorter fiction, and the early volumes in his vast cycle of novels on the history of the Revolution. For the first time, too, he was committing to paper the large poetic *œuvre* he had created during his years in the Gulag and preserved for himself by a prodigious feat of memory.

To produce typescripts of all these works and make carbon copies of them, to circulate them to reliable readers, to microfilm those thousands of pages (when things came to that stage), and find adequate hiding places for everything that had been written and copied; and then, at a further stage of this clandestine project, to make contact with and assess the trustworthiness of the couriers who might be counted upon to ferry these works to trusted contacts in the West—all of this, needless to say, required an immense amount of time, a great deal of laborious effort, and huge personal risks on the part of collaborators who, in most cases, were already working at full-time jobs and otherwise living under very difficult conditions.

It wasn't always the case, either, that every one of Solzhenitsyn's dedicated collaborators agreed in every respect with his political and religious views. Inevitably, there were ideological disagreements—not, for the most part, about the catastrophe that Stalin and his successors had imposed on Russia, for virtually everyone's life had been deeply touched by the years of Terror, but about the legitimacy of the Revolution itself. The myth of the Revolution was in some cases the hardest thing to give up,

even among people who felt a profound disgust for the Soviet regime. Yet such was their dedication to Solzhenitsyn's cause that even these disagreements, which could be fundamental, were subordinated to the success of his mission.

For with the official publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in the early 1960's, Solzhenitsyn had emerged as the leader of the internal opposition to the Soviet regime. The so-called Thaw that had made its publication possible proved to be short-lived, however, and during the new crackdown that ensued Solzhenitsyn's moral authority was further enhanced by his open and steadfast campaign of opposition—a campaign that reached a kind of climax with his public "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" in 1973. It was *Ivan Denisovich*, above all, that prompted so many remarkable people to rally to Solzhenitsyn's banner and become the "invisible allies" that made his mission a success. The publication of *Ivan Denisovich* had raised hopes that the truth about the Terror and its consequences might at last be open-

ly discussible, and it was in the light of the shattered hopes that came with the new crackdown that these allies sought out the author of *Ivan Denisovich*, who was otherwise unknown to them, and placed themselves at his service.

Had anything quite like this ever before occurred in the history of literature? It may well have had some precedents, but none that I know of.

There is also a very poignant subplot to be followed in *Invisible Allies*—the story of the breakup of Solzhenitsyn's marriage to a woman who actually became a threat to his entire project and the whole clandestine network that was laboring on his behalf, and his happy attachment to his present wife, who came into his life as one of the most remarkable of the many women who served his cause. About this personal side of Solzhenitsyn's ordeal he is customarily reticent, but it is nonetheless one of the elements of the narrative that adds romance to the suspenseful, spy-thriller aspects of the gripping story that is told to us in *Invisible Allies*. ❧

Learn Another Language on Your Own!



Learn to speak a foreign language fluently on

your own and at your own pace with what are considered the finest in-depth courses available. Many were developed by the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State for diplomatic personnel who must learn a language quickly and thoroughly. Emphasis is on learning to speak and to understand the spoken language. A typical course (equivalent to a college semester) includes an album of 10 to 12 audio cassettes (10 to 18 hours), recorded by native-born speakers, plus a 250-page textbook. Some of our courses:

<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic, Saudi	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> German I	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Latin	\$160	<input type="checkbox"/> Serbo-Croatian	\$195
<input type="checkbox"/> Egyptian	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> German II	\$155	<input type="checkbox"/> Latvian	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Slovak	\$185
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bulgarian	\$245	<input type="checkbox"/> Greek	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Lithuanian	\$135	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish I	\$185
<input type="checkbox"/> Cantonese	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Haitian Creole	\$225	<input type="checkbox"/> Mandarin	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish II	\$165
<input type="checkbox"/> Catalan	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Hebrew	\$255	<input type="checkbox"/> Norwegian	\$125	<input type="checkbox"/> Swedish	\$185
<input type="checkbox"/> Czech	\$125	<input type="checkbox"/> Hungarian	\$195	<input type="checkbox"/> Persian	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Swahili	\$225
<input type="checkbox"/> Danish	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Italian	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog	\$295
<input type="checkbox"/> Dutch	\$125	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Portuguese	\$215	<input type="checkbox"/> Thai	\$195
<input type="checkbox"/> Estonian	\$295	<input type="checkbox"/> Khmer	\$225	(Brazilian)		<input type="checkbox"/> Turkish	\$195
<input type="checkbox"/> French I	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	\$195	<input type="checkbox"/> Romanian	\$115	<input type="checkbox"/> Ukrainian	\$195
<input type="checkbox"/> French II	\$215	<input type="checkbox"/> Lakota	\$185	<input type="checkbox"/> Russian	\$225	<input type="checkbox"/> Urdu	\$185
						<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	\$225

You can order now with a full 3-week money-back guarantee.



Call toll-free 1-800-243-1234, fax (203) 453-9774, e-mail: 74537.550@compuserve.com

Or clip this ad and send with your name and address and a check or money order—or charge to any major credit card, by enclosing card number, expiration date, and your signature. Ask for our free 56-page *Whole World Language Catalog* with courses in 96 languages. Our 24th year.

AUDIO-FORUM
THE LANGUAGE SOURCE

Audio-Forum, Room F214,
96 Broad Street, Guilford, CT 06437 (203) 453-9794

The "Lovely Grub" of Winston Churchill's Life

In Search of Churchill: A Historian's Journey

by Martin Gilbert

Wiley / 316 pages / \$30

REVIEWED BY

Joseph Shattan

Since 1968, when he replaced Randolph Churchill as Winston Churchill's official biographer, Martin Gilbert has produced six narrative volumes tracing Churchill's career from the eve of the First World War in 1914 to his death in 1965. He has also produced a one-volume life of Churchill, along with ten documentary volumes containing, as he puts it, "a comprehensive selection of the letters, documents and other contemporary materials covering all periods of Churchill's life and career." Much of the research behind this prodigious body of work must have been extraordinarily tedious—Churchill's papers alone are estimated to weigh fifteen tons—but some of it was pure pleasure. *In Search of Churchill* gives a sense of that excitement.

The fun began in 1962, when the 26-year-old Gilbert set aside plans for graduate study at Oxford for what he thought would be a six-month stint as research assistant to Churchill's son, Randolph. Fiercely loyal to his father's political legacy, Randolph was a vivid and formidable character who still burned with hatred for Neville Chamberlain and his band of appeasers. When a newspaper editor whom Randolph especially wanted to impress, and for whom he had prepared a particularly elaborate dinner, imprudently admitted that he had cut the dispatches of the *Times'* Berlin correspondent during the 1930's, Randolph's reaction was awful to behold:

The cutting of the Berlin dispatches was a central point in the perfidy of the appeasers.

JOSEPH SHATTAN is consulting editor of *The American Spectator*.

Now the "villain" had revealed himself, and done so without realizing what he had done. I looked at Randolph, but he had risen from the table and was already at the sideboard, where the baron of beef was awaiting, his back to us. Suddenly, he turned towards the table, brandishing the carving knife, shaking and trembling, and exploded with a bellow of fury: "S---s like you should have been shot by my father in 1940." The stress on the words "s---s" and "shot" was fearsome to hear. Then he lunged towards the editor, who had to dodge round the table, until Randolph hurled the carving knife on the floor and strode out of the room. We never saw him again that night.

But Randolph did more than provide occasional fireworks; he taught the youthful Gilbert how to be a historian. Gilbert's job was to go through the files containing Winston Churchill's letters, have them typed up by one of the secretaries, then read them aloud to Randolph. "As I read, he would fire questions at me, which I would jot down in the margin.... I had to find, or at least to seek, the answers to a dozen questions each time I read a file to him, sometimes more."

Randolph Churchill had been a journalist since the 1930's, so this approach to history—always demanding to know what, who, and when—came quite naturally to him. It did not come at all naturally to Gilbert, whose Oxford education had made him "used to reading secondary works in which the historian had already established the facts or, if he had failed to establish them, had left them vague and blurred." Eventually, though, Randolph's passion for details—"lovely grub," he called them—became Gilbert's as well: "History was for Randolph a feast, full of delicious morsels. And so, despite his unpredictable rages, it became for me."

When Randolph died and Gilbert succeeded him as Churchill's official biographer, he devoted himself to the quest for "lovely grub." Besides Churchill's papers, these came mainly from public and private archives, supplemented by

the recollections of people who knew Churchill at various points in his life. One of those was Churchill's private Secretary, Sir John Colville. Colville challenged the view, popularized by Churchill's physician, Lord Moran, that throughout his life Churchill had been prone to lengthy and debilitating bouts of depression—what Churchill called his "black dog." In a letter to Gilbert, Colville argued that Moran had simply misunderstood Churchill:

The expression "to have a black dog on one's back" was one that my nanny used to use very frequently. I suspect that Mrs. Everest [Churchill's nanny] must have used it too. It was a very common expression among nannies. I think that Sir Winston must have said on various occasions to Lord Moran, "I have got a black dog on my back today." Lord Moran, not moving very frequently in nanny circles, evidently thought that this was some new and remarkable expression which Sir Winston applied to himself.

Gilbert agrees with Colville that, far from stemming from deeply-rooted psychological difficulties, Churchill's bouts of depression were simply "a reaction to the world's failures, and deep frustration whenever he was not in a position to influence them." Gilbert's doubts about Lord Moran's judgment were reinforced when, having completed the final volume of his biography, he discovered that Moran's published diary, upon which he had relied but which he'd never seen in its original form, was not, strictly speaking, a diary at all—merely a series of undated musings. "The mind boggles," Gilbert writes, "at how much misinformation may have crept into the history books, mine included, by such routes."

Names like Lord Moran and Sir John Colville are well known to all students of the Churchill saga. Less familiar is the name Charles Torr Anderson. Squadron Leader Anderson had won the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1917. In 1934 he became Director of Training at the British Air Ministry. Convinced that government officials were deliberately misleading the public about the Royal Air Force's lack of readiness, he began giving Churchill secret Air Ministry documents, which