

to undermine private life as well. Berkeley himself diagnosed the pathologies of his age in terms of two categories of analysis still valid to this day: materialization of the external world and psychologization of the self. The first can be parodied as Lockeanism with a vengeance, while the second made a star of Freud. The first de-mystifies God in the world, while the second relocates Him to the therapist's couch. Perhaps this is why Pius X concluded that, "Modernism is the synthesis of all heresies."

*The End of the Modern World* suffers from a severe compression of this complex history. But the advantage goes to the general reader who wants a summary of the descent of man from a cosmological soul integrated spiritually beyond the limitations of temporal units—states, nations, races, or classes. Romano Guardini provides a thoughtful, but not hopeless, meditation on the dissolution of Western culture.

## ***For the Love of Russia***

EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR.

### **November 1916: The Red Wheel /**

**Knot II**, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,  
translated by Harry Willetts, *New*  
*York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.*  
1014 pp.

"WHITHER ARE WE BOUND? What is to happen? Something grandiose and terrifying is imminent. We are rushing toward the

---

EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR., is Professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is a long-time contributor to *Modern Age* and a new member of its Advisory Board.

abyss." These words spoken by a young lady at a dinner party capture the mixture of listlessness and foreboding that prevails in Russia in late 1916. Russia is caught in a vise between war abroad and revolutionary ferment at home; and some good, saving thing urgently needs to happen but is not happening.

It is very daring—some may think foolhardy—to write a thousand-page novel in which nothing happens, but that is what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn does in *November 1916*. How else to capture the atmosphere of oppressive stagnancy without which the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 would not have occurred? The highest task of literature, the author says elsewhere, is "to serve reality," and the reality he presents here, in a major revision of history, is that the Revolution was not inevitable. It happened because, as William Butler Yeats immortally wrote about this great historical juncture, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." Since history is told by the victors, Solzhenitsyn must "recreate a reality which has been crushed, trampled and maligned." Committed to recovering the truth of history, he shows also, as the victors have not shown, the roads not taken, roads that could have detoured our century's great horrors.

Yeats could only wonder "what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born." Solzhenitsyn was fated to live in the belly of that dragon from its beginning (he was born in 1918) until his 1974 exile, and now beyond the momentous demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. The chief defining trait of the twentieth century has been its fanatical experiment in totalitarianism, which is different in kind from old-fashioned dictatorship. To this attempt at total control of persons' inner as well as outer lives, Solzhenitsyn has been the indispensable witness. He is a central interpreter of our foreshortened

century running from 1914-17 to 1989-91. He has also, through the power of his pen, been a major actor in the drama of his time. By now, only the willfully obtuse refuse to accord *The Gulag Archipelago* its due in precipitating the collapse of the Soviet empire. This stunning end of the story, too, which almost no one foresaw, Solzhenitsyn correctly predicted.

Beyond his many literary works set in Soviet times, Solzhenitsyn devoted his main energies in maturity to telling how the story began. By his teens he decided that the great work of his life would be to tell the story of the Russian Revolution. And so he has done. True, the Marxist-schooled youth lost his illusions in the prison camps and turned to the Orthodox Christian faith of his forefathers. But that radical change of heart simply made the telling of the climactic event of modern world history all the more urgent, now not as celebration but as lament and cautionary tale.

*November 1916* is the second installment of *The Red Wheel*, with two more (and not shorter!) installments to come, the original plan of twenty volumes having proven overly ambitious. The total should approach 5000 pages. Even after formidable preliminary work in Russia, Solzhenitsyn spent nearly his entire two decades in the West on this *magnum opus*. It is sad to report that it has taken almost as long for *November 1916* to reach English translation, the Russian version having appeared fifteen years ago. Who knows how long it will be before we have the whole of *The Red Wheel*? And how many years after that will it take for a full scholarly processing of the nature and import of this gargantuan work? Never mind that already, before we have half the text available, some critics have declared the project a failure, dead not on but before arrival. If his other works guarantee his standing as a major twentieth-century figure, Solzhenitsyn clearly

is banking on *The Red Wheel* as his chief claim to enduring fame.

The odds against Solzhenitsyn are substantial. The immensity of the project does not comport well with habits of readers who turn pages fast at airport standup bars. The author, having required of himself long years of deep historical research, makes great demands on unknowledgeable Western readers, providing little (too little) explanation of personages and events far away and long ago. Moreover, plot, fiction's most crowd-pleasing element but never Solzhenitsyn's long suit, is particularly skimpy here. If John Milton hoped for only "fit audience, though few" for *Paradise Lost*, Solzhenitsyn's audience will likely be fewer and will have to be fitter.

The best augury in Solzhenitsyn's favor is that *March 1917*, the third installment, recently appeared in French translation to superlatives of praise. Furthermore, the early English-language reviews of *November 1916*, though not numerous, range from respectful to quite favorable. This is in contrast to the reception of *August 1914*, which drew frowns from most reviewers and castigation from some. (This initial rejection, too, Solzhenitsyn anticipated.) So it is possible that one who has been so right so often about so much will also be right about posterity's verdict on his "main project."

Readers who approach this work expecting a conventional novel may stumble. As baggy as the genre of novel is, *The Red Wheel* does not fall comfortably within it. The author says he approached the writing confident that "the material itself will dictate the necessary form, just as the material of *Gulag* did to me." The *sui generis* result he calls "a narrative in discrete periods of 'a cycle of knots,'" somewhat like a mosaic. Each knot is a "nodal point" in history when complex and interrelated issues come into focus and the significance of histori-

cal flux is revealed.

A knot features not plot but character. Solzhenitsyn lavishes as much care on imagining historical characters as on inventing fictional ones. Since his "main dramatis persona is Russia as a whole," we encounter a very large cast of individuals, from top to bottom socially, from side to side (left to right) politically. These characters are deployed polyphonically, so that in each chapter a given one is the central consciousness.

Perhaps the most useful heuristic device for cataloguing these characters is according to whether—and how much—they love or hate Russia. But real, full-bodied love for Russia includes loving the God of this historically Christian people. *The Red Wheel* is this thoroughly Russian writer's most Russian work of all—and hence, necessarily, his most Christian work (which of course is another stumbling block for secular readers). In his Templeton Address, Solzhenitsyn explained "the great disasters that had befallen Russia" starkly: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened." In this novel love of God underpins love of all the neighbors that compose the nation.

The chief hater is Lenin. "In every country," he urges, "stir up hatred of your own government! This is the only work worthy of a socialist." After his lifetime of studying this man whose "vocation" was "to change the course of history," Solzhenitsyn's interpretation of the century's most celebrated figure is only now beginning to gain ground, in a debate that will rage on. This Lenin is far from infallible, imagining, for example, that "from Switzerland the flame of revolution will be kindled throughout Europe!" What he has that no one else has in equal measure is "the savage, intolerant narrowness of the born schismatic."

This singlemindedness causes Lenin to prevail over his main fellow-conspirator, Parvus, who bankrolled Lenin.

"Parvus was full of contradictions": a "desperate revolutionary" and a "passionate trader," a Russian revolutionary who turned Western socialist and never returned to his homeland. Lenin "proved to be the more farsighted of the two," because "ideas are more durable than all [Parvus's] millions." Lenin's singlemindedness also inspires such true-believer disciples as factory-worker Shlyapnikov, who carried the zeal of his Old-Believer rearing into his work as a Bolshevik operative and who, ironically but unsurprisingly, died a prisoner in Stalin's camps.

Not only socialists but also liberals are among those who do not love Russia or Russia's God. Here the primary offenders are the Kadets, "a party of intellectuals" and the kind of people who, if you "utter just one word in defense of Orthodox Christianity[,] ... will howl you down." As one shrewd character describes it, "The Kadet phenomenon...is not just a political party, it's a poison, a corrosive pervading the whole Russian atmosphere." Solzhenitsyn reconstructs and comments on the speeches in the parliament (Duma) given by Kadet leaders and others. Though he uses small print for such passages as a concession to hurried readers looking for parts to skip, they are often brilliantly conceived and historically rich sections.

It is these liberals who come to power in the revolution of February 1917, but with a "growing indebtedness to the left." When "the wind always blows from the far left," in Solzhenitsyn's interpretation, "heads incorrigibly skewed leftward could not return to a midway position." So, for any reader who wonders why, after all his labors to explain the Russian Revolution, Solzhenitsyn stops with April 1917, here is why: Once the soft haters came to power, they would surely succumb to the hard haters. That is the only inevitability in this story. The jig was up for Russia in February 1917; November

1917 was the terrifying denouement, as the red wheel of revolution rolled inexorably onward. All these haters are among the devils of Dostoevsky's famous prophesying.

The lovers of Russia in this volume are numerous, but they all suffer in varying degrees "Russia's curse—from top to bottom: indecision." At the top is the pathetically paralyzed figure of Tsar Nikolai II. His wife, Aleksandra—wild with desire to help her nation, her husband, her hemophiliac son, herself—is among a handful of best-drawn characters. This religious woman is also superstitious, and her advice relies fatally on the fanciful insights of her (always capitalized and always offstage) Friend, Rasputin. Ineffectual love beats hatred, obviously, but Russia in her extremity needs wiser heads than these.

Were there any? Yes, there were. There once was a man who knew what to do: Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin. He is Solzhenitsyn's historical hero, the "one great one." He was a centrist committed to evolutionary development—just like Solzhenitsyn, be it noted (despite egregious misrepresentations of him as some sort of extremist). He was assassinated. *August 1914* treats his person and political philosophy. He hovers over *November 1916* as (to steal a notion from deconstructionists) the presence of an absence. "Start brooding about the past and the image of the thwarted and murdered Stolypin loomed at every turn."

Stolypin had followers. Dmitri Shipov and Aleksandr Guchkov, leaders of the moderate Octobrist political party, carry the torch. But it is dimming. Solzhenitsyn traces their careers through a downward spiral into ineffectuality. Yet he admires their ideas. Shipov, for instance, believes that "the inner development of the person has priority over social development," but that "these two processes should not be seen as in opposition." His deepest commitment is to "the Russian

idea" which from of old has sought "to order men's lives according to God's will."

Guchkov made Stolypin's cause his own, even sharing Stolypin's "tragic role of defending the monarchy against the monarch." But a "middle-of-the-road" policy proves "the most difficult line of all to follow." So, despite his capacity and desire for high office, "he remained an ineffectual busybody, an outsider, with no official standing—a Russian destiny!"

Of similar mind is Georgi Vorotyntsev, who, as a (fictional) colonel in the army, may be considered a Stolypin figure further down the totem pole. He is the most extensively treated character of both the first and second knots and often the author's mouthpiece. This man of honor combines the efficiency of a modern man with an embrace of tradition. This doer's favorite role is leading men in battle, but he is also a clear-eyed strategist who could advise well those in the military and civil establishment, despite his scorn for them, if they would listen. By the end of *August 1914*, a reader may well conclude that Russia could have had a happy twentieth century if only there were enough Vorotyntsevs. ("Why, oh why, was Russia so short of serious people?")

But *November 1916* shows Vorotyntsev's feet of clay. He comes to St. Petersburg in search of Guchkov. When they finally talk, they agree that Russia erred in joining the war in Europe, and together they discuss removing rulership from the Tsar's shaky hands in a palace coup by moderates that would also serve as a preemptive strike against the radicals. But in the meantime, Vorotyntsev engages in an adulterous liaison with Olda Andozerskaya, a professor of medieval history who was "rather ordinary-looking" but "the cleverest woman in Petersburg, so they say." Despite the consanguinity between these two thoughtful patriots, the dizzying affair distracts Vorotyntsev from fulfilling his sense of duty to country, a microcosm of

which is his avoiding his wife. One of the best begins to lack conviction.

Had wise leaders emerged, there would have been followers. Among the peasants, the soldiers, the engineers, the others forming the backbone of Russia, one character, army lieutenant Sanya Lazhenitsyn, is particularly noteworthy. He is based on the author's father, who died in a hunting accident six months before his son was born. An early conversation between Sanya and Father Severyan, a chaplain, establishes the work's Christian tone. Sanya, who in *August 1914* had sought out Tolstoy in person, has by now concluded, to the priest's approval, that Tolstoyanism is not the answer: "What Tolstoy wants to do is save people without any help at all from God."

Although critics have facilely linked Solzhenitsyn with Tolstoy, *The Red Wheel* is peppered with anti-Tolstoyan polemics. In *August 1914*, Solzhenitsyn counters Tolstoy's emphasis on the large, impersonal forces of history by insisting on the primacy of freely willed actions by individuals. *November 1916* continues that argument over the philosophy of history and adds an Orthodox Christian rebuff of Tolstoy's heterodoxy. Solzhenitsyn pays Tolstoy the homage of arguing with him, but his heart belongs to Dostoevsky.

One more character absolutely essential for a proper reading of this book is Zina Altanskaya, to whom the author devotes the lyrical closing chapter. A rebellious adolescent who says she does not believe in "God the Comforter," Zina has an affair with Fyodor Kovynov, her forty-year-old high-school teacher and also a writer (modeled on the Cossack author, Kryukov, from whom Sholokhov plagiarized, according to Solzhenitsyn). From this union Zina bears a son. When Kovynov, after having abandoned her, beckons to her to come to him, she briefly leaves her son. And he dies! Later, still in a daze of anguished guilt, she unthink-

ingly finds her way to a church. "It was a path she had never once taken in her young days." But as the final line of Tengiz Abuladze's magnificent film *Repentance* puts it, "What good is a street that doesn't lead to a church?"

There, in the dome above the nave, she sees an image that represents to her "a portrayal of the Power that sustains the world" and all of us in it. She turns toward an icon of "the Saviour's brown-tinted[,] ...completely human face." She pours out a full confession to Father Aloni, who offers her absolution and guides her head so that she can kiss the Gospel and the crucifix. The "mystery greater than we realize" that indwells each of us can be glimpsed only "in communion with God."

In Zina we have a symbol of Russia. As disruptions in private lives parallel those in the nation's public life, so the final words are for the nation as well as the woman. "How can anyone forbid you to love when Christ said that there is nothing higher than love? And he made no exceptions, for love of any kind whatsoever." How odd, how unexpected, that this sprawling panorama of historical fiction turns out to be, in the end, a story of love. Solzhenitsyn writes to heal the Russian soul riven by war and revolution, and what Russia needs even now is love, sweet love. And we all remember the apostle's words about Who is love.

## ***The New American Faith***

ALLAN CARLSON

**After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State**, by Paul Gottfried, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. 141 pp.

PAUL GOTTFRIED, a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College, has long been