The Center for Ethics and Culture Solzhenitsyn Series

The Center for Ethics and Culture Solzhenitsyn Series showcases the contributions and continuing inspiration of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), the Nobel Prize–winning novelist and historian. The series makes available works of Solzhenitsyn, including previously untranslated works, and aims to provide the leading platform for exploring the many facets of his enduring legacy. In his novels, essays, memoirs, and speeches, Solzhenitsyn revealed the devastating core of totalitarianism and warned against political, economic, and cultural dangers to the human spirit. In addition to publishing his work, this new series features thoughtful writers and commentators who draw inspiration from Solzhenitsyn’s abiding care for Christianity and the West, and for the best of the Russian tradition. Through contributions in politics, literature, philosophy, and the arts, these writers follow Solzhenitsyn’s trail in a world filled with new pitfalls and new possibilities for human freedom and human dignity.
Publisher's Note

March 1917 (consisting of books 1–4) is the centerpiece of The Red Wheel, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s multivolume historical novel on the roots and outbreak of the Russian Revolution, which he divided into four “nodes.” March 1917 is the third node.

The first node, August 1914, leads up to the disastrous defeat of the Russians by the Germans at the Battle of Tannenberg in World War I. The second node, November 1916, offers a panorama of Russia on the eve of revolution. August 1914 and November 1916 focus on Russia’s crises, revolutionary terrorism and its suppression, the missed opportunity of Pyotr Stolypin’s reforms, and the souring of patriotism as Russia bled in the world war.

March 1917 tells the story of the beginning of the revolution in Petrograd, as riots go unchecked, units of the army mutiny, and both the state and the numerous opposition leaders are incapable of controlling events. The present volume, book 1 of March 1917, is set during March 8–12. It will be followed by English translations of the next three books of March 1917, describing events through March 31, and the two books of April 1917.

The nodes of The Red Wheel can be read consecutively or independently. All blend fictional characters with numerous historical personages, usually introduced under their own names and with accurate biographical data. The depiction of historical characters and events is based on the author’s extensive research in archives, administrative records, newspapers, memoirs, émigré collections, unpublished correspondence, family records, and other contemporary sources. In many sections the historical novel turns into dramatic history. Plots and subplots abound.

The English translations by H. T. Willetts of August 1914 and November 1916, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1989 and 1999, respectively, appeared as Knot I and Knot II. The present translation, in accordance with the wishes of the Solzhenitsyn estate, has chosen the term “Node” as more faithful to the author’s intent. Both terms refer, as in mathematics, to discrete points on a continuous line.

In a 1983 interview with Bernard Pivot, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn described his narrative concept as follows: “The Red Wheel is the narrative of revolution in Russia, its movement through the whirlwind of revolution. This is an immense scope of material, and . . . it would be impossible to describe this many events and this many characters over such a lengthy stretch of time. That is why I have chosen the method of nodal points, or Nodes. I select short segments of time, of two or three weeks’ duration, where the most vivid events unfold, or else where the decisive causes of future events are formed. And I describe in detail only these short segments. These are the Nodes. Through these nodal points I convey the general vector, the overall shape of this complex curve.”

Dates in the original Russian text were given in the Old Style, according to the Julian calendar used in Russia until 1918. In the English translations these dates have been changed, in accordance with the author’s wishes, to the New Style (Gregorian) calendar.

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putting them thirteen days ahead of the old dates. The March 1917 revolution thus corre-
sponds to the February Revolution in Russian history (Old Style), just as the revolution
that placed the Bolsheviks in power in November of that year is commonly referred to as
the October Revolution.

In the “screen” sequences in this book, the different margins represent different in-
tuctions for the shooting of a film: sound effects or camera direction, action, and di-
alogue (in italics). The symbol “=” indicates “cut to.” Newspaper headlines of the day,
common in other volumes of The Red Wheel, are not included in the present book be-
cause the Petrograd newspapers had stopped publication during this period.

*   *   *

The English translation was made possible through a generous anonymous donation to
the Solzhenitsyn Initiative at the Wilson Center’s Kennan Institute, which is gratefully
acknowledged.

The two maps of Petrograd and the Index of Names have been adapted and revised from
the versions in the French translation, La Roue rouge, Troisième nœud, Mars dix-sept,
tome 1, with the kind permission of Fayard and approval of the Solzhenitsyn estate.
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