

The New Criterion

Notes & Comments

September 2008

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 1918-2008

On the death of the great Russian writer.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who died last month at eighty-nine, was one of our greatest chroniclers of Soviet tyranny. Beginning with his short novel *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, published in 1962 during the Khrushchev “thaw,” he unforgettably anatomized the inner workings of that hideous, soul-destroying engine of totalitarianism. *A Day in the Life* won Solzhenitsyn instant literary fame, but also the unhappy scrutiny of Soviet authorities. His subsequent books—*The Cancer Ward* (1969), the multi-volume *Gulag Archipelago* (1973), and other works—remained unpublished in the Soviet Union for decades.

Solzhenitsyn knew the macabre, arbitrary workings of totalitarianism from the inside. In the winter of 1945, when he was fighting with the Soviet army on the Prussian front, he was arrested for being an enemy of the State. The crime? A reference to Stalin in a letter to a friend ...

This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 27 September 2008, on page 1

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