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Foreword Review HISTORICAL

March 1917: The Red Wheel, Node III, Book 2

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
Marian Schwartz, Translator
University of Notre Dame Press (Nov 15, 2019)
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That Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is an important chronicler of Soviet era Russia is hardly in dispute; his novels are among the most memorable depictions of that era. That's certainly true of *The Red Wheel*, his massive, multi-volume account of the 1917 revolution that toppled Nicholas II and replaced imperial power with Bolshevik power. For the Russian Revolution's centennial anniversary, Marian Schwartz's new translation is the first time the expansive and resonant *March 1917: Node III: Book 2* has been published in English.

The book takes place over just three days—March 13th through the 15th—during the early revolution. In the capital, the imperial order is being replaced, while both the provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet are forming the institutions that will clash in the second revolution later in the year. Solzhenitsyn tells the story through dozens of point-of-view characters enveloped in the chaos, from soldiers returned from the front of the unpopular Great War to students to aristocrats trying to figure out what the upheaval means for them.

Real-life characters, including the tsar and other political figures, share the stage with a young child keeping a diary. Solzhenitsyn also makes use of news reports, issued orders, and other documents, which are treated almost as characters in their own right. He spent decades on the research and writing of *The Red Wheel.*

Solzhenitsyn captures the chaos of the time, when a centuries-old order fell and the factions that would fight to replace it were still forming. Though *Book 2* features myriad characters and is only one volume of a four-volume book (and even then only part of a much larger sequential novel), the story it tells isn't a complete narrative. Still, this entry in the master work is satisfying as both an engrossing patchwork of lives and a snapshot of a moment when the people didn't yet know what was coming.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2019)

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