

Books that influenced my life



Three books

- I include three books that influenced my thinking and hence my life.
- I read these when I was an impressionable young man (in the 1960s)
- The books are:
 - “The Red Orchestra” by Gilles Perrault
 - “The Gulag Archipelago” by Solzhenitsyn
 - “Ulysses” by James Joyce

The Red Orchestra

- The book “The Red Orchestra” by Gilles Perrault was published in 1967
- “The Red Orchestra” was the name of the Soviet spy-ring in Europe *during* WWII
- It had 279 members of many nationalities
- 69 were Jews, including Palestinian Jews
- It was based in Brussels and Paris
- They caused at least 200,000 German casualties
- Its “conductor” was Leopold Trepper

Leopold Trepper

- Born in Poland in 1904
- Studied at Krakow University
- Became a miner and a Communist
- Was imprisoned for 9 months
- In 1928 moved to Palestine
- Organized anti-British strikes
- Was expelled and was back in France in 1930
- Became part of a Communist spy ring
- In 1932 attended spy school in Moscow
- In 1938 began organizing a Soviet spy ring in Brussels
- In 1940 was appointed head of Soviet espionage in Europe centered in Paris



Trepper's activities

- Used false identities with various passports, e.g. Leiba Domb, Jean Gilbert
- Set up dummy companies, “The excellent trench coat company” in Brussels and Simexco in Paris
- Used legitimate businessmen as fronts
- Spoke excellent French, German and Russian
- Cultivated good relations with senior SS officers, giving presents and parties (none realized he was Jewish)
- Dealt in black market and bribes
- Lived in high style during WWII
- Passed information onto Moscow thru several radio operators (pianists) including the date of the German invasion of Russia, June 22, 1941

Capture and fate

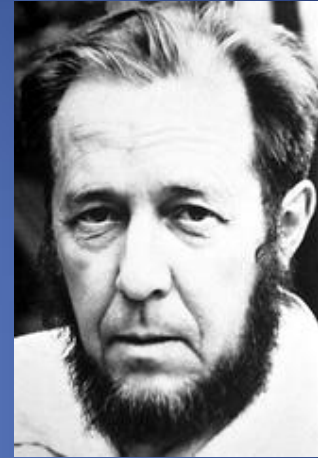
- Had a Berlin branch, Harro Schulze-Boysen and Arvid Harnack
- The Gestapo/Abwehr tracked his network down and eventually caught him in 1942
- They tortured and executed all his assistants, but not Trepper
- He agreed to cooperate with them and send false information to Moscow (the “great game”) although he later claimed to have been a loyal anti-Nazi
- They suspected he was Jewish, but preferred to believe otherwise
- He managed to escape in 1943 from a pharmacy in Paris with two entrances
- Returned to Moscow in 1945, but was imprisoned by Stalin for 8 years
- Was released and allowed to return to Warsaw where he was Head of the Jewish Community Organization
- Returned to Israel in 1973 and died in Jerusalem in 1982

Influence on my thinking

- The unknown and obscure story of the Red Orchestra proved to me that Jews in an organized way could have done much more damage to the Nazis than they did
- Trepper epitomized the tough, independent and resourceful Jew who took action and thru sheer nerve and intelligence overcame his enemies

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

- Born 1918 in Russia, died there 2008
- Was Captain in the Red Army
- Arrested in 1945 for making jokes about Stalin
- Sentenced to 8 years in the camps
- First sent to a *sharashka*, a special camp for scientists
- Then sent to hard labor in Kazakhstan as a *zek*
- Followed by 3 years of exile in Siberia
- The Gulag Archipelago was written 1958-1967, based on his own experiences and those of fellow prisoners
- It revolutionized the world's view of communism and was massively influential



“The Gulag Archipelago”

- GULAG was the acronym for the camps of the Soviet penal colonies that spread across the USSR
- They were forced labor camps
- Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned there 1945-1953
- This experience led to the writing of “*One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*” that was published in the USSR in 1962 with the permission of Khrushchev and became a unique literary and historical event



“The Gulag Archipelago”

- The book was written in three volumes covering the whole period of the Gulag under Communism from 1918-1956
- It is subtitled “An experiment in literary investigation” which is certainly an under-statement
- It covers Solzhenitsyn’s own arrest, his interrogation and experiences in the *sharaska* camp and in a hard labor camp with other *zeks*
- Volume One of the “Gulag” starts with the first camp in 1918 on Solovetsky Island where prisoners were murdered indiscriminantly
- It covers the building of the White Sea canal from Leningrad north that resulted in an estimated 25,000 deaths
- It includes the murder of uncounted thousands of *kulaks* (rich peasants) who were transported by boat up the Volga river and left in the Arctic to die.

Solzhenitsyn in exile

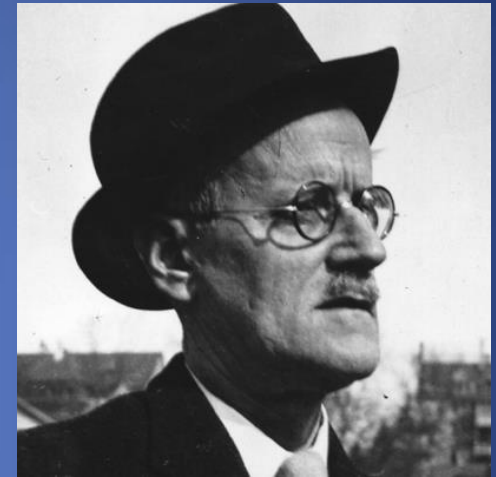
- The bulk of the “Gulag Archipelago” was written on scraps of paper in tiny writing and then smuggled out of camps and typed and then smuggled out of the USSR
- It includes the narratives of nearly 300 other prisoners that Solzhenitsyn committed to memory and reproduced in the book.
- Solzhenitsyn himself was deported in 1974, stripped of his USSR citizenship and lived in Vermont, USA, until the overthrow of communism when he returned to Russia in 1990
- Solzhenitsyn was known for his right wing political views, but undoubtedly was a literary genius

Influence on my thinking

- “The Gulag Archipelago” is a work of literary genius, that ripped open our eyes to the truth and reality of communism
- It showed how facile concepts such as socialism could lead to terrible suffering and revealed the darker instincts of men
- It also showed that millions could be killed even before the Holocaust happened and showed how precious is our own freedom

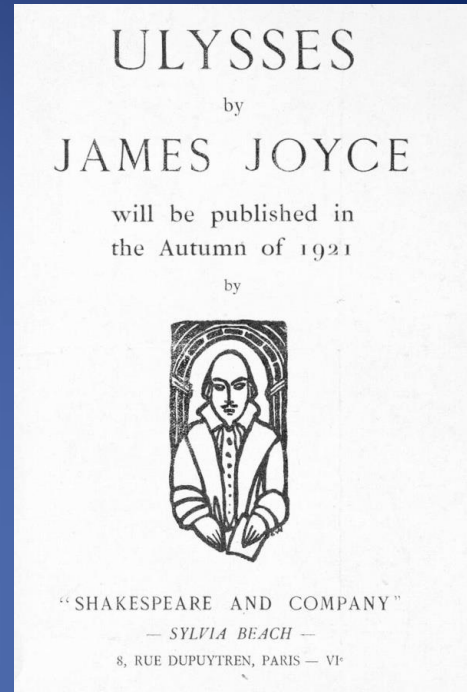
James Joyce

- James Joyce born Dublin 1882
- Graduated UCD 1902
- 16 June 1904 met Nora Barnacle
- They eloped to Trieste in 1904
- “Dubliners” published 1914
- “Portrait of the Artist” in 1916
- Taught English and started writing “Ulysses” 1914
- Moved to Zurich in 1915 and then Paris in 1920
- Published “Ulysses” in Paris in 1922
- Lived there until 1940 then moved to Zurich and died there in 1941



“Ulysses”

- Written from 1914-1921
- Published by Shakespeare & Co, Paris
- Based on Homer’s Greek classic “The Odyssey”
- Considered “modernist” in style with “stream of consciousness” sections
- Takes place on a single day, 16 June, 1904, known as “Bloomsday”
- 18 chapters, each written in a different style
- Stephen Dedalus represents Joyce, Leopold Bloom is his avatar
- “Ulysses” has a serious anti-Catholic theme and was considered obscene at the time
- Banned in the USA, not published there until 1933
- Became a classic case of first amendment rights



Plot of “Ulysses”

- The plot of “Ulysses” exists on three levels
- First, it parallels the trials of Ulysses in the Odyssey (a long difficult journey)
- Second, it portrays the life of Stephen Dedalus as he moves about Dublin on one day, giving a detailed picture of the city and its denizens
- Third, it portrays the struggle of Joyce to break with Catholicism and dramatizes his refusal to kneel at his mother’s bedside when she was dying and his estrangement from his father
- Why was Bloom Jewish? Actually he wasn’t, only his father was Jewish, based on a friend in Trieste Ettore Schmitz (Italo Svevo), representing “everyman”

Selections from “Ulysses”

- P. 3 “The snotgreen sea. The scrotum-tightening sea”
- P. 4 “The aunt thinks you killed your mother, that’s why she won’t let me have anything to do with you.”
- P. 328 “Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyrining, Imperthythnthn thnthnthn.”
- P. 444 “Mendelsohn was a jew and Karl Marx and Mercadante and Spinoza. And the Saviour was a jew and his father was a jew. Your God.” “He had no father... By Jesus” says he, “I’ll brain the bloody Jew-man for using the holy name. By Jesus, I’ll crucify him.”
- P. 819 “What spectacle confronted them when they, ...emerged silently, ...the heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit.”
- P. 933 “...yes I said yes I will Yes.”

Influence on my thinking

- The novel “Ulysses” opened my mind to a whole new form of literature, it was unconventional, versatile, profound and even mind-blowing
- It showed that especially in the 20th century we could overcome hundreds of years of traditional story-telling for a completely fresh and novel approach to literature