

“Orlando Figes has performed an astonishing task...This is a very important book – authoritative, vivid, precise, and, in places, almost unbearably moving.”

The Sunday Telegraph, 1 November 2007

Noel Malcolm, [‘Extraordinary Stories from Ordinary Soviet Life’](#)

"This book is one of the best literary monuments to the Soviet people, on a par with *The Gulag Archipelago* and the prose of Shalamov. *The Whisperers* is a fascinating encyclopedia of human relations during the Stalinist Terror."

The New Statesman, 6 December 2007

Andrey Kurkov, [‘Secrets of the State’](#)

“Orlando Figes’s awesome work on the misery visited on the Soviet people by their own regimes is one of the most unforgettable books I have ever read. I defy anyone to read it without weeping at its human suffering, cruelty and courage.”

The Mail on Sunday, 14 October 2007

Simon Sebag Montefiore, ‘Forgotten Victims of Terror’

“Orlando Figes is the master of a new genre...The books is full of sad beauty. Like any great history book, *The Whisperers* is also a manifesto about how history should be written.”

Prospect, November 2007

Ben Lewis, [‘We Started Something Great’](#)

“Masterfully composed and controlled as a narrative by Figes, this is a collective testimony in which you can hear voices through a doorway open at last, recounting the hopes, fears and numberless awful tragedies of the Soviet era....The family sagas in this vast canvas are of scarcely believable tenacity and endurance.”

The Sunday Times, 23 September 2007

[Reviewed by Alexander Cockburn](#)

“This book is the result of a large-scale research project and its importance cannot be overestimated. Figes and his team have unearthed diaries and accounts from archives and interviewed hundreds of survivors. This is a heartrending book... which should be made compulsory reading in Russia today.”

The Times, 22 September 2007

[Reviewed by Antony Beevor](#)

“This is an exhausting, even numbing encyclopedia of woe – made bearable by the compassion its subjects show one another and Mr Figes’s own rigorously compassionate treatment of their compromises...this is a humbling monument to the evil and endurance of Russia’s Soviet past...”

The Economist, 18 October 2007

[‘Stalin’s Children’](#)

“Brilliant and shocking... a powerful history of emotional life in a society in which the personal was ruthlessly repressed for three-quarters of a century.”

The Observer, 21 October 2007

Geraldine Bedell, [‘Stalin’s Victims Find a Voice’](#)

“This book, about the breakers and the broken, explains in brutal detail how a political ideal contrived to beat an entire country’s heart out of place. The author of *A People’s Tragedy* and *Natasha’s Dance* has outdone himself.”

The Telegraph, 29 September 2007

[Reviewed by Jasper Rees](#)

“The thoroughness of the research makes *The Whisperers* an impressive book”

The Mail on Sunday, 5 October 2007

Reviewed by David Price-Jones

"This remarkable book is the fruit of a project to try to record the recollections of

an elderly generation of former Soviet citizens before they disappeared as witnesses to the long history of the Soviet regime....Orlando Figes and a team of Russian colleagues and assistants have attempted to breathe life into what is often presented as a set of dry statistics of deaths and camp inmates. The result is an extraordinary exploration of the inner lives of a cross-section of Soviet society as they first experienced and then reflected on the 20 years of Stalinist dictatorship."

Times Higher Education, 21 December 2007

Richard Overy, ['Silence and Suffering'](#)

"..a worthy tribute to the humanity of the victims of the Terror"

The Independent, 28 September 2007

Catriona Kelly, ['At last, the statistics speak'](#)

"Historical analysis is lightly but deftly rendered, and it is the voices of Stalin's victims which takes centre stage. The chronicle of damaged lives which emerges is deeply moving and extraordinarily poignant...Figes's brilliant account of this terrifying social experiment, and the deformed life it forced on its citizens, brings us close to the heart of the Soviet utopia, a time when to be oneself was all but impossible, even behind closed doors."

The Scotsman, 13 October 2007

Marc Lambert, ['Collective Psychosis'](#)

"*The Whisperers* is a vast, patient monument to almost unimaginable constraint. It is a record of the silence that settled down in Soviet life, not just in public life but in private too, between friends, within families, and even in people's thoughts....Figes has worked around this silence, has made it eloquent, with the help of the organization Memorial, which bravely campaigns for a Russian reckoning with its 20th century....The result is a mass of vivid moments that could be shared with no one when they happened. Here and there come secret

kindnesses, but for the most part, secret sufferings, moments of pain locked away lifelong."

Evening Standard, 8 October 2007

Francis Spufford, 'Deathly Silence of the Stalin Decades'

"Working at a human level, *The Whisperers* is not about the vast sweep of history, but about the hidden lives that were caught up in it. It is a heroic undertaking, both in scale and diligence. Figes writes with great fluency and clarity, giving us the fullest picture to date of how life was lived under the moral degradation that was the Stalin era."

The Oldie, November 2007

Jennie Erdal, 'Hidden lives'

"This book is the fruit of a colossal undertaking...Figes has constructed a monumental edifice with a literary architect's skill. Each story is a suite of rooms spanning several floors, and Figes expertly guides the reader through halls and corridors of these heroes' lives, showing us both the riches and the squalor of human experience."

Books Quarterly, Waterstones Autumn issue

Reviewed by Andrey Kurkov

"Orlando Figes's *The Whisperers* is the most haunting history I have read in years. Based on extensive original research and carefully collated personal testimony, it reveals what private life was like for millions under Stalin's tyranny. Figes is appropriately modest in the face of the searing sadness that he records: he does not over-analyse, or attempt to explain away the pain. Instead he honours the lives Stalin blighted by writing about them beautifully. I pride myself on rarely crying, but this book did move me to tears, and filled me with enormous respect for its exceptionally talented author."

Ruth Scurr, *The Times*, Books of the Year

"An unforgettable Panorama of human suffering, cruelty and resilience."

Noel Malcolm, *Sunday Telegraph*, Books of the Year

"A new book by Orlando Figes is always something special. I haven't finished *The Whisperers* yet - but I already know that it will be the best book I read this year."

Marina Lewicka, *Sunday Telegraph*, Books of the Year

"[an] extraordinary book.. thanks to Figes, these survivors overcame their silence and have lifted their voices above a whisper."

The New York Times, 25 November 2007

Joshua Rubenstein, ['Stalin's Children'](#)

"The stories are poignant, heartbreaking, even terrifying in their depiction of human cruelty, the waste of talent, the abuse of trust and faith...Figes has written an extraordinary work of synthesis and insight, carefully contextualizing the varied witnesses to suffering and survival."

The Moscow Times, 16 November 2007

Ronald Grigor Suny, ['Behind Closed Doors'](#)

"Excellent... riveting, at once solemn and lively. Figes has unwrapped the mystery inside the enigma of Stalinism."

The Washington Post, 17 February 2008

Vladislav Zubok, ['The Destruction of Memory'](#)

"Extraordinary... vividly reveals a people whose entire existence was defined by the taboo against private life as well as the resilience, and resistance, of the human soul in the face of forcible reorientation."

[The New Yorker](#), 12 November 2007

“Figes, the preeminent Russian historian in the English language, has made it his life’s work to preserve and understand the nightmarish Soviet century... he has done his utmost to capture the essence of what it was like to be alive in that dark time, and *The Whisperers* is the remarkable, deeply moving result... crammed full of humanity, like a Dostoevsky novel brought to life. While it is a scholarly work of history, reading it was one of the most emotionally draining literary experiences I can remember.”

The Boston Globe, 30 January 2008

Saul Austerlitz, ['Giving voice to the lives destroyed by Stalin's reign of terror'](#)

“The everyday lives of Russians between the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the death of Josef Stalin in 1953 is the subject of Orlando Figes’ illuminating and profoundly moving new book. Filled with the stories of hundreds of survivors, many of which make for desperately painful reading, *The Whisperers* offers the most thorough account so far of what it meant to live under Soviet totalitarianism.”

The Seattle Times, 16 November 2007

Douglas Smith, ['Resilience in the face of repression'](#)

“A tapestry of the Stalinist era woven from the personal experiences and words of Soviet citizens, both betrayers and betrayed... the research is extensive and subtle, Figes uses it to elucidate the texture of daily life and the ways humanity was perverted by a regime of terror.”

[The Atlantic](#), 3 December 2007

"Remarkable....Through the show trials, World War II, the doctors' plot and repressions against the Jews, and the thaw of Nikita Khrushchev, released exiles and their families kept silent, afraid to invite further punishment. Now their voices can be heard in Mr. Figes's valuable work."

The New York Sun, 21 November 2007

Martha Mercer, ['Life Under a Tyrant's Thumb'](#)

“‘Magisterial’ may be an overworked adjective in book reviews, but it accurately describes Orlando Figes’s latest volume. He deserves kudos for his penetrating narrative.”

The New Leader, November/December 2007

Gene Sosin, ['Exploring Uncharted Territory'](#)

In his panoramic new book, Orlando Figes sets out to investigate this crime of silence, in which the victim—the Russian people—was also the perpetrator. *The Whisperers* is the perfect title for this portrait of human society under the Bolsheviks: a nation of the paranoid, fearful, and selfdeluded; an empire of cannibals, quietly chewing away at one another, with immense suffering but very little screaming to be heard. The accounts by those who couldn’t help but scream, like Mandelstam’s memoir and Eugenia Ginzburg’s, are well known, as are the stories of those who were swallowed up by Stalin’s labor camps but lived to tell about it (well chronicled in Anne Applebaum’s recent book, *Gulag*). Figes has succeeded in doing something much more ambitious and complicated. His book is not about the people who struggled against the world that Communism created; it is about those ordinary Soviet citizens who made their lives within that world, and what it did to them—the girl who was orphaned when her parents were arbitrarily arrested and sent to labor camps, the woman who informed on her husband to save herself, the relative of an “enemy of the people” forced to shut the door in his face when he needed help, the neighbors who felt they had no choice but to spy on one another. The book is a mosaic of just some of these millions of shattered lives.

Book Forum, December/January 2008

Gal Beckerman, ['Arrested Development'](#)

Some historians of the nit-picking type have already done their thing in regard to Figes's vast canvas, but no one could fail to be moved, horrified and enlightened by it. He is a dedicated purveyor of the social effects of tyranny.

The Australian, 19 January 2008

Judith Armstrong, ['Careful, the Great Leader might hear you'](#)