



And Quiet Flows the Don

Mikhail Sholokhov , Stephen Garry (Translator)

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And Quiet Flows the Don or Quietly Flows the Don (????? ???, lit. "The Quiet Don") is 4-volume epic novel by Russian writer Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov. The 1st three volumes were written from 1925 to '32 & published in the Soviet magazine October in 1928–32. The 4th volume was finished in 1940. The English translation of the 1st three volumes appeared under this title in 1934. The novel is considered one of the most significant works of Russian literature in the 20th century. It depicts the lives & struggles of Don Cossacks during WWI, the Russian Revolution & Russian Civil War. In 1965, Sholokhov was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for this novel. The authorship of the novel is contested by some literary critics & historians, who believe it wasn't entirely written by Sholokhov.

And Quiet Flows the Don Details

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Author : Mikhail Sholokhov , Stephen Garry (Translator)

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From Reader Review And Quiet Flows the Don for online ebook

Sotiris Karaiskos says

I read this book under strange circumstances, as part of a group reading in a group, lasted a long time and I was unable to follow its timetable, so I read it occasionally and I was unable to into it. This, of course, is bad on the one hand but on the other hand the lack of emotional involvement in most of this book can make me make a more calm and objective review. Of course, at the beginning, when I read almost normal, this engagement existed as the author made a truly majestic account of life in a Cossack village in a beautiful but difficult environment with rules that have not changed for centuries. There the proud Cossacks distribute their time between agricultural work and preparation for the next war in which they will have a major role. When they do not, they are being dragged by their characteristic passion in any other area of ??their lives, including love. So we come to the story of erotic passion that threatens to destroy the two lovers by exhaling them from the village life. In this particular point I dare say that we are going through some pages of literary grandeur, which is not limited to telling the erotic story but also to creating the special characters somehow influenced by it.

Somewhere there, however, things are getting serious as the First World War begins. There, through the look of the writer, we watch the heroes involved in the battles and those who are staying back, having a humane narrative of the suffering on the sidelines of the great historical events. Then follows the revolution and the tragic civil war that changed the whole of Russia and of course the protagonists of our history. From this part to the end is where I lost the thread somewhere and I'm not sure that this is only because of the unusual way of reading. Of course, the book is extremely interesting at this point, but it was quite difficult to watch the plot. More seemed to me as the separate narration of individual episodes rather than the narration of an integrated story. These episodes were from breathtaking to relatively uninteresting and within them a multitude of characters are passing, representing each side of this situation, which certainly helps to have an image but it certainly makes reading even harder. Finally, the different threads come together as we observe the most horrible dimension of the civil war, where the writer's message about the value of peaceful life becomes clear.

So, to be honest, I must admit that I did not enjoy this book, that I did not experience moments of awe through its pages, but from the few moments that I managed to get into the book - and even be moved - from his quality, the beautiful writing, and the message that goes on in the end I understand that I have read something really important that rightfully has a place among the masterpieces of Russian literature. In a next reading that will be done in better conditions, I believe I will be able to enjoy it as well.

Αυτ? το βιβλ?ο το δι?βασα κ?τω απ? περ?εργες συνθ?κες, στα πλα?σια μιας ομαδικ?ς αν?γνωσης σε μ?α ομ?δα μου κρ?τησε πολ? καιρ? και αδυνατο?σα να ακολουθ?σω το χρονοδι?γραμμα της, με αποτ?λεσμα να το διαβ?ζω αρκετ? περιστασιακ? και να μην μπορ? να μπω αρκετ? στο κλ?μα.
Αυτ? β?βαια ε?ναι κακ? απ? τη μ?α αλλ? απ? την ?λλη η ?λλειψη συναισθηματικ?ς εμπλοκ?ς στο μεγάλ?τερο μ?ρος αυτο? του βιβλ?ου μπορε? να με κ?νει να κ?νω μ?α πιο ψ?χραιμη και αντικειμενικ? κριτικ?. Β?βαια στην αρχ? που δι?βαζα σχεδ?ν φυσιολογικ? αυτ? η εμπλοκ? υπ?ρχε καθ?ς ο συγγραφέας ?κανε μ?α πραγματικ? μαγευτικ? περιγραφή της ζω?ς σε ?να χωρι? των Κοζ?κων, μ?σα σε ?να ?μορφο αλλ? δ?σκολο περιβ?λλον με καν?νες που δεν ?χουν αλλ?ξει για αι?νες. Εκε? οι υπερ?φανοι Κοζ?κοι μοιρ?ζουν το χρ?νο τους αν?μεσα στις αγροτικ?ς εργασ?ες και στην προετοιμασ?α για τον επ?μενο π?λεμο στον οπο?ο θα πρωταγωνιστ?σουν. ?ταν δεν τα κ?νουν αυτ? παρασ?ρονται απ? το χαρακτηριστικ? τους π?θος σε οποιονδ?ποτε ?λλο τομ?α της ζω?ς τους συμπεριλαμβανομ?νου και του ?ρωτα. ?τσι φτ?νουμε στη ιστορ?α ερωτικο? π?θους που απειλε? να

καταστρ?ψει τους δ?ο εραστ?ς εξορ?ζοντας τους απ? τη ζω? του χωριο?. Σε αυτ? ειδικ? το σημε?ο τολμ? να πω ?τι περν?με απ? μερικ?ς σελ?δες λογοτεχνικο? μεγαλε?ου, που δεν περιορ?ζεται μ?νο στην αφ?γηση της ερωτικ?ς ιστορ?ας αλλ? και στην δημιουργ?α των ξεχωριστ?ν χαρακτ?ρων που επηρε?ζονται με κ?ποιο τρ?πο τρ?πο απ? αυτ?.

Κ?που εκε?, ?μως, τα πρ?γματα σοβαρε?ουν καθ?ς ξεκιν?ει ο πρ?τος Παγκ?σμιος Π?λεμος. Εκε? μ?σα απ? τη ματι? του συγγραφ?α παρακολουθο?με τους ?ρωες που συμμετ?χουν στις μ?χες αλλ? και αυτο?ς που μ?νουν στα μετ?πισθεν, ?χοντας ?τσι μ?α ανθρ?πινη αφ?γηση των βασ?νων στο περιθ?ριο των μεγ?λων ιστορικ?ν γεγον?των. Μετ? ακολουθε? η επαν?σταση και ο τραγικ?ς εμφ?λιος που ?λλαξε ολ?κληρη τη Ρωσ?α και φυσικ? τους πρωταγωνιστ?ς της ιστορ?ας μας. Απ? αυτ? το μ?ρος και μ?χρι το τ?λος ε?ναι που κ?που ?χασα το ν?μα και δεν ε?μαι σ?γουρος ?τι για αυτ? ευθ?νεται αποκλειστικ? ο ασυν?θιστος τρ?πος διαβ?σματος. Ε?ναι β?βαια τρομερ? ενδιαφ?ρον το βιβλ?ο σε αυτ? το σημε?ο αλλ? ?ταν αρκετ? δ?σκολο να παρακολουθ?σω την πλοκ?. Περισσ?τερο μου φ?νονταν σαν την ξεχωριστ? αφ?γηση μεμονωμ?νων επεισοδ?ων παρ? την αφ?γηση μιας ιστορ?ας ολοκληρωμ?νης. Αυτ? τα επεισ?δια ?ταν απ? συγκλονιστικ? ?ως σχετικ? αδι?φορα και μ?σα σε αυτ? περν?ει ?να πλ?θος χαρακτ?ρων που αντιπροσωπε?ουν κ?θε μερι? αυτ?ς της κατ?στασης, κ?τι που σ?γουρα βοηθ?ει στο να ?χουμε μ?α εικ?να αλλ? σ?γουρα κ?νει την αν?γνωση ακ?μα δυσκολ?τερη. Προς το τ?λος τα διαφορετικ? ν?ματα εν?νονται καθ?ς παρακολουθο?με την πιο φρικτ? δι?σταση του εμφυλ?ου πολ?μου ?που γ?νεται ξεκ?θαρο το μ?νυμα του συγγραφ?α για την αξ?α της ειρηνικ?ς ζω?ς.

Οπ?τε πρ?πει, για να ε?μαι ειλικριν?ς, να παραδεχτ? ?τι δεν απ?λαυσα αυτ? το βιβλ?ο, ?τι δεν ?ζησα συνταρακτικ?ς στιγμ?ς μ?σα απ? τις σελ?δες του, απ? τις λ?γες στιγμ?ς, ?μως, που κατ?φερα να παρασυρθ? απ? το βιβλ?ο - ακ?μα και να συγκινηθ? -, απ? την ποι?τητ? του, την πολ? ?μορφη γρ?φ? και απ? το μ?νυμα που περν?ει στο τ?λος καταλαβα?νω ?τι δι?βασα κ?τι πραγματικ? σημαντικ? που δικα?ως ?χει μ?α θ?ση αν?μεσα στα αριστουργ?ματα της ρωσικ?ς λογοτεχν?ας. Σε μ?α επ?μενη αν?γνωση που θα γ?νει σε καλ?τερες συνθ?κες πιστε?ω θα μπορ?σω και να το απολα?σω.

Simona says

Un roman uria?, (uria? atât la propriu cât ?i la figurat, cu peste 1800 de pagini în 4 volume, listat pe Goodreads ca volum unic), cea mai masiv? oper? literar? pe care mi-a fost dat s? o duc pân? la cap?t pân? acum.

O lectur? cople?itoare ?i tulbur?toare, o poveste ampl? ?i foarte detaliat? despre apusul unei lumi, despre câteva destine simple de cazaci, ce î?i vor fi pierdut pentru totdeauna lini?tea în confruntarea nemiloas? cu plaga ro?ie a sovietelor ruse?ti, care aveau s? schimbe pentru totdeauna soarta întregii omeniri.

Sub acest aspect, în ceea ce m? prive?te, nu pot sa trec cu vederea similitudinea atmosferei descrise de Margaret Mitchell în *Pe aripile vântului* cu cea descrisa de ?olohov în *Donul lini?tit*, despre destine frânte, familii risipite de r?zboi, moarte sau boal?, iubiri adulterine convulsive, ezit?ri, ?ov?ieli existen?iale într o epoc? istoric? ce face ca nimic s? nu mai fie ca înainte.

Lectura poate fi u?or disconfortant? pentru cititoarele de sex feminin, scenele de r?zboi sunt masive ?i foarte minu?ios descrise. Pe de alt? parte, afl?m numele si obâr?ia tuturor personajelor principale, secundare sau colaterale, de natur? s? sugereze o meticuloas? informare din partea autorului (numarul numelor proprii folosite în roman este de ordinul câtorva sute de mii), dar care, la un moment dat devin n?ucitoare ?i

ap?s?toare.

Pe scurt, *Donul lini?tit* este o m?rturie a imensului poten?ial literar al autorului, care scrie primele doua volume la vârstă de 23 de ani. În fa?a acestui neobi?nuit talent literar însu?i Sartre s-a plecat, spunând ca nu se cuvine a primi el însu?i premiul Nobel înaintea lui Mihail ?olohov, care îl va primi, la rândul, s?u în anul urm?tor (1965).

Dacă cele 1800 de pagini vi se vor părea o încercare prea temerară, puteți opta pentru ecranizarea din 1957, extrem de fidelă și cu intervenții regizorale și de scenariu minime.

Dup? p?rerea mea, acest roman trebuie inclus în lista c?r?ilor care chiar merit? a fi citite o dat? în via??. Nu îl ocoli?i.

Bruce Taylor says

I found this book--literally--about 30 years ago while I was a freshman in college. I was wandering around the stacks of the library at Texas A&M University and found the two-book series, *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *the Don Flows Home to the Sea*. I was looking for a good book and I was looking for a better program of study (engineering wasn't my thing). I hadn't heard of Mikhail Sholokov and still don't know very many who have. Despite a fairly heavy load in school I dove in and began reading this. I couldn't put it down. Like some other Russian literature, this book (it's one volume in Russian) is epic in scale. At the outset you feel like you are in a timeless Russian village that could be in 17th, 18th or 19th centuries. As it turns out, the book begins just before World War I and the Russian Revolution, which sets up the rest of the book. I've read reviews from American writers that suggest the book is a lesser work, that it is Marxist propaganda. Whatever it is, it's a terrific story of life, love, and redemption. It helped me navigate my way out of a career pursuit (engineering) that I didn't want and into one that has served me well (English and education).

Vlad says

In Russian, the most beautifully written and original prose I've ever read, by a mile. The language is simply stunning and makes even inanimate objects appear as alive as most human characters in average novels. It would be a monumental task to translate it into other languages, I suspect..

Aside from the language, it's an epic read about a very interesting people in a crucial time in Russian history -- Cossacks during the Russian Revolution. It depicts the life of ordinary but fierce and colorful characters trying to make it through a merciless historical tsunami. Passion, need for freedom, all-consuming civil war, people of great earthly spirit who are willing to endure suffering but not submission.

Ahmed says

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Babak says

The most impressive novel that I have read. it is a masterpiece.

Bettie? says

Fabulous reading...

... and now for a rather, methinks, irreverent view via a Rupert Everett (smack in the puss) film:
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0384712/>

Mea Culpa: see that line above re the film. NOPE! The film is more than my 'ickle heart could have

imagined. Superb!

If anyone should ask me what is the best ever book it would have to be this.

A winter re-read is now top of the agenda.

Bill Purkayastha says

How does one go about writing a review of one's favourite book of all? One runs the risk of making one of two errors: one might either ignore flaws, and praise too much, to the point of gushing; or, one might try and be too critical in an attempt to be even-handed, and thus sell the work short.

Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* (that's the complete and unabridged English edition of Tikhii Don, "The Quiet Don" in the original Russian) is not an easy book to read. It's not something for those who have limited attention spans and/or no knowledge of history. And, though it's a novel of war, it's emphatically not for those who are looking for action.

The Russian Civil War was one of the most defining events of history. This is not the place for discussing its effects, but two things should be remembered: first, if it had not happened, the twentieth century would have been almost in every way completely different; and, secondly, the victory of the Bolsheviks in the war was far from assured. As the war progressed, the Red Army had not only to fight against the Whites, but against anarchists, assorted bandit formations, and rebellious Cossacks, who switched sides several times as the tide of events washed over them.

The book is the story of one such Cossack, and of the women whom he loves, and the struggles he has to go through.

Grigorii Melekhov is a young Cossack in the Don valley just prior to the start of the First World War. He loves Aksinia, the wife of another Cossack, and this results in so much fighting and turmoil that his father forcibly marries him off to another woman, Natalya, who is as sweet and gentle as Aksinia is fiery and determined. Finally, Aksinia and Grigorii run off together, and find employment in the mansion of a wealthy landowner, where they might find a modicum of happiness.

But the war comes, the First World War, and the Tsar orders the Cossacks to the front. Grigorii is sent to the Austro-Hungarian front, and for the first time kills men in combat. Meanwhile, as the war drags on, the Tsarist autocracy begins to collapse under the weight of its own corruption, and the masses begin to rise up in protest.

The Don Cossacks were not directly involved in the overthrow of the monarchy, and the news only filtered through to them later, causing anxiety more than anything. After all, though they had been routinely used as cannon fodder by the Tsars, they were historically and almost organically part of the Tsarist apparatus, and could not imagine life under any other system. However, they weren't exactly given a choice in the matter, and soon enough the tides of the Civil War washed over them.

Quite apart from not being a book for the attention-span-challenged, this book is not for the squeamish; the Russian Civil War was one of the most brutal in history, with both sides (or, to be exact, all sides) routinely massacring prisoners and carrying out what today would be considered war crimes. In this war, there were two kinds of combatant; one who was ideologically driven, and fought on one or the other side, through victory or defeat; and, on the other, the kind of soldier who fought not for ideology but in defence of his own

ethnic group and its perceived interests. Grigorii Melekhov was emphatically of the latter, and switched back and forth from the Red to the White sides as the fortunes of war dictated.

Meanwhile, the two women in his life, Natalya and Aksinia, live through their own private torment – Natalya, scarred in a suicide attempt, her attempt to make a life again with Grigorii sabotaged by the war; and Aksinia, torn between her husband, whom she does not love and who does not love her, and Grigorii, whose child she has borne and who she knows is torn between her and Natalya. It's a love story as well as a war story, and in these circumstances the outcome can't be anything but tragic.

The writing, even in translation, is superb, the minor characters brilliantly etched. It's not a book which one can read and say to oneself, "Now so-and-so is quite superfluous; one could just delete him and nothing would be lost". Even the insignificant valet of the landowner has his own place in the narrative, serving to fill out the canvas. And there's the odd moment where one sees the hope of the future, like the German whom Grigorii takes prisoner early in the novel and then lets go, who shakes his hand and tells him: "In the coming class wars we'll be on the same side of the barricades, won't we, comrade?"

One of the most important things about the novel is its sympathetic treatment of the Whites; though written in Stalin's USSR by a very much establishment author, it's as far from a Communist polemic as it's possible to get. That it won the Stalin Prize in 1941 is another proof of something I've said before and will say again: the alleged persecution of dissent by Stalin is at least partly exaggerated, not least by his successors like Khrushchev for their own political purposes.

What are the flaws of the book? Apart from the fact that one needs at least some background knowledge of the First World War and the Russian Civil War, including an idea of Russian civil society of the time, at two thick volumes it's certainly not something to be gone through in one session. Spanning almost a decade, the ebb and flow of characters can sometimes be confusing, especially if one is a newcomer to Russian literature and can't remember Russian names.

Also, the only conclusion one can draw from this book is, when brothers fight, nobody wins. Even the victor has lost whatever it was that was worth fighting for.

Completely and absolutely recommended, for those who care.

Nick says

It was aight. Should not have been 554 pages...

The first section ("Peace") held my attention because I had never read descriptions of the olde tyme Cossack lifestyle before. It was cool to see their daily life for a while (especially as an ethnic and social group distinct from the surrounding mostly Russian peasantry). However in later sections the book dwelt heavily on the goings on of this village region. This is problematic for a few reasons. 1) we already got all that information in the first section. 2) It breaks up/takes away from the much more interesting events which I'll get to in a sec. 3) I didn't really care about the minutia of these characters lives after a while. Their romantic drama, familial drama, etc all bored me.

The second section ("War") is probably the best one. In this one the Cossacks are sent to fight Austrians/Germans. The depictions of warfare in this book are consistently good. This is also interesting because it's where the socialist realism comes in, as Bolshevism creeps through the military ranks. It also

stays away from the home village more than subsequent chapters.

The next section ("Revolution") is heavily socialist which was very entertaining. There's a reason the operatic adaptation of this won a Stalin prize. It really makes you sympathize with the Bolsheviks in a convincing, not blatantly propagandistic way. This section and the subsequent one are also interesting as they depict an array of actual historical events familiar to any scholar of Russian history. However, we spend too much time in that tedious home village in this chapter.

The last section ("Civil War") was cool because like the previous chapter it utilizes dialogue between a variety of characters to give the reader a cool taste of all the span of political interests active in the civil war period. There's a lot of time spent in the Village here, but action actually takes place there this time instead of just fishing and sleeping around. Good battle scenes and historical events. It does drag on though.

Basically, this book would have been great if it was half the length, focused less on the village, and emphasized the other strong points which I mentioned (war, socialism, historical events, cultural factors of Cossack life and Bolshevism). I've never read "War and Peace", but I have a feeling the comparison is not apt.

David says

This is a really strange book - it is in four parts. The first two are brilliant hardy-esque descriptions of peasant life in peace and war. Part three sees the novel's structure collapse as the Russian Revolution takes hold. Sholokov was clearly obliged to incorporate much Marxist theory and the tone becomes quite abstract. The final part sees a return to the countryside, and an inconclusive finish.

The only consistent progression in this novel is the role and treatment of women. In the opening chapters women are beaten and even lynched for sorcery. By the end they are taking their equal part in the revolution as soldiers standing alongside the men.

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Bruce says

This book was published in 1934 and is a beautifully written novel about Cossack culture and history from the late 1800's through WWI, the Russian Revolution, and the civil war immediately following. I knew little about the Cossacks and was fascinated by this picture of their lives, culture, and political aspirations, all of

which have apparently disappeared. Sholokhov has written a work as interesting as *War and Peace*, I think, focusing on a particular group within Russian society, a group in many ways unique and colorful, and he has done so with great sensitivity and beauty, his descriptions of nature being particularly striking. His presentations of life and war and their effects on the lives of ordinary people are often harsh but never gratuitous, and tensions within a society are wrenching and poignant. I understand that subsequent novels by Sholokhov have been judged to be of lesser quality, but his reputation could well stand on this single novel alone.

Edward says

Key to Principal Characters

--And Quiet Flows the Don

Biblio Curious says

So this book as a book ... it's becoming so hard to read literature as just works of art and not as articles of a culture. This book seems to have a lot of history & context surrounding it's creation & publication. The actual book can only hint at the culture of the people showcased within it's pages. All of the conflicting ideas the characters represent only hint at the complexity of the time.

Sholokhov was a Cossack and he wrote a book about Cossacks. Why is this suddenly so complicated? It's been disputed if he even wrote this: some folks say yay and others nay. The tensions surrounding the Nobel Prize during the decade that this book won only highlight just how much discussion surrounded the books of that decade. There were a lot of masterpieces published during this decade and this book won against some of the greats.

At first, I read this as just a book, nothing else. I tried to not consider the history or social context while reading it. As a work of fiction, it's a great story about a region & people I know so little about, who have a culture filled with beauty & uniqueness. Part way through reading, it led me to explore a bit of their history, what they believe in and a strong desire to read books by Eastern European authors. Their mythology, music, dance, beliefs and food are all intriguing to me and this book only introduced them to me.

Yet, this book doesn't celebrate their culture, not really. In some passages, the writing sings of nature imagery that must have been steeped in the Cossack culture. Some of the character's actions show they're fiercely protective of a culture being attacked by another. Perhaps this book can only highlight just how complex culture is and just how difficult it is for an author to compress a living culture onto a page.

Is this an accurate description of this book? The Cossacks honoured their traditions and it was their music that brought them back home. Conflicting ideas are what drew them apart when they needed to remain unified. How much of the history was changed to compliment the story or adhere to the censors when it was published? Which parts of the culture couldn't be translated into English? How many other sides are there to the story? Are any of them correct?

publisher went for the current title to make clear they meant the river, although plainly they weren't troubled by the thought that readers might imagine that this would be a novel about the rural hinterland of industrial south Yorkshire.

Instead it is a rollicking saga of southern Russia in the years of war and civil war, I felt having finished the first part, it was the kind of thing that Catherine Cookson might have written if she had written a story about Cossack families, Civil War and communism in southern Russia as opposed to fictionalised versions of her conception and childhood set in Northumberland.

I first read it years and years ago, way back in the last century, the cover blurb mentions this book in comparison with War and Peace, well it certainly has both war and peace in it, but rereading I have to conclude that it is also far, far, less memorable. Nobel Prize for literature in 1965, from which I conclude that it is nothing new to make that award to books which are rather unexceptional.

So I was leafing through *The Sunday Times* a couple of weeks back, miserable Murdochian right-wing rag that it is, and read an article that was full of praise for this old book and in particular the Stephen Garry translation of 1934, and I thought, like Burglar Bill 'I'll read that' (view spoiler). Aside from the title choice the Garry translation also chops the original book in two and dropped apparently about 25% of the original, which was interesting to have in mind as I read, at points I'd wonder - why was this left in, and with so much cut, are the author's and the translator's conception of the novel the same?

This is an unusual Russian novel in that it touches upon WWI, which is a bit of a non-event in Russian consciousness, despite the million and more deaths it has been completely washed away by the impact of the second Great Patriotic war of '41 to '45 which was to be a cornerstone for the construction of Soviet patriotism by the postwar Communist regime. Anyway Sholokhov wrote this novel, his authorship was then disputed, a dispute which was I believe only within living memory resolved in his favour by computer analysis. Later Solzhenitsyn, like a stiff legged dog, approached his theme, sniffed at it and then urinated over it his own multi-volume screed (view spoiler) tackling the same theme but from his own nationalist agenda.

So what's it all about, this rollicking saga? Well It is the grand rolling saga of Don cossacks from the years directly before the Sarajevo assassination, through the war, the two revolutions (March and November) and the beginnings of the Russian civil war at which point amidst mass executions of prisoners - with the promise of more to come - this volume ends, after botched hangings, a flogging, and the now traditional head shot (view spoiler).

In the beginning we have a picture of simple village life, the women are full figured, the men tough, the horses characterful. The way of life is barely literate, the telegraph and railway exist, but not in this village. There are a handful of rapes within the first hundred pages, all fairly casual. This isn't we feel a setting of much sophistication, nor is it sold to us as any kind of Eden. The particular fly in the ointment is sexual incompatibility which leads to both husbands and wives seeking out other lovers and to a certain amount of domestic violence(view spoiler).

The story follows a variety of characters and something of the ideological shift from a complacent monarchism to, well, a world of immense variety, if not exactly freedom of choice - authoritarian military dictatorship, authoritarian nationalist (in several flavours), anarchist, foreign domination, Bolshevik, asocial banditry.

A recurrent theme is the conservatism of the Cossack world, the agents of change come from outside or from the fringes of that world, outsiders agitate for change and by the end of the novel are imposing their agendas in respect of the principles that nature hates a vacuum and that the absence of an ideology is a sign of inherent conservatism. Indeed the part Turkish ancestry of one of the main characters: Gregor Melekhov is

frequently stressed as if to underline that the world of the cossacks is in stasis, change can only come about from the outside.

Another give away that this isn't the world of War and Peace is that the characters here aren't on a quest to live meaningful lives, they don't have spiritual or intellectual aspirations as Tolstoy's do, some are concerned about the quality of the sex they are having, others about whether their horse will pass muster when they are summoned to Summer training camp, arguably because of that the politics in the book is all the more interesting and significant.

At times I felt that certain of Sholokhov/Garry's characters were only there to remind or tell the reader about the course of the political narrative, so we get characters in Petrograd, apparently only so we get to see a revolution or two and experience from a certain view point Kornilov's abortive putsch(view spoiler).

Politically the novel has a broader interest and significance in that it was published in 1929. And in keeping with the nationalist shift of the year with the increasing political dominance of Stalin, the tendency is here is by and large nationalist (view spoiler) Communism is literally foreign and brought in by foreign agents and rendered only partially acceptable by the conviction that Lenin is a secret Cossack, equally of interest I felt given the upcoming political terrors was the depiction of one of the die hard Bolshevik agitators suffering psychologically to the point of experiencing sexual impotence as a result of his participation in a death squad, given his frequent references to the need to be hard through out the novel, irony I assume was intended. The novel, as I said ends with mass executions and the leaders of the anti-Bolsheviks while not literally braying monocle wearing nit -wits, tend slightly in that direction while the broad mass of the men who ride with them are broadly sympathetic in that they are in defence of their homeland and familiar pattern of life, the incoming Bolsheviks are not all paragons of virtue, the realities of civil war are in this book are scrappy, brutal, and clumsy. Reading I was comparing this to Isaac Babel's Red Cavalry (view spoiler), Babel's story collection is the more exceptional work in my opinion, there's more of a unity of literary form and story telling, here the traditional cosy familiar novel allows the author to slip sex and violence peaceably under the reader's nose while Babel would have prefer to have it explode out of the page in your face. The casualness and also the 'black humour' involved (at least at times put me in mind of Blood Meridian though the effect there is more sustained and intensified, both authors were looking in a similar direction I feel. Theirs are worlds which are intrinsically violent,which indeed give signs of being in cycles of intensifying violence. Yet here ultimately the reader knows there will be peace, the only question is how much violence and devastation will there need to be to reach it?

I thought perhaps there was something in the depiction of nature, particularly the titular Don that mirrored the political economy and rendered the book fit to weather the changing circumstances of the Soviet union during the 1930s. Nature here isn't harsh, nor beneficent, or particularly fecund, it rather flows on to its own rhythm. The seasons are as inevitable as the eventual Dictatorship of the Proletariat. As in 1984 too much knowledge of party dogma can be a fatal mistake, not one that our characters are likely to make, the important thing is to have been backing the right horse and to avoid taking part in the races yourself. So we can see the political illiteracy of the cossacks as a strength, blessed are the ignorant who follow Comrade Stalin, for they shall (mostly) avoid Siberian labour camps.

A wife isn't a bear, she won't run off into the forest

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Eadweard says

One of the best russian books I have ever read. Is "sweeping epic" a cliché thing to say?

A sweeping epic.

El says

I initially thought reading this would take longer than a month, but somehow I managed to rock its Russian face. It's no secret that these Russian tomes can often be dense, filled with hundreds of characters (with a bunch of different names) doing things in highly detailed settings, where things like a blade of grass or a pebble in a river somehow manage to be a character themselves for fifty pages or so. Russian novels are dark and cold, just like the land from whence they came. Many of the authors had beards, even the women authors! (Or so I like to imagine.)

(Sholokhov, sadly, did not have a beard. At one point he had a mustache, but that hardly counts.)

Quiet Flows the Don is no exception in the land of Dark and Cold Russian Novels. This book has girth, baby. The Don of the title refers to the Don River and it most certainly is a character in the book. It has attitude, and apparently emotions. (Okay, so in reality? The attitude and emotions of the human characters are reflected in the motion of the river. It's all very literary, yo. Symbolic and shit.)

The story starts in the early 20th century, before WWI and all, and it revolves around a Cossack family. Did I mention there were a lot of characters? There were. According to the List of Characters at the beginning of the book (to which I referred regularly) there are 32 main characters, 53 Historical Persons including some actual familiar names like Stalin, Lenin, and Trotsky. I suck at math, but I do know that the grand total then comes out to 85 characters. (And maybe more that the List of Characters didn't think necessary to mention?)

(That's a Cossack. Burly, right?)

So this Sholokhov guy. He was a fanboy of Tolstoy, which I think is pretty evident in *Quiet Flows the Don*. I would say Sholokhov wrote this book with *War and Peace* in mind. Like *War and Peace*, *Quiet Flows the Don* is about war - though instead of focusing on the French invasion of Russia as in the Tolstoy, Sholokhov's story revolved around the start of WWI and Russian Civil War. There are periods of "peace" in both books as well, moments of downtime in which we see a flash of home life - the women, the children, the farms - though the politics never seems to leave these pages. This is a politically charged novel, and Sholokhov's personal politics are on every single page. (Yes, that *can* get tedious, thank you for asking.)

But I'm happy I read this. As far as the Russkies go, Sholokhov is one I haven't heard that much about. Apparently he and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had a few issues which I think is interesting. I mean, Solzhenitsyn looked like he could kick a few asses. (Or at least smother people to death in his beard.) I can't say that Sholokhov was as good as his forefathers like Tolstoy, or even some who came slightly later, like Solzhenitsyn. But a fine contribution to Russian literature, and a solid good read nonetheless.

Manray9 says

I am glad to see *Quiet Flows the Don* is back in print in English. Sholokhov won the Nobel Prize for this novel of war and revolution among the Don Cossack host. Although painted across a backdrop of history, it is primarily the love story of Gregor and Aksinya. As much of great 20th century Russian literature, the style harks back to Tolstoy, but the subject matter is undeniably Soviet. Published in 1929, *Quiet Flows the Don* was the pinnacle of Sholokhov's career. He never again produced a work to compare, although to be fair to him, his career coincided with the height of Stalinist conformity in the arts. This was an era when simply being a famous writer was dangerous - think of the careers of Pasternak, Babel, and Pilnyak. If Sholokhov descended into the role of a party hack churning out the obligatory Socialist Realist pap, at least he lived to a ripe old age.

I have never understood the conventional English translation of the book's title as *Quiet Flows the Don*. In Russian it is ????? ???, literally *The Quiet Don*. Did the original translator, Stephen Garry, believe it would be confused with a story of a taciturn British academic?
