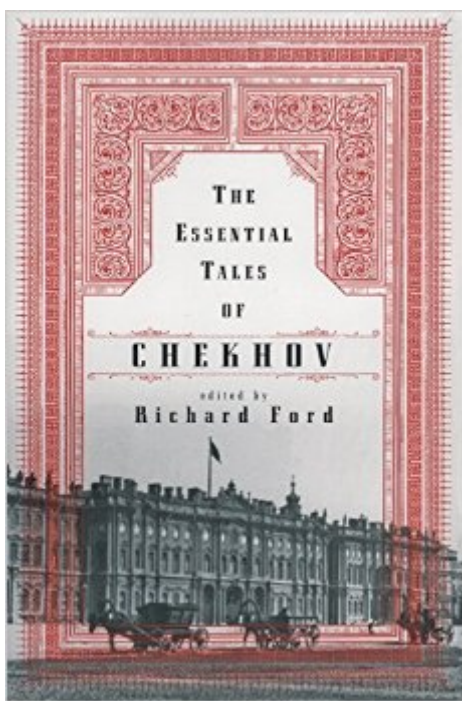


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The Essential Tales Of Chekhov



Synopsis

Of the two hundred stories that Anton Chekhov wrote, the twenty stories that appear in this extraordinary collection were personally chosen by Richard Ford--an accomplished storyteller in his own right. Included are the familiar masterpieces--"The Kiss," "The Darling," and "The Lady with the Dog"--as well as several brilliant lesser-known tales such as "A Blunder," "Hush!," and "Champagne." These stories, ordered from 1886 to 1899, are drawn from Chekhov's most fruitful years as a short-story writer. A truly balanced selection, they exhibit the qualities that make Chekhov one of the greatest fiction writers of all time: his gift for detail, dialogue, and humor; his emotional perception and compassion; and his understanding that life's most important moments are often the most overlooked. "The reason we like Chekhov so much, now at our century's end," writes Ford in his perceptive introduction, "is because his stories from the last century's end feel so modern to us, are so much of our own time and mind." Exquisitely translated by the renowned Constance Garnett, these stories present a wonderful opportunity to introduce yourself--or become reacquainted with--an artist whose genius and influence only increase with every passing generation.

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Customer Reviews

with Chekhov. Whatever volume (happily, there are lots in print), whatever translation you start with, you'll want to keep reading and keep discovering. But, Chekhov may require some getting used to. His stories are melancholy, funny, laconic, ironic. Not many of his characters could be called heroic. His plots do not end neatly. He asks many questions but doesn't answer them. My personal favorites in this volume: An Anonymous Story, Ward 6, The Grasshopper, The Lady with the

Dog. For a great critical essay on Chekhov, read Nabakov's in his Lectures on Russian Literature.

A quibble with the title of the volume. Why 'the essential Chekhov'? as if the great bulk of the Chekhov stories not contained in this volume were somehow 'less essential'? One cannot help but agreeing with the overwhelming majority of readers and reviewers of Chekhov who find him one of the great masters and delights of Literature. His stories are celebrations of insight into the human soul and character, in all its great quirkiness. Here stories too are guides to understanding life's ironies and disappointments. Chekhov's work is filled with dreamers, and filled with obsessed characters whose ideas take them on lonely paths of their own. What makes Chekhov so special in my mind aside from this constant play and contradiction between reality and dream, is the love which he seems to have for his characters. The soul of the human being Chekhov is felt in these stories, almost as if he were a caring country physician seeking to understand and find a remedy for the strange illnesses of his beloved patients. Chekhov knows what romantic love is and of course one of his signature stories (included here) "The Lady and the Dog" gives us a truly moving instance of it. Life and the heart lead us to where we do not necessarily want to go. The aging lecher despite himself finds himselfr impossibly in love with the Bovary-like heroine and upon their reunion in impossible love and life the story ends. In Chekhov stories too as in life things end in the middle without resolution and with only the promise of disappointment and heartbreak to come.

I have just finished reading these stories and what I can say is that they are really exceptional. One falls in love with the characters, even with the most disgusting ones, since the author finds a light deep inside each human being he creates through the words, whether a miserable "mushik" or a refined "barin". Feelings somewhat opposed like desperation, compassion, anguish and beatitude arise every now and then along the pages, leading the reader through a vast gallery of situations and characters.

Sorry, I have to differ from my fellow reviewers. The translations here by Constance Garnett are tired and clunky and way too literal. The art of translation has evolved light years from the "word-by-word" school. To compare how much more "modern" Chekhov can sound (and Chekhov was, is, and will remain always MODERN), read Robert Payne's translations. Payne eliminates the clumsy clauses and unnecessary commas and lets the story shine through. Ford's introduction is interesting, but note: he says NOTHING about the translations. He must know they are abominable. Personally, I have no respect for Richard Ford and Ecco Press for reprinting these. Screw the reader, right?

Reading Chekhov you learn what it is to be Russian. Like their samovars, and the muzhiks(Russian peasants). It's all very interesting. I never knew they were as devout in their Christian faith as they appear to be in his stories. Of course, it predates Communism which banned churches(Stalin almost had St. Basil's Cathedral leveled). Chekhov takes you back in time when horses, trains, and ships were the main mode of transportation. The Lady With The Dog was my favorite.

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