

Notes 2022 - 'And Quiet Flows the Don' Mikhail Sholokhov

Written between 1926 – 1984, Sholokhov details the changes in Cossack society as it adjusts to the twentieth century and the first world war. The Don is to the east of the Ukraine.

- Originally Cossacks were thought to have escaped Russia after the rural population was enslaved as serfs. Cossacks fled and settled on the river Don in Georgia, creating a horse culture of hardy farmers quite different from Russian peasants. The Cossack culture in the Tsarist times is presented as
 - Drunken
 - Violent to women who are frequently beaten by husbands
 - Military service for all males. Seems to train their fighting spirit
 - Great horsemen
 - Peasant farmers and a few small merchants lived along side them
 - Dirty, cold, poorly erected and furnished farm houses for most of them
- The first book is set after the Peasant Revolt in Russia in 1905. Tracing how their traditional society was starting to break down under pressures of the new century. It looks at their culture in peace time, then during the First World War then after the revolution and the civil war that followed this. Once loyal to the Tsar, the war and the rise of agitators trying to arouse the working class to revolt against their poor conditions caused dramatic changes for this unique group of Russians.
- The second book looks at how characters at home and their soldier relatives fared during the First World War.

In books One and Two the main characters are:

The Cossacks : Grandfather Panteleiman's family: His son also referred to as **Panteleiman** and two grandsons **Piotra and Gregor**

Gregor was married to Natalia but had as his lover **Aksinia**, whom he stole from a neighbor, **Stephan**

Uriupin: a psychotic killer who befriends Gregor during their war service.

The middleclass: Mokhov the merchant had descended from a father who was a spy for the Russian secret police. He had a **son Vladimir and daughter, Lisa.**

Stockman the locksmith arrived in the village and set up trade, while his main plan was to agitate amongst the Cossacks and prepare them to revolt against the Tsarist regime.

Bunchuk was a volunteer former factory worker and dedicated agitator in the army and spread information amongst the troops about the Social Democrat reforms that were needed.

Also in this group, but not important to the narrative were the postmaster, the teacher, students and a troop commander.

Tsarist ruling class: The local ruler [Ataman] Nicolai Listnitsky. He settled disputes and allocated grazing rights. His son **Eugene Listnitsky was a lieutenant officer in the army.**

The Army is the Army is the Army:

In book Two, *The War*, the author implies that all soldiers regardless of the country they fight for bear the same trials, cruelties and dehumanization. The author [and Social Democrats] believe this will not cease until working class men from all countries rise up and take control of their governments. There will be no need for wars if this happens.

The awfulness of war for soldiers is the same for the Russians as everyone else:

- Rapes, boredom, gambling, fearful battles, friends killed in hideous ways, This alters all the hopeful young men who fight.
- Growing disrespect of their officers, resulting in men killing their officers
- Desire to throw it in and go home
- Agitators spreading information about overthrowing the Russian elite
- False news of deaths sent to relatives – other simply seem to vanish without trace
- Depression about what they are forced to do.

At home:

- Farms are neglected and houses and fences fall into ruin
- Old men, boys and women have to manage as best they can
- Food production reduced
- Fear for safety of their soldier men
- Some women desperate for sexual contact with men enter into illicit relationships with whom ever they can find. [Some women are fickle theme]

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