



The Cossacks (Everyman's Library, #170)

By Leo Tolstoy

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A brilliant short novel inspired by Leo Tolstoy's experience as a soldier in the Caucasus, *The Cossacks* has all the energy and poetry of youth while also foreshadowing the great themes of Tolstoy's later years. His naïve hero, Olenin, is a young nobleman who is disenchanted with his privileged and superficial existence in Moscow and hopes to find a simpler life in a Cossack village. As Olenin foolishly involves himself in their violent clashes with neighboring Chechen tribesmen and falls in love with a local girl, Tolstoy gives us a wider view than Olenin himself ever possesses of the brutal realities of the Cossack way of life and the wild, untamed beauty of the rugged landscape.

This novel of love, adventure, and male rivalry on the Russian frontier—completed in 1862, when the author was in his early thirties—has always surprised readers who know Tolstoy best through the vast, panoramic fictions of his middle years. Unlike those works, *The Cossacks* is lean and supple, economical in design and execution. But Tolstoy could never touch a subject without imbuing it with his magnificent many-sidedness, and so this book bears witness to his brilliant historical imagination, his passionately alive spiritual awareness, and his instinctive feeling for every level of human and natural life.

Translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude

(Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)

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Editorial Review

Review

When you think of Tolstoy, you most likely think of his epic novels, like *Anna Karenina* or *War and Peace*. You probably don't think of his shorter pieces like *The Cossacks*, a shorter novella that is considered to be the author's autobiography. The book centers around an unhappy Muscovite nobleman named Dmitri Olenin who joins the army in search of adventure and purpose in his life. He winds up in the Caucasus and is intrigued by the geography and the simple people who live there. Along the way, he discovers himself and falls in love for the first time, and in turn discovers the pain love can bring. We meet a cast of characters that includes the manly Cossack soldier Lukashka, the beautiful Cossack girl Maryanka, and the larger-than-life grandfather figure, Uncle Yeroshka, each of who play an important role in the life education of Olenin. Since this has always been one of my favorite books, I was curious to see how it translated into the audiobook format. The voice work is done by Jonathan Oliver, an English actor who has over a decade of experience reading audiobooks for the blind. At first, I was a little thrown by his English accent, as I know many Russians personally, and I always lent a Russian accent to *The Cossacks* characters in my mind. But as the story progressed, I got used to Oliver's accent and it became very natural sounding, as he took on the life of the characters. He also did a wonderful job of changing out his vocal style as each different character spoke, making it easy to tell who was speaking as the conversations took place. I especially liked his portrayal of Uncle Yeroshka, the colorful old man of the Cossack village who takes Olenin under his wing. Oliver's voice bellows and rings out with intensity, bringing the character to life in incredible fashion. Oliver is obviously very familiar with the story as well as Tolstoy in general, and he adds touches here and there to make the story even more special. For example, he reads the descriptive sections with the same enthusiasm as the speaking roles, painting a perfect picture of the Cossack village and the activities of its inhabitants as they go about daily life. He also sings their songs with a convincing air, staying in character the whole time. As far as classic literature goes, this one is an easy listen. It is not too long, and the story moves quickly, filled with adventure and a touch of innocent romance. Plus, it is a great introduction to Tolstoy without getting lost in the epic length of some of his other works. Highly recommended.? - MISH MASH, <http://mishmashmusic.blogspot.com/>

From the Inside Flap

"Tolstoy's lavish and always graphic use of detail," wrote John Bayley, "together of course with its romance and exotic setting . . . has made "*The Cossacks* the most popular of all his works." This vibrant new translation of Tolstoy's 1862 novel, by PEN Translation Award winner Peter Constantine, is the author's semiautobiographical depiction of young Olenin, a wealthy, disaffected Muscovite, who joins the Russian army and travels to the untamed frontier of the Caucasus in search of a more authentic life. Quartered with his regiment in a Cossack village, Olenin revels in the glories of nature and the rough strength of the Cossacks and Chechens. Smitten by his unrequited love for a local girl, Maryanka, Olenin has a profound but ultimately short-lived spiritual awakening. Try as he might to assimilate, he remains an awkward outsider and his long search for a more enlightened and purposeful existence comes to naught. With the philosophical insight that would characterize Tolstoy's later masterpieces, this long overdue major new translation is a revelation.

"From the Hardcover edition.

From the Back Cover

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Charlie Smith:

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Timothy Austin:

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