



Stories and Prose Poems

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Michael Glenny (Translation)

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A new edition of the Russian Nobelist's collection of novellas, short stories, and prose poems *Stories and Prose Poems* collects twenty-two works of wide-ranging style and character from the Nobel Prize-winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose shorter pieces showcase the extraordinary mastery of language that places him among the greatest Russian prose writers of the twentieth century.

When the two superb stories "Matryona's House" and "An Incident at Krechetovka Station" were first published in Russia in 1963, the Moscow Literary Gazette, the mouthpiece of the Soviet literary establishment, wrote: "His talent is so individual and so striking that from now on nothing that comes from his pen can fail to excite the liveliest interest." The novella For the Good of the Cause and the short story "Zakhar-the-Pouch" in particular—both published in the Soviet Union before Solzhenitsyn's exile—fearlessly address the deadening stranglehold of Soviet bureaucracy and the scandalous neglect of Russia's cultural heritage.

But readers who best know Solzhenitsyn through his novels will be delighted to discover the astonishing group of sixteen "prose poems." In these works of varying lengths—some as short as an aphorism—Solzhenitsyn distills the joy and bitterness of Russia's fate into language of unrivaled lyrical purity.

Stories and Prose Poems Details

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From Reader Review Stories and Prose Poems for online ebook

Judith Johnson says

It's over 30 years since I last read Solzhenitsyn. This is my 2nd book in the Russian-subject-daisy-chain started by reading Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Beginning of Spring*. I found this copy on my son's bookshelves (testament to its being acquired in his student days: it has a Jimi Hendrix lyric copied out on the inside back cover, bless him!). I'd forgotten what a wonderful writer Solzhenitsyn was. The stories 'Matryona's House' and 'An Incident at Krechetovka Station' are particularly poignant.

Chris Tutolo says

Solzhenitsyn is fantastic. This really opens up the world of Russian literature, and it gives reason to explore his other works, notably *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Karen says

Really enjoyed this story and poem collection. Most are set in Russia, but one is set in Uzbekistan.

Mimi says

Apparently, I've been on a Solzhenitsyn kick lately, and that's ok. In fact it's pretty good. I'm not usually a short story reader, but this was my morning reading, so a bit at a time was perfect. By far the best story is the amazing "Matryona's House" highly recommended to me by a dear friend. Having said that, several of the other stories were also thought provoking, beautiful, and interesting. An excellent collection and one I will probably read again.

Steven says

"As long as there is fresh air to breathe under an apple tree after a shower, we may survive a little longer." (243)

I had already read two of the longer pieces in this collection—*Matryona's House* and *An Incident at Krechetovka Station*. The other stories in this collection, especially the last, newly restored *What a Pity*, were well worth reading, as were the various prose poems. Tinged with nostalgia and suffused with lamentation, regularly revolving around the tension between good and evil, Solzhenitsyn's work is often bleak—and just as often beautiful.

Contrarian Person says

This is an intriguing collection of novellas, short stories and prose poems (who knew!). I'm biased by what I read about Soviet literature pre-Perestroika now, but I enjoyed reading Matryona's house and other stories. Again, the stories are 'light' commentaries on Soviet life under the communist regime but they are more than propaganda pieces - there is an attempt to show the inadequacies and inequities of the Soviet way without ruffling too many feathers. Looking forward to One Day in the Life of...

Greyson says

Haunting. Solzhenitsyn's experiences in the camps bleed through every sentence in this collection. The three longer pieces rope you in immediately and the poems sketch a mood perfectly.

Liz Janet says

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote some of my favourite books, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, The First Circle and The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956, and just as beautiful as those, it is his prose and short stories. However his works are not for everyone, I would consider them for those well versed in Leo Tolstoy or Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and for those that wish to read about his struggles, but once more, do a bit of research before reading him, since he can be seen as controversial.

Michael Yacoub says

1.5/5

Too didactic/blunt. However, it had tinges of profundity. I am looking forward to the longer works.

Anna says

Solzhenitsyn always seems to write with a kind of prosaic melancholy, a sense of longing for a past which has been swept away and a love for his country and its people. There's a clear condemnation for the failings and the detached brutality of the Communist regime, but also a quiet pride in the way the ordinary Russian citizen carries on living. We see stoical lives being crushed by needless bureaucracy and the petty officialdom of the larger cogs in the machine. But still, through all this, Solzhenitsyn's love of the bones of his country and the souls of his people shines through.

Bob says

Solzhenitsyn can spin a good yarn, albeit bleakly. Further examples of the suspicion, fear and deprivation suffered by the brainwashed masses in pursuit of the Communist ideal. A few brief moments of levity tempered with profundity may be found in the short prose towards the end with such examples as, The duckling, The elm log or The puppy helping to turn our thoughts to higher things. A book for the Solzhenitsyn enthusiast and the casual reader who has heard the name but never sampled the man or his work and needs gentle introduction.

Kyle says

Worth picking up for Matronya's house, For the Good of the Cause and The Right Hand. Matronya's is a classic, almost Tolstoyean fable about the necessity of honest, hard-working, selfless peasant folk to the survival of human civilization. It continues the well-established Solzhenitsyn theme of glorification of labor and faith and disparagement of everything modern or otherwise "unnatural" to the "soul" of the "Russian people," which if you know Solzhenitsyn you know includes Communism, consumerism, moral relativism, atheism, and MTV. Still a fantastic story, well-told and, despite the author's obvious bias and ideological intent, a good read.

The prose poems are pretty poor and most of the other stories aren't that great. Solzhenitsyn needs space (the vastness of Mother Russia perhaps..????!???) to make his point and he works well across volumes and chapters, not pages and lines. These stories and prose poems, despite momentary flashes of wit or brilliance, are only a few long footnotes to his body of work as a whole.

Jane says

It does not matter when you read a book if it haunts you or shines a pearl on your life for your remaining stint on the planet.

It's profound and from the point of view of a man who suffered greatly and appreciated every morsel of air and freedom and life.

Nathan Albright says

One of the qualities of Solzhenitsyn's writings is that once you read a little bit of his work, which is true of me (reviews forthcoming) one wants to read more of it. And like many writers who write based on the material they work with and the story they are telling rather than from any sort of preconceived notions of how long that writing should be, his writing varies from the very short to the very long. Admittedly, his very long works take a long time to get through, and so as someone who like to read and review a lot of books in order to keep the review pipeline going strong, I have a bit of a bias towards his shorter works that are simply easier to get through than his longer works. But these shorter works are charming and worthwhile enough that they inspire and encourage a reader like myself to read those longer works as time permits, and so I hope to be reading and reviewing a lot more of him in the future. This is a book that demonstrates Solzhenitsyn's place among the great writers of Russia going back to the Tsarist days, and not only as a

writer of the dysfunctionality of the Soviet gulags for which he is best known.

This particular book consists of both stories and prose poems, six of the first and sixteen of the latter, but the variance in length is very great between these works, which total a bit more than 250 pages in all, a third of which is made up of the story "For The Good Of The Cause," an excellent story that involves the problems a school has in keeping its buildings for its own engineering students in the face of bungling Soviet bureaucracies that give one of the buildings to someone else to use who happens to be well-connected. A third of the book is taken up as well by the story "An Incident At Krechetovka Station," where a logistics officer struggles with boredom and feeding refugees and is haunted by the choice he makes to turn in a Russian emigre spy to the authorities. There are also some stories here like "Matryona's House," about the rivalry between people over the ownership of the house of a dying woman, and "The Right Hand," about the efforts of a dying man to make use of the fear that people have of his title one last time in order to receive medical care in a hospital. In contrast to this, the prose poems are very short, but they are still lovely, reflecting on the beauty of St. Petersburg ("The City On The Neva"), the difficulty of rural life ("In Yesenin Country"), and a discussion about "The Ashes Of A Poet." The prose poems, though, are lovely and have an impressionistic touch.

For the most part, these are not the sorts of works that would have given the author his deserved reputation for being among the greatest writers of the 20th century, Russian or otherwise. His writing of *A Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, his multi-volume epic on the Gulag Archipelago, and works like *The Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle* are enough for that. This work, though, demonstrates the ability of the author to observe what is around him and write smaller and shorter works that show admirable skill in characterization and storytelling on a smaller scale. All of this only makes the author's writing more accessible to people who may find the length of most of his classic works daunting, and provides a suitable entry into his corpus of writing as a whole. For those readers who do want to see how the Solzhenitsyn's skill for observation and reflection and mastery of prose works in shorter fiction and poetry, this book is definitely a worthwhile one to read.

Stephen Hicks says

I must admit, this was my first go at any thoroughly Russian literature. I have come to find that it is an acquired taste no doubt. However, I did enjoy this book at times. Matryona's House was a particularly good story that kept me thinking for a number of days. For the Good of the Cause was also good. The only critique I have is that it takes Solzhenitsyn a very long time to say anything. Perhaps that's part of the style and he does this intentionally. I do plan on reading more and would recommend this book to the right person...not for everyone though. The prose poems were particularly good. I enjoyed The Duckling, The Elm Log, and A Journey along the Oka very, very much.
