



The Shooting Party

Anton Chekhov , Ronald Wilks (Translator) , John Sutherland (Introduction)

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Anton Chekhov's only full-length novel, this Penguin Classics edition of *The Shooting Party* is translated and edited by Ronald Wilks, with an introduction by John Sutherland.

The Shooting Party centers on Olga, the pretty young daughter of a drunken forester on a country estate, and her fateful relationships with the men in her life. Adored by Urbenin, the estate manager, whom she marries to escape the poverty of her home, she is also desired by the dissolute Count Karneyev and by Zinovyeve, a magistrate, who knows the secret misery of her marriage. When an attempt is made on Olga's life in the woods, it seems impossible to discover the perpetrator in an impenetrable web of lust, deceit, loathing and double-dealing. One of Chekhov's earliest experiments in fiction combines the classic elements of a gripping mystery with a short story of corruption, concealed love and fatal jealousy.

Ronald Wilks's brilliant new translation of this work is the first in over seventy years. It brilliantly captures the immediacy of the dialogue that Chekhov was later to develop into his great dramas. This edition also includes an introduction by John Sutherland, suggestions for further reading and explanatory notes.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was born in Taganrog, a port on the sea of Azov. In 1879 he travelled to Moscow, where he entered the medical faculty of the university, graduating in 1884. During his university years, he supported his family by contributing humorous stories and sketches to magazines. He published his first volume of stories, *Motley Tales*, in 1886, and a year later his second volume *In the Twilight*, for which he received the Pushkin Prize. Today his plays, including 'Uncle Vanya', 'The Seagull', and 'The Cherry Orchard' are recognised as masterpieces the world over.

If you enjoyed *The Shooting Party*, you might like Chekhov's *Plays*, also available in Penguin Classics.

The Shooting Party Details

Date : Published June 24th 2004 by Penguin Classics (first published 1884)

ISBN : 9780140448986

Author : Anton Chekhov , Ronald Wilks (Translator) , John Sutherland (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 199 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Cultural, Russia, Literature, Russian Literature

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From Reader Review The Shooting Party for online ebook

John Burgess says

In "The Gentleman of Moscow" by Amor Towers, a German visitor to the hotel Metropol challenges anyone to name three contributions Russia has made to the West beyond the invention of Vodka. Count Rostov takes up the challenge and begins with Chekhov and Tolstoy who he claims are "the bronze bookends on the mantelpiece of narrative. Henceforth writers of fiction from wheresoever they hail, will place themselves in the continuum that begins with one and ends with the other. For who, I ask you has a better mastery of the short form than Chekhov in his flawless little stories? Precise and uncluttered, they invite us into some corner of a household at some discrete hour in which the entire human condition is suddenly within reach, if heartbreakingly so. While at the other extreme....."

This eulogy prompted me open a beautifully illustrated Folio edition (pictured) of "The Shooting Party" by Chekhov, that I bought last month from a second-hand bookshop in Dulverton at the bargain price of £9. What a disappointment. For this is not a short story and thus part of that unsurpassed bookend of great literature, but rather a short and rambling novel, the only one Chekhov wrote and told as a story within a story. It leads tediously to a murder, where the victim and murderer are flagged up for those with eyes to see, from very early on - although Chekhov tries to shock the reader by leaving the denouement to the very end.

All the characters with their multitude of glorious Russian names are sunk in gloom, misery, drunkenness, and despair - the reader would cheerfully shoot the lot, and toast their deaths with a bottle of Vodka.

However, having a got a taste for Russian literature by reading Tolstoy two years ago, there are aspects of the novel I enjoyed. The landscape, the weather and the descriptions of place are uniformly depressing, yet so effective that you automatically throw another log on the fire and reach for your slippers.

I've also got the Folio edition of Chekhov's short stories so I'd better see if these make a bronze bookend of great literature - I can't really see myself disagreeing with Count Rostov.

Alexandru Ungureanu says

Pe scurt, f?r? a intra în detalii, Kamishev, se prezint? la un post de redac?ie pentru a-i fi publicat un roman, o poveste în care el a fost martor ocular. Editorul, la insisten?ele lui Kamishev, îi acord? o ?ans? ?i ne relateaz? povestea. Se cite?te u?or, lectur? pl?cut?!

"O furie cumplit? se dezl?n?uise în sufletul meu... Tot ce mai aveam bun, cîstit în mine, dup? ani ?i ani de via?? destr?b?lat?, acel pu?în salvat de la pieire, dup? o lung? perioad? de degradare, ce p?stram cu str??nicie, îl adulam ?i cu care m? mîndream - era acum insultat, scuipat, împr?cat cu noroi!

Înainte cunoscusem femei corupte, cump?ram dragostea lor, le studiam, dar acele femei nu aveau în obraji bujorii candorii ?i nici ochii senini, plini de sinceritate, cum v?zusem în acea diminea?? de mai cînd mergeam prin p?dure la târgul din Tenevo... Eu însumi, depravat pîn? în m?duva oaselor, iertam, propov?duiam toleran?a fa?? de tot ce-i viciat, eram îng?duitor pîn? la sl?biciune... Aveam convingerea c? nu-i po?i cere noroiului s? nu fie noroi ?i nu po?i învinui acele monezi de aur care, prin forta împrejur?rilor,

nimeresc în noroi... Dar înainte nu ?tusem c? monezile de aur se pot dizolva în noroi, amestecandu-se cu el ?i formând un singur tot. Este solubil deci ?i aurul!

Tavi Florescu says

The mother of all stories about books and manuscripts relating a unsolved crime.

Henry Avila says

It is well-known that Anton Chekhov disliked long narratives, his plays and short stories are...yes... short and sweet. He found them, the endless novels uncomfortable, boring to read and write, get to the point quickly as possible and get out (I'll do that soon hopefully) .This, his only novel which no surprise, Chekhov ignored in his later years, nevertheless authors are notorious at misjudging their own work, too close to the action...A very early 1884 murder mystery book from the great scribbler (who could have guessed) one of the first, set in southern Russia in an ordinary, small and not highly important town, truth be said ...a reprehensible crime will be committed , quite unusual there... Zinovyev, a young country magistrate in his early thirties falls in love with a very pretty nineteen year old peasant girl, but has two rivals, friends at the beginning, Count Karneyev, a little older and his estate manager Urbenin 50, both drunkards . The center of attraction or should I say lust is Olga , whose father am I repeating myself imbibes too, only the magistrate is sober when not at the Count's mansion, participating in wild orgies with gypsy women. Well the writer has a rather dark impression of Russian men but back to the story , excuse me. The poor lady desperately wants to escape the untenable situation at the dreary home , of her father's, a forester when feeling good which he seldom is, too much alcohol plus being utterly insane doesn't make for a happy life for her, and the two others, younger siblings , so much suffering, abuse, hunger happens there. She needs to get out soon , help her family and women then could do that only by marrying a man who has money, however the Count won't, he is a dissolute, the extremely handsome Zinovyev, likes chasing and catching ladies, why settle for one? To her ultimate disgust she marries the seemingly gentle but jealous Urbenin, the infatuated widower, all the town knew it would be a disaster looking at the couple in the church wedding, they're right...Olga the unhappy , ignorant, immature, nonetheless beautiful girl gives favors to her former suitors, promptly after the ceremony. And passion, inevitably strikes with a heavy, crushing blow on one of the four main characters...An unusual murder case, the crime is not in the beginning but during the second half of the novel, Chekhov is such a superb writer that he overpowers the simple plot with his wonderful gift of revealing human weaknesses, people's hopes, unreachable dreams, sorrows and fears which cripple them into ennui, if you enjoy marvelous literature in a strange package this is for you as it was for me, or is it I ?...no I believe it is indeed me...

Judith says

The Shooting Party echoes Gogol with the descriptions of faces, particularly the noses and descriptions of clothing. Chekhov moves beyond Gogol in plot, putting his storyteller in the middle of a murder investigation in the woodlands of Russian. However the novel as a manuscript within the novel didn't really add to the work as a whole. Particularly the conclusion only serves to confirm the reader's suspicions. Translator Ronald Wilks is a master at making Russian Lit accessible. So if you you're going to read Chekhov and Gogol, look for Wilks.

James says

Chekhov's first and only full-length novel (written in his final year at medical school!) is a very Russian murder mystery – the principal narrator, a local magistrate, is the quintessential superfluous man, and the main action of the novel consists in his series of sprees with a drunken count. *The Shooting Party* is no masterpiece; but its conclusion is ingenious, and if nothing else the novel goes to show that Chekhov could boil a pot with the best of them.

Marc Gerstein says

This novel, the only one written by Chekhov, got off to a very slow start, and even past the one-third mark, I was having a tough time pushing myself to get back in after pauses in my reading. I'm not sure, though, whether this was due to youthful not-fully-developed craftsmanship, an inclination we would later see toward plays and stories rather than novels, or an actual aspect of the work that elevates it to pure genius. What I am sure of is that once it gets going, it becomes very hard to put down.

This is a novel within a novel. The main first-person protagonist is an editor who is presented with a novel by an amateur writer, a former magistrate. The editor is told the novel is based on true event and the writer leaves it with the editor for three months hoping the editor will give it a read. The latter obliges. The meat of this work is, therefore, the amateur novel the editor read, one that is first-person narrated by a magistrate. The editor doesn't comeback until the very end. So, as I said, the main novel is not polished, but I have no idea if that's due to the fact that this was early Chekhov, or the fact that it was definitely written by an amateur writer. There are many clues that support the latter view and if that's so, it would suggest that the young Chekhov was already the genius we know he was destined to become. That's why I'll make the leap of faith and give this five stars.

The inner novel is a whodunnit. The Goodreads description and other reviews explain it well and I don't know that I can add anything without slipping into spoilers, so I'll leave it at that. I did read somewhere that Chekov was doing this as a put down on the popular whodunnits of his day, and that he wanted to do a Gogol-like slam on aspects of Russian upper society. I believe it. The work delivers on both. I read the second 60% of the book in day, and at the end, as glad to have buckled down and plowed through. It was worth it.

Lately, I've come to be suspicious of the idea of neglected classics. Too often, I felt after reading that things thusly neglected were neglected for good reason; i.e. they weren't really all that good, and in some cases, they downright sucked. I see the "The Shooting Party," another neglected classic, differently. This one is for real and its neglect may have more to do with its awkward fit into a Chekhov taxonomy; lots of stories, lots of plays, but just one measly little early novel. OK world: Data handling has advanced quite a bit and needs to get serious about considering this work part of the Chekhov collection.

Paul says

Chekhov's only novel and a detective novel at that. There is the usual cast of suspects, although the murder is

quite late on in the book. It is narrated by the examining magistrate, who is also involved in the events described. Spotting the murderer is not that difficult; although if you don't the twist at the end is a good one. The descriptions of the landscape are good. Describing the plot would give too much away and this is after all a whodunnit.

This being a Russian novel most of the characters are profoundly miserable or debauched. There is lots of vodka drunk, plenty of illicit sex, a decent plot, decadent aristocracy, unhappy peasantry, scheming bureaucrats and inept law enforcers. The novel within the novel idea was a little clumsy, but doesn't detract from the whole. It's a bit more Agatha Christie than Tolstoy but I enjoyed it for what it was.

Katia N says

On Youtube, I came across on the fragment of the movie I knew since my childhood with breathtaking Waltz music. It is the one of the best waltz i know, including Strauss or Shostakovich. The movie is loosely based on Chekhov's short novel. I've seen it many year ago, but, I've realised, I've never read the novel. So I've read it now. It is wonderful. It is the one of longer works by Chekhov (he did not leave any proper novel and preferred the short form). It feels surprisingly modern: it is structured as a longish novella packed within a short story. And I did not know anyone used the footnotes meaningfully in fiction before David Foster Wallace 100 years later. Chekhov does it here. Also it reminded me Nabokov's "Pale Fire". May be some people would find the comparison a bit far-fetched, but Nabokov loved Chekhov (while he hated Dostoyevsky and many others Russian writers).

I would not talk here about the plot, or the characters, or the language. Suffice to say, it is Chekhov at his best plus a bit of a twist, which I think is not usual for him. I do not know why they translate the title as "Shooting party". In Russian it literary means " A drama during the hunting". It is quite a bit of a difference. So I am not sure how well the rest is translated. But I really recommend it if you like Russian literature.

Btw, this is the Waltz:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mSHQ...>

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Eliseo Monteros says

Muy buen relato, muy entretenido, en el que Chejov se revela como precursor del policial psicológico.

Fio Constant Reader says

"Yo, asido a la mesa, me dejé llevar por amargas reflexiones. Sentía que me ahogaba"

La única novela del escritor ruso es todo lo que aspira el relato policial de una época donde la psicología empezaba a tener avances y seguidores.

Mi ejemplar pertenece a la colección El Séptimo Círculo, curada por Borges y Bioy Casares y si bien yo recién comienzo mi camino por el oscuro túnel del policial, en Extraña Confesión lo que importa es el personaje y no el hecho. Lo puedo emparentar, de lo que he leído, con Agatha Christie, aún cuando sus tonos y artilugios son bien distintos.

Iván Kamishov le entrega una novela al un editor, que bien podría ser el propio Chejov, con las esperanzas de ser publicado. Lo que nosotros leemos es el manuscrito corregido y con anotaciones del editor, un texto con reflexiones e interpelaciones a nosotros.

Lo que allí se cuenta es un misterio detectivesco (aunque no se preocupe en la parte misteriosa, ya que se adivina fácilmente desde el principio el devenir de las cosas), centrado en Olenka, la joven hija de un loco guardabosques e idealizada por el narrador como si fuera una diosa de los bosques, como el objeto del deseo de los hombres y protagonista de un crimen pasional.

En el corazón de una Rusia decadente y rural, la historia se desarrolla con pausa, sutileza y atención al detalle psicológico, pero en este caso, también con pistas falsas y detalles incongruentes que son detectados por el lector, como si él mismo fuera el comisario encargado del caso.

Curiosidad: Llevada al cine en 1944 por Douglas Sirk, con George Sanders y Linda Darnell como protagonistas, Una extraña confesión es la primera novela larga publicada por Antón Chéjov y la única policíaca que escribió el gran autor ruso.

Wendy says

Not my favorite Chekov although it still has those beautifully drawn characters and dark view of life. This was his first long novel and I found it tediously long.

Barbara says

I was inspired to read this after reading The Summer Guest which talked about Chekhov's only novel. In Summer Guest, it turned out that there WAS no such novel. Out of curiosity, I checked to see whether Chekhov had actually written a novel, and The Shooting Party is it. It was quite interesting and I enjoyed the writing. Of course, with translated books, one is never sure how much of the style is the author's and how much is the translator's.... Next, I'd like to explore some of his short stories and plays. I've read some but so long ago that I really have no memory of them. I'd also like to read a biography in my spare time!

Lazarus-II says

3.5/5 or 7/10

Rodreyes says

Antón Chejov es absolutamente imprescindible. Esta novela corta (o cuento largo) es una ensayo psicológico y de emociones, con un fondo detectivesco, pero no en Nueva York, sino en la rusia rural de fines de los mil 800.

La edición que tuve en mis manos (Emecé, 1951) pertenece a la colección El séptimo círculo, dirigida por Jorge Borges (sic) y Adolfo Bioy Casares. El ejemplar está en pésimas condiciones, desencajado, hojas sueltas... Uf, pésimo. Pero que entrega placeres incommensurables.

Peter Pinkney says

Marvellous. A little bit like Crime and Punishment-what is it about those Russian authors...

Better though because it flows much smoother. Again a story about the psychology of murder, and all the angst that goes with it.

I don't speak Russian, but the translator deserves praise for the fluidity of the text-a certain Ronald Wilks, take a bow sir.

Chekhov really is the master and it's a great pity that he wrote no more novels.

Mary says

There in the forest was the girl in red!

Olga is the pretty young daughter of a drunken forester.

To escape she marries a much older man who she doesn't love but soon realises her mistake.

This short novella focuses on the three men who love her, her Husband , the Count and the Magistrate.

What happens to the girl in red as it reaches its dramatic conclusion?

Booklovinglady says

For me this was a typical example of a 19th century Russian novel (and I liked it). The unusual bit lies in the fact that the actual murder doesn't take place until 50 or so pages before the end of the book. The majority of the pages lead up to the event.

Kristen says

"A man who under the influence of mental pain or unbearably oppressive suffering sends a bullet through his

own head is called a suicide; but for those who give freedom to their pitiful, soul-debasing passions in the holy days of spring and youth there is no name in man's vocabulary. After the bullet follows the peace of the grave: ruined youth is followed by years of grief and painful recollections. He who has profaned his spring will understand the present condition of my soul. I am not yet old, or grey, but I no longer live. Psychiatrists tell us that a soldier, who was wounded at Waterloo, went mad, and afterwards assured everybody - and believed it himself - that he had died at Waterloo, and that what was now considered to be him was only his shadow, a reflection of the past. I am now experiencing something resembling this semi-death . . ."

Mark says

Met een ogenschijnlijk speelse eenvoud zet Tsjechov het verhaal van *Drama op de jacht* neer. Het is zo'n typische 19-e eeuwse raamvertelling: iemand brengt een manuscript bij een uitgever, de lezer krijgt het manuscript te lezen en het geheel wordt weer afgesloten met een finale ontmoeting tussen de uitgever en de aanbrenger van het manuscript. Die - surprise (of niet eigenlijk) - zelf een van de hoofdpersonages in het manuscript is. En de mogelijke dader, want er is sprake van een moord in dit verhaal. Vandaar die titel, '*Drama op de jacht*', hoewel ik de Engelse titel (*The shooting party*) subtieler en minder melodramatisch vind.

Een ijdeltuit en zuipschuit van een graaf, een gerechtelijk rechercheur, een eenvoudig meisje - dat is een aantal van de personages waar het verhaal om draait. Niet toevallig vertegenwoordigen zijn de diverse klassen in de Russische maatschappij. De spanningen in het verhaal voeren tot een moord. Of Tsjechov daarmee wilde preluderen op dat waartoe de spanningen in de Russische maatschappij zouden voeren, weet ik niet. Maar hij hint op duistere, dreigende krachten: "*De duisternis was schrikbarend. Het meer lag boos te kolken en leek vertoornd te zijn dat ik, een zondaar die juist nog getuige was geweest van iets zondigs, het waagde om zijn grimmige rust te verstoren. In het donker kon ik het meer niet zien. Wat daar brulde, leek een onzichtbaar monster te zijn, of de mij omringende duisternis zelf.*"

Een onzichtbaar monster... De raamvertelling stelt Tsjechov in staat om eerst de ene dader aan te wijzen, en dan weer de ander, zodat een eenduidig antwoord op wie nou de moord gepleegd heeft niet gegeven wordt. Of de kogel van rechts komt, of van links, het valt niet te zeggen. Maar de ingrediënten voor drama zijn volop aanwezig. Het is net onze huidige tijd...

Overigens is de schrijfstijl fraai, en denk ik (voor zover ik zoiets kan inschatten) dat ook de vertaalster veel lof verdient. Ter illustratie nog een passage:

"Wie zich onder invloed van psychische pijn of bedrukt door een ondraaglijk lijden een kogel door het hoofd jaagt, heet een zelfmoordenaar, maar voor hem die zijn erbarmelijke, de ziel omlaaghalende hartstochten de vrije loop laat in de heilige dagen van lente en jeugd, heeft de menselijke taal geen naam. Na de kogel volgt de rust van het graf, na een vergooide jeugd volgen jaren van smart en kwellende herinneringen."

Met die sterren hier op Goodreads is het vaak tobben, vind ik. Dit is een prima boek, erg knap eigenlijk, maar aan de andere kant wel een vrij korte roman, imposant valt het weer niet te noemen. Ik zou gaan voor een 7 of 7.5 - zeg maar 3 1/2e ster. Nou goed, ik heb er dus 3 sterren van gemaakt.
