



## Notes on the Cuff and Other Stories

*Mikhail Bulgakov, Alison Rice (Translator)*

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The stories collected here represent a sampling of the prose that first established Bulgakov as a major figure in the literary renaissance of Moscow in the 1920s, long before he became known as an influential playwright and novelist. The centerpiece of this collection is the long story "Notes on the Cuff," a comically autobiographical account of how the tenacious young writer managed to begin his literary career despite famine, typhus, civil war, the wrong political affiliation, and the Byzantine Moscow bureaucracy. This stylistically brilliant work was only partially published during Bulgakov's lifetime due to censorship, but was immediately recognized by the literati as an important work. The other stories collected here range from a sequence about the Civil War to Bulgakov's early reportage on the rebuilding of Moscow in the early 1920s, stories which now have a strikingly contemporary ring. Bulgakov describes the swindlers who arrived along with NEP, a program for the limited return to a market economy, as well as the vast reconstruction as the city is brought back from the destruction of civil war. Bulgakov, who burst on the world literary scene in the 1960s with the publication of his long-suppressed *The Master and Margarita*, has continued to enjoy tremendous success both in and out of Russia where productions of his plays and adaptations of his prose works have found new audiences.

## Notes on the Cuff and Other Stories Details

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## From Reader Review Notes on the Cuff and Other Stories for online ebook

### T.P. Williams says

Some short stories and "feuilletons" by the Russian author, who I understand is quite influential (I had not read anything by him before picking this one up on the discount pile at a bookstore). I enjoyed the feuilletons the most; short descriptions of Moscow in the early 1920's, during Lenin's New Economic Policy. The short stories I liked hardly at all. I felt the transitions in them were clumsy and the voice or POV was frequently muddled. It seemed to me that maybe the translation was at fault (I think Russian is a difficult language to translate into English). The best of the short stories was the first, a type of autobiographical account of the writer's illness during the Russian Civil War, being stuck in the mountains of Georgia and his delirium. I mentioned my take on this book to a former teacher and he recommended I not give up on this author and try "The Master and Margarita." Maybe.

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### Carolinemawer says

[I've read another edition - the new translation by Alma Classics]

Read this book!

Start with 'The Murderer', if you want to try out thinking well of a murderer. I immediately started reading again, and then again, after finishing this story.

Start here too if you're hesitant.

As well you might be. The stories are about chaos so, of course, are sometimes chaotic.

Ease yourself into them.

I'd suggest giving yourself time to savour each story in between reading.

Don't even think about enjoying them as you go along. After all, it isn't enjoyable living in chaos.

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### Turkan Kasamanli says

I never thought that I'd like some book of Bulgakov more than I liked (LOVED) Master & Margarita. However when I finally started to read his short stories I understood how wrong I could be. These stories connect you with Bulgakov as you know him in reality, as he is someone you know very well. It is like you are sitting in the park (or maybe kitchen) with him and he is telling you about everything - his friends, neighbors, colleagues, places he've been to, stories he heard.

We must admit that he was witness of very bad times and his intelligent mind did not suit to bolsheviks' world at all. In spite of this his absolutely fine intellect and subtle sense of humor makes you smile all the time while you read these narrations. He doesn't play a hero, he admits that he was poor, hungry, scared and lost man.

He is very sincere and honest.

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## **Kirsty says**

Whilst I love Bulgakov's work, this was far too similar to *A Country Doctor's Notebook*; I stopped reading for that reason alone.

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## **Ed Howard-Jones says**

'Notes on a Cuff' is a great little short story, but most of the other stories in this book are quite stale.

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## **Andrei Tama? says**

"Însemn?ri pe man?ete" este una dintre operele care anun?? mare crea?ie ulterioar? a lui Bulgakov, concentrat? într-o singur? opera, cosmogonic? (?i la propriu ?i la figurat!) ?i etern?. ?i aceasta -ca ?i celealte scrisori scurte, de altfel- a indus cititorii din epoca în derut?, deoarece subiectul este relativ ambiguu ?i cap?t? multe interpret?ri (printre care ?i nelini?tea omului în aspira?ia spre absolut pe un fundal al "fugii" industriale).

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## **Hugh Coverly says**

Bulgakov could probably write in any form he set his mind to, and in *Notes on a Cuff* and *Other Stories* there are many wonderful stories that display his great talent. The title story, for example, is written from the perspective of a recovering typhus patient, whose delirium seems to reach beyond his hospital room. Also enjoyable were *The Fire of the Khans*, *Crimson Island*, *The Murderer*, and *Cockroach*; an especially funny story, in collection not filled with comedy, is *A Scurvy Fellow*. There is a reason this great Russian writer was largely unknown until after his death, it is the subtle criticisms of both the Bolshevik and Stalinist regimes. Stalin was a great admirer of Bulgakov and occasionally provided much needed financial assistance, but most of Bulgakov's novels, plays and stories were suppressed during his lifetime. These stories can be read as both experiments in avant garde literature and as literary criticism of the larger political landscape that Bulgakov and other writers were navigating.

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## **Steven says**

This collection includes several longer stories, like the titular *Notes on a Cuff*, *The Crimson Island*, and *The Fire of the Khans* (my favorite among the longer pieces), as well as a bunch of shorter stories, among which *The Murderer* and *The Cockroach* really stood out.

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## **Jennifer Richardson says**

I could not have loved this book more. I had to brush up on my history of the Russian Civil war so that I

could actually understand some of the specific events he narrates, especially those happening in his beloved Kiev. But the chaotic style of narration forced the reader to feel the utter chaos these citizens experienced from seemly endless violence and from constantly changing hands, as well as the hunger and desperation that defined the period. This would have been a very difficult and perhaps even pointless read without the footnotes, though, which explained/contextualized a lot of the fine-tuned cultural subtleties that so define Bulgakov's style (which would have otherwise been completely lost on me). I had to immediately go out and buy his novel *The White Guard* in hopes to find more of the same!

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### **Trevor Durham says**

Some fascinating and autobiographical tales from my favorite author, which I am very grateful to have been finally translated.

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### **Esin says**

Bulgakov'un kendine özgü yarat?c? dünyas?n?n eseri olan, Rusya tarihinin önemli döngülerini içeren olaylarla beraber dile getirdi?i öykülerden olu?an kitap, tan?t?m?nda da de?inildi?i gibi Kiev ve Moskova'n?n günlük hayat?n?n panoramas?n? çiziyor. ?eytani ve Usta ile Margarita'y? oldukça zevkle okudu?um yazar?n öyküleri beni bu sefer biraz zorlad?. ?ç sava? y?llar?ndan Yeni Rusya'ya kadar tarihin önemli olaylar?n?n i?lendi?i 22 öykü ayr? ayr? farkl? zamanlarda okunarak sevilecek öyküler bana göre. 1 kitap içinde hepsini birden okumak beni biraz s?kt?. Kitap asl?nda Bulgakov'un di?er kitaplar?nda da bilinmesi gereken altyap?n?n biraz daha fazlas?n? istiyor bu yüzden konu itibariyle özel ilgi gerektirecek öyküler içeriyor bana göre. E?er ilgi alan?n?z s?n?rlar? içine girmiyorsa öykülerin hepsini bir anda de?il sindire sindire okuman?z? tavsiye ederim.

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### **Emily says**

Feuilletons I'd imagine of chiefly historical interest, but two stories of real quality--showed Bulgakov's gift for whatever it is. Magical realism? Hyperrealism? Black comedy? Worth reading for those two longer works.

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### **Susan says**

Some events during the Soviet era were so bizarre it seems that they could only be works of satire. This collection of Mikhail Bulgakov's earliest short stories, written between 1920 and 1921, highlights the horror, pathos and comic absurdity of the period.

The longest story in the collection, "Notes on a Cuff" is an (only slightly) satirical account of Bulgakov's early writing career, including the two months he spent as secretary of LITO, the Literary Department of the Central Political Enlightenment Committee, an agency of the Commissariat of Education. I have no idea whether LITO sounds as silly in Russian as it does in translation, but judging by the opening passage, in

which the narrator, suffering from typhus-induced delirium, fades in and out of consciousness as he riffs on a series of puns on the name, I guess it does!

In one bizarre incident, LITO's "literary evenings" in the Caucasus were banned due to newspaper criticism that the portrait of Pushkin displayed on the stage made the founder of modern Russian literature look like a "serf-owning landlord"!

The story also includes a wonderful account of Mikhail Bulgakov's play-writing collaboration with a lawyer:

"There were three of us writing it: I, the barrister and hunger."

Anyone who has ever dealt with bureaucracy will surely identify with the Kafkaesque account of the fruitless day Bulgakov spent looking for the LITO office after it was re-located without his knowledge.

And anyone who has ever sat through an interminable presentation will also appreciate "Makar Devushkin's Story", an hilarious account of a Party meeting in which each official spoke for three hours or so, but at which the main drawcard was the Party secretary's impressive new trousers:

"And, indeed, Fitilyov appeared in a pair of trousers with such creases and so magnificently tailored that they resembled those on the metal statue of Puskin in Moscow."

But when a particularly boring speaker spoke about the work of the management committee:

"No trousers were of any help here, and even Fitilyov himself... fell asleep while pretending to be listening. The young women who had been looking admiringly at the handsome figure of Fitilyov all left the room — they couldn't stay any longer, even though he was a bachelor."

The two stories "The Strange Adventures of a Doctor" and "The Murderer" are particularly interesting because they draw from Mikhail Bulgakov's experience as a doctor in the Ukrainian People's Army during the Russian Civil War and presage events in his novel *The White Guard*.

Although the stories are of varying quality, I highly recommend this collection for fans of Mikhail Bulgakov and Soviet absurdism.

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### **Jason Furman says**

(Note, I read the title novella and the first set of stories, but skipped most of the "Feuilletons").

I was excited to find a Bulgakov book that I hadn't yet read appear in translation. But the excitement did not extend to the actual reading, which explained why these are not very common. The title novella *Notes on the Cuff* is about a doctor/writer (much like Bulgakov), focusing on a series of incidents during the civil war, and not nearly as good as *A Dead Man's Memoir* (aka *Black Snow*), which itself was not so great. A number of other stories are in a similar vein. The second part of the book is "Feuilletons" which describe Moscow, other cities, in somewhat satirical terms. I only dipped into these and found them less interesting than the first half.

I would have been better of reading Master & Margarita a third time.

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## Macat says

Bulgakov, eserlerini, özellikle mizah?n? çok sevdi?im bir yazar. Bir iki kitab? d???nda her kitab?n? okudum (Usta ile Margarita'y? sona sakl?yorum) ve hepsini g?n?l rahat!??yla tavsiye de edebilirim. Ancak Bulgakov'un en bilinen ve okunan eserleriyle di?er baz? eserleri aras?nda büyük fark var. Kol Man?etinde Notlar da bu di?er eserler aras?nda.

Kitap, daha çok okurlara d?nemi yans?tan ve Bulgakov'un hayat?ndan kesitler sunan hikayelerden olu?uyor. Kitab? yazar?n di?er eserlerinden farkl? k?lan ise yazar?n dili ve anlat?? tarz?. Okumay?, hikayelere odaklanmay? zorla?t?ran bir ?slup var bu hikayelerde. Baz? hikayelerde ise anlat?lan? gerçekten kaç?rabiliyorsunuz ve kar??yor her ?ey. Bu sebeplerle kendi ad?ma okuma ?rem de on g?n? ge?ti san?r?m. Bunlara ra?men kitaba kötü diyemiyorum ?ünkü çok güzel öyküler de var ve Bulgakov bir ?ekilde kendisine ba?l?yor beni.

Bulgakov'u gerçekten sevenler zaten herhangi bir eserini kaç?rmadan okur ama daha önce yazarla tan??mam?? olan okurlara tavsiyem ilk ba?ta Köpek Kalbi, Genç Bir Doktorun An?lar? gibi daha anla??l?r eserlere yönelmeleri. Herkese iyi okumalar ve ?imdiden iyi y?llar.

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