



Creatures That Once Were Men

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A collection of short stories by the popular and influential Russian author, a founder of the socialist realism literary method and arguably the greatest Russian literary figure of the 20th century. He wrote stories, plays, memoirs and novels which touched the imagination of the Russian people, and was the first Russian author to write sympathetically of such characters as tramps and thieves, emphasizing their daily struggles against overwhelming odds.

Creatures That Once Were Men Details

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Guillermo Gonca says

Maksím Gorki (o si se prefiere: Máximo Gorki) pasó su juventud recorriendo Rusia y Ucrania. En sus viajes conoció todo tipo de personas, especialmente vagabundos y aventureros que buscaban en la libertad del viaje, el instrumento que les haga salir airosos en la lucha por la vida. Gracias a esta experiencia, Gorki encontró su vocación literaria y decide escribir el testimonio de los seres humanos que fue encontrando a su paso.

Entre 1894 y 1899 publicaría una serie de relatos conocida hoy en día como "Los vagabundos", cuentos que hablan sobre indigentes, bandidos, trotamundos, prostitutas y hasta aristócratas renegados en busca de emociones. La pobreza es un elemento constante pero también lo es el espíritu aventurero. Estos infortunados personajes intentan convivir momentáneamente con el sector convencional de la sociedad, para después retomar su camino; no sin dejar a su paso conflictos, sufrir injusticias y vivir amoríos con audaces y apasionadas mujeres.

El estilo del escritor es bastante asequible, pues aborda los relatos de manera simple y directa. La preponderancia del diálogo coloquial y la osadía de los temas, sugiere una juventud irreverente. Sin embargo, los relatos no están exentos de sabiduría y denuncia. El tono de los escritos no es tan social como podría esperarse (quien piense que este libro está marcado por las ideologías políticas está totalmente equivocado). En lugar de eso, encontraremos una profunda influencia literaria, desde los grandes maestros de las letras rusas hasta el movimiento naturalista francés. Por otro lado, este es un buen libro para empezar a conocer muchos de esos términos rusos que resultan vitales para la lectura de otras novelas, pues contiene abundantes notas a pie de página.

Mi edición de "Los vagabundos" contiene seis cuentos que comentaré en orden de aparición:

-Una vez en otoño: Quizás este sea el cuento más sencillo. Narra en primera persona la historia de dos jovencitos hambrientos. Desde aquí se perfila el estilo simple y asequible que disfrutaremos en casi todo el libro. Sin embargo, no se trata en absoluto de un cuento débil, pues por su mensaje y su sobrecogedor desenlace, podemos colocarlo entre los mejores del libro.

-Konovalov: Enseguida aparece el cuento más extenso, ilustrando a profundidad lo que significa el alcoholismo y la melancolía. Sin haber cumplido los treinta años de edad, Gorki ya sabía que el sentimiento de derrota ante la vida es lo que realmente conduce a las adicciones. El protagonista es un personaje sobresaliente cuya psicología sensible, apasionada y melancólica queda descrita de manera brillante.

-Camaradas: Este es el relato que menos ha llamado mi atención. Trata sobre el reencuentro inesperado de dos amigos de la adolescencia. Es el único que está escrito en tercera persona.

-Boles: El más breve de los seis cuentos con apenas diez páginas. Trata sobre una mujer frívola y solitaria cuya amistad es despreciada por un estudiante. El tono aleccionador del desenlace no demerita en lo más mínimo la calidad literaria.

-El timador: ¡Esta es la gran gema del libro! El relato se divide en dos partes más bien extensas; la primera desarrolla la más reciente travesía de un cínico y ventajoso bandido, quien se aprovecha de la ignorancia del

pueblo, la piedad de los creyentes y la inoperancia de los burócratas. Sin duda es un personaje odioso, pero el éxito de sus fechorías nos habla de la situación social de la Rusia prerrevolucionaria. La segunda parte es aún más interesante, pues desarrolla toda la vida del ruin personaje y su torcida forma de pensar. Mientras tanto, el narrador reflexiona a plenitud sobre diversos temas, intercalando lo que sería un breve pero brillante ensayo sobre la naturaleza humana. Aquí puede apreciarse el desbordante talento que el escritor desarrollaría en obras posteriores. Comparado con los otros relatos "El timador" se distingue de manera aplastante.

-Kirilka: En esta sátira advertimos finalmente la conciencia social que hizo famoso a Gorki. Narra la historia de tres funcionarios que esperan su turno para cruzar el río. Mientras tanto los personajes demuestran su desprecio por los campesinos y se enfrascan en un breve debate sobre la utilidad de la educación en las clases bajas. Me parece que este es un mal intento de emular "Bola de Sebo" de Guy de Maupassant, pero no deja de tener sus momentos interesantes.

En resumen "Los vagabundos" es un buen libro, sobretodo si consideramos la juventud de Maksím Gorki al momento de escribirlo. Si usted me dice que el autor ruso escribió mejores obras, no lo dudaría ni un momento. Sin embargo, me atrevo a decir que aquí encontraremos dos o tres cuentos fundamentales para conocer al gran escritor ruso. En especial el excelente "El timador".

-Sobre la traducción de "Reino de Cordelia":

La edición de editorial "Reino de Cordelia" deja mucho que desear por su irritante traducción amateur. Parece evidente que el responsable no se molestó en realizar las revisiones pertinentes, de modo que el desaseado español resultante resulta poco digno de una obra de este calibre. En algunos párrafos la sintaxis es un absoluto desastre. Además el traductor no logra hacer una interpretación ingeniosa y coherente de los peculiares diálogos de la obra. La editorial presume ofrecer una traducción nueva, pero el léxico resulta bastante anacrónico y para colmo (en el caso de los terminos coloquiales) demasiado regional, agregando dificultad y confusión para cualquier lector que no haya nacido en España. Esta puede ser la peor traducción que he leído en mi vida. Está usted advertido.

Constantin says

R?tcitor de bun? voie, Gorki iube?te marginalii. Atribuie inteligen??, sensibilit??i ?i profunzimi neb?nuite unor oameni arunca?i, de cele mai multe ori f?r? voia lor, la marginea societ??ii. A?a s? fie? Al?turi de Tolstoi sau Dostoievski, ?alamov îl socote?te pe Gorki drept unul dintre principalii vinova?i pentru zugr?virea tabloului luminos al vagabondului, al infractorului m?runt ?i nu numai. ?i atunci de unde au ap?rut blatarii? Mi-e team? c?, de pild?, cei trei nu duc nic?ieri f?r? ?alamov. Strict dîn punctul de vedere al în?elegerii universului celor de neîn?eles...

Merve says

"Ya?am?n gizlerini anlayamama pas? ile dü?ünme zehri, bir talihsizlik eseri duygulu bir yürekle birlikte yarat?lm?? bulunan bu iri gövdeyi durmadan kemiriyordu."

Artem Chapeye says

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Manolito says

El realismo ruso en versión 2.0 Para quienes les gusta las obras de Dostoyevski, no pueden dejar de leer a Gorky.

Diana says

«Prepárense, pues, para un viaje. Lean con las botas puestas, y con el abrigo a mano, porque en la Rusia de Gorki hace mucho frío. Si algún personaje se le ofrece, acepte un té, un vodka, un sitio al precario abrigo de una barca volcada o al calor de una hoguera. Déjense llevar de la mano del escritor amargo, compasivo, ruso hasta el tuétano, por ese país físico que es casi un estado de ánimo...». Escribe Eva Orúe.

Yo no he estado tan preparada y es por ello que acepté el té casi al final, cuando ya era muy tarde para beberlo gota a gota. ¡Pero cómo acabé sintiéndolo! Hallé calor entre los fríos labios.

Dr. Cristina Bettencourt says

Maybe the translation was poor, or the style has no Zeitgeist but I found the book irritating.

Perry Whitford says

What a great phrase!

Gorky himself obviously liked it, which is why he trots it out at every given opportunity during the title story of this collection.

An excellent story it is too, almost of novella length, about the inhabitants of a doss house for drunks. The 'Creatures That Once Were Men' come into conflict with their landlord and don't come off too well, though it's worth noting that he is the one who ends up momentarily grovelling on all fours like a creature.

There's something so vivid and unselfconscious about Gorky's characters, a blazing simplicity if you will, an admirable crudity. This short exchange goes a long way to capturing the general gist of how they talk and behave:

"I will break his teeth for him," said Martyanoff.

"And why?" asked the youngster.

"Just because. . . ."

"And I will take a stone and hit you on the head," the young man answered respectfully.

Martyanoff would have broken his bones, had not Kuvalda interrupted with: "Leave him alone. . . .Is this a home to you or even to us? You have no sufficient reason to break his teeth for him. You have no better reason than he for living with us."

"Well, then, Devil take him! . . . We all live in the world without sufficient reason . . . We live, and why? Because! He also because . . . let him alone. . . ."

The rest of the stories have a lot to live up to but are equally arresting in their way. In 'Twenty-Six Girl' the men slaving in a bakery exult the pretty innocence of a sixteen year old girl who they see each morning, then a boastful newcomer turns his amorous attentions her way. An allegory for the difficulties of retaining faith or modesty in a sordid world.

Then in 'Chelkash' a smuggler takes advantage of an ignorant peasant down on his luck. The psychological results of their short liason are fascinatingly played out by Gorky, I can't imagine a Western writer coming to the same resolution.

'My Fellow-Traveller' is a similar two-hander. A travelling peasant takes an ungrateful young Georgian under his wing. I've read before that other Russians consider the Georgians to be insane. I can see why.

The closing 'On a Raft' is both haunting and depraved. Apparently there is an ancient Russian custom where the father of a bridegroom had first dibs (for want of a better phrase) on his son's wife. This boat trip on the Volga is striking material with which to illustrate the difficulty of attaining spiritual purity in a material world.

In his introduction G. K. Chesterton pretty much labels Russians as barbarians. How dare he, the oversized Edwardian ignoramus.

Georgians however...

Luis C. says

Very uncommon novel despite their common theme. A beautiful reading.

Mark says

"What are you? Who are you?"

"A man . . ." he answered in a hoarse voice.

"A man! And are there really men like you?"

"Men are of various kinds . . . as God wills . . . There are worse than me . . . still worse . . . Yes. . . ."

Perfect. Been wanting to read this since picking up *The Collected Short Stories of Maxim Gorky* in 2009. At first, it was a little peculiar as Gorky took his time introducing the slew of downtrodden characters and I really wasn't sure what the story would entail, or if there would be any story at all. This would make an excellent stage play. Godot-ish. Yes.

Zebardast Zebardast says

Maxim Gorky, pseudonym of Aleksey Maksimovich Peshkov, (born March 16 [March 28, New Style], 1868, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia—died June 14, 1936), Russian short-story writer and novelist who first attracted attention with his naturalistic and sympathetic stories of tramps and social outcasts and later wrote other stories, novels, and plays, including his famous *The Lower Depths*.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

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R K says

DNF
Lost interest

So why did I lose interest? Well to put it simply, I got tired of reading racist and misogynistic crap. I know. I know. The audience roars, "You're judging from your modern perspective! 1800 Russia was a different time!"

Yes. I know that when you read older books, you need to be mindful of the differences in societal perception for the time. It's something I chant myself. But whereas in most books I can just ignore the blatant comments towards (insert minority group) because it's from a time long gone, I couldn't with this one. Russian classics take a bit of time to bite into. You follow the story then get lost then follow the story once again. It's a repetitious pattern and sometimes it produces a good story and sometimes not. This time was a dud. There were so many comments towards Jews and the Jewish community and really cruel comments towards women. This was supposed to be a book that shows the situation of Russia's poor, but I couldn't give a crap about a group of drunk men who debate about the proper way to hit a woman with many side jabs towards

Jews.

How can you cry about your poor fate and then turn around and beat a woman and worry about whether your ethnicity has a place in heaven? I couldn't ignore it. It bugged me too much. I honestly felt like these were men who had the potential to make their life better but didn't because it's easier to complain. Also, the one educated person (a teacher) actually held a "debate" on how to beat a wife. Full on beating till she's black and blue is wrong (especially if she's pregnant) but being lightly beaten is "okay" because "it keeps her in place".

Maybe you need to be more stubborn to get through such commentary because of the message the book it supposed to send. But a lot of the racist comments, and jabs towards women is something that happens in everyday life, still; unfortunately. Note: I know that if a character behaves in such a manner, it doesn't mean the author themselves feel that way. I have no idea how Gorky was as a human himself, but I just don't want to read a book filled with these things that also fails to hold my attention.

Cristina Maeve says

A fost o lectur? interesant?, mai ales prin prisma faptului c? povestirile sunt rostite la persoana I ?i astfel, autorul invit? direct cititorul s? ia parte în ac?iunea c?r?ii. Multitudinea de povestiri, de peripe?ii prin care trece Maxim Gorky în perioada sa de „vagabond” îl plaseaz? pe scriitor printre „scursurile societ??ii” de atunci care, de multe ori, se dovedesc a avea mai mult? onoare decât aristocra?ia vremii.

Spencer says

Gorky gives the reader a vivid picture of the life of a peasant at the turn of the 20th century in Russia. This picture is dark, grueling, and hard. The book is comprised of several short stories, with "Creatures That Once Were Men" at the forefront and the longest, setting the tone for the shorter stories that follow.

Gorky show a gritty reality where the few that get ahead use and abuse the lower class as if they were beasts of burden. Gorky also shows the lower class as dismal and giving up on their fate, confining themselves to drink. However, Gorky does show a kinship within this lower class, that they do help one another as they can, knowing that the greater of them are in it together. This is most notable in "My Fellow-Traveler" as Maxime and the Prince are helped once recognized as peasants (mistakenly in the Princes case).

With all the darkness in these stories, "On a Raft" ends the anthology with sunlight and the vividness of nature, and a yearning for natural love. Overall, Gorky shows extreme darkness, and darkness of souls, but through all of this, these lowly "creatures" endure despite their hardships, never fully letting their spirits be snuffed out. I believe this is an homage from Gorky to his comrades.
