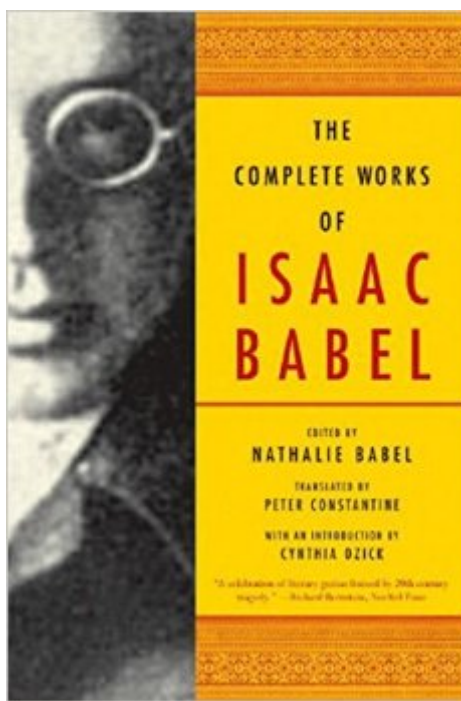


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The Complete Works Of Isaac Babel



Synopsis

"A celebration of literary genius framed by 20th-century tragedy."--Richard Bernstein, New York Times Finally in paperback, this "monumental collection; gathers all of Babel's deft and brutal writing, including a wide array of previously unavailable material, from never-before-translated stories to plays and film scripts" (David Ulin, Los Angeles Times). Reviewing the work in The New Republic, James Woods wrote that this groundbreaking volume "represents a triumph of translating, editing, and publishing. Beautiful to hold, scholarly and also popularly accessible, it is an enactment of love." Considered one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Isaac Babel has left his mark on a generation of readers and writers. This book will stand as Babel's final, most enduring legacy. Winner of the Koret Jewish Book Award; A New York Times Notable Book, a and Library Journal Best Book, a Washington Post Book World Rave, a Village Voice Favorite Book of the Year.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book after stumbling upon one of Babel's army stories from the "Red Cavalry" collection. Babel truly is a master of short fiction. I am surprised that I have gone this far in my life and have just now found him. The biographical information provided by his daughter enhances the reading pleasure as well as draws attention to the politics that contributed to self-censorship and eventual assassination from Stalin's henchmen. Babel is the Chekhov and the Turgenev of his time: classic Russian Short Fiction at its most beautiful. The only drawback to this extensive collection is its extensiveness. Babel's longer works and plays lack some of the focus and integrity of his short

stories. Luckily the short stories make up the bulk of the book. If you can afford it buy the hardcover. It comes in a protective box and I guarantee this is a collection you will want to preserve and cherish forever.

Isaac Babel was a Russian Jewish writer who wrote his most famous works -- all short stories -- under the Soviet regime in the 1920s. He was tragically killed during the Stalin purges of the late 1930s. His work is unique from so many perspectives: he was a Jew, but he did not live in the Pale or write in Yiddish (he was a modern, secular Jew who lived in Odessa and wrote in Russian); he fought in the Red Army in the Russian Revolution, became disillusioned, but never left Russia; he wrote only short works such as short stories and screen plays. In this one volume, his daughter has collected every available work that he ever wrote. While there were many manuscripts that were destroyed when Babel was purged, this will stand as his complete works, all recently translated. In addition to Babel's own writings, there are wonderful introductions from Cynthia Ozick, the translator Peter Constantine and Babel's daughter, Nathalie Babel. Ms. Babel also includes, as an afterward, a wonderful memoir of how she came to produce this work, starting with the gripping tale of her and her mother's life in France during WWII. Also included is a timeline of Babel's life. These materials alone make for fascinating reading as you dip into Babel's literary works. Of course, it is Babel's short stories that are the star attraction. There are three main collections, the Odessa stories, which tell the tales of Russian Jewish thugs living in a district in Odessa, the Red Cavalry stories, which are based on Babel's experiences in the Red Army in the Russian Revolution, and the Dovecote stories, which are autobiographical tales of Babel's youth. The stories are all lean and sparsely written with a biting irony that attacks all facets of Russian life. This is not a book one is likely to or needs to read from cover to cover at one time. It is, however, perfectly designed to let one slowly absorb this great writer as you dip into this over time.

Babel's output was relatively small. His reputation rests on his short stories, particularly the stories about his hometown of Odessa and the remarkable Red Cavalry sequence describing the Soviet invasion of Poland. This work is, nonetheless, a high point of 20th century literature. Babel was a great writer, putting more into short stories than many talented writers can put into whole novels. His descriptions of life under the Czar, seen particularly through the prism of Jewish gangsters in Odessa, are remarkably gripping accounts of a repressive society. The Red Cavalry sequence, a tour de force of vivid narration and psychological insight gets right to the heart of the brutality that characterized much of the 20th century.

Babel is one of the great storytellers. The man who according to his description as recorded by Lionel Trilling had 'spectacles on his nose and autumn in his heart' was a pale Yeshiva- boy type thrust into the world of Cossack violence. He recorded that violence and the horror of it with chilling accuracy in his 'Red Cavalry' stories. More ebullient are the stories of the Odessa Jewish underworld and its Robin- Hood Benya Krik. Babel was a writer of the *mot juste* who grew up on Flaubert and Maupassant. He wrote and rewrote his stories, thirty or forty times. "No steel pierces the heart more poignantly than a period in the right place'. The most memorable of his stories for me is one of his childhood 'For my Dovecoat' about the experiencing of a pogrom, the murder of a grandfather. Babel has been celebrated by many of the most distinguished modern writers and critics. Deservedly so. He is a true master.

Babel is a masterful teller of short stories. His stories, most of which do not exceed a few pages, speak volumes about the extraordinary times in which he lived. For me, the most interesting aspect of Babel's writing is his ability to convey how the onset of Soviet power changed everything--and yet changed nothing (ie, the cossacks of the Red Army seeking to spread world communist revolution in Poland, and simultaneously reprising past cossack wars and pogroms in the region). Babel lived in a fascinating, uncertain time, and his vivid diaries describe the Red Army's exhilaration as they sweep westward into Poland--seemingly as the vanguard of a world revolution--and their confusion and dejection as the Polish pans push them back. This book was too intense and too homogeneous for me to read all at once: many of Babel's stories feature the same themes (chiefly Jewish life and red cavalry) and after a few hundred pages a definite sense of *deja vu* sets in as Babel reworks various characters, scenes, etc. Nonetheless, a fantastic book to read in smaller chunks.

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