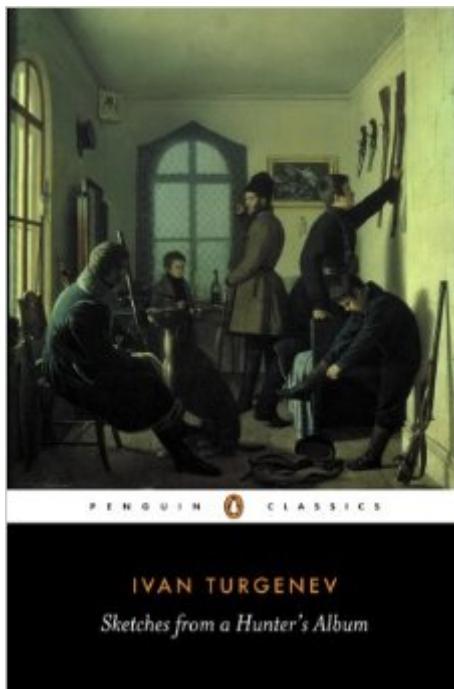


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Sketches From A Hunter's Album: The Complete Edition (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Turgenev's first major prose work is a series of twenty-five Sketches: the observations and anecdotes of the author during his travels through Russia satisfying his passion for hunting. His album is filled with moving insights into the lives of those he encounters - peasants and landowners, doctors and bailiffs, neglected wives and bereft mothers - each providing a glimpse of love, tragedy, courage and loss, and anticipating Turgenev's great later works such as First Love and Fathers and Sons. His depiction of the cruelty and arrogance of the ruling classes was considered subversive and led to his arrest and confinement to his estate, but these sketches opened the minds of contemporary readers to the plight of the peasantry and were even said to have led Tsar Alexander II to abolish serfdom. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

It's taken me until now to get to Sketches From A Hunter's Album. Now I have finished it and now I am grieving. It will stay in my nonlending collection so I can savor it even after the surprise has

gone. It's like losing a friend. Turgenev calls these 'sketches' rather than stories. It's a good distinction. More story writers should concentrate on their sketch pads. The sketches are of places and people in the rural south of Russia in the 1840s. Each is strung thematically on Turgenev's wanderings through the countryside while hunting for game birds. Each begins with a mention that he was hunting in a certain place. He goes into lovely thoughtful and surprising descriptions of the woods or marsh, the sky, the smells, the sounds, the light. Even in translation, these are exquisite. He speaks of shifting light shining through the leaves onto the forest floor, or unbreatheable noonday heat, or changing skies at the advent of a storm, a dawn, or a sunset; he calls up moments from your own life that you thought could not be shared with anyone who wasn't there and he makes you relive those moments as if he had been there with you. For anyone who has spent time out of doors, these little Aldo Leopold nature essays standing alone would be reason enough to read the 'Sketches', but these are just *hors d'œuvre* to his descriptions of the persons he meets while hunting. When sketching people, Turgenev does gracefully what Dickens tried to do and did clumsily; that is, he describes the physical characteristics of a person and gives you a fully formed description of their character as well, and he does this without sounding forced and without showing himself. (And you will burst out laughing at the sudden recognition that, indeed, someone does look 'like a root vegetable'.

Turgenev effectively invents a new form -- the literary sketch -- to impart a new kind of content. What is brilliant about these sketches which are in part nature meditation and in part biographical sketch is how Turgenev allows each character to speak for themselves. As a result we feel like we are hearing something we have never heard before -- the natural voice of the people. By allowing people to speak for themselves Turgenev gives us a truer and more genuine idea of how people -- serf and gentry -- really think and relate. Each sketch begins with a detailed description of the natural surroundings he is walking through and these descriptions give us insight into Turgenev's cast of mind which is infinitely receptive, and discerning, even romantic and delicate at times as when he describes staring up through the forest canopy and imagining he is staring up at the world from beneath a vast body of water. These magnificent introductions set the mood for the character sketch to come. When he meets a serf it is as if he is merely continuing his communion with nature for the serfs live at one with the land. When he meets one of the gentry, however, and passes time in their company he feels removed from the natural settings and people he so values. It is a fascinating and very subtle technique but Turgenev makes the landowners seem like unnatural creatures who are disturbing the natural order. Though he is one of the gentry himself Turgenev

hunts with the serfs , he values their company and conversation, and he values what they know. He knows them as individuals not just as serfs and so we too come to know them as individuals, each with their own personality and ideas about life and story to tell.

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