Sholokhov, Mikhail Aleksandrovich (1905-84)

Soviet critics about *Quiet Flows the Don:*

The most outstanding novel of the 20th century;

Gives a historically accurate and very broad picture of the life of the Russian Cossacks, but the book’s world-historic significance cannot be confined in such narrow local limits;

It’s a milestone in world literature and has exerted an immense influence on its development. Its impact lay mainly in its contribution to the democratization of art.

It is significant that this epic appeared in beginning of the 20th century, the century of revolutions and the collapse of the colonial system, when it became clear that every human being is a world in himself, a whole universe. Every human being, and not just the chosen few! Sholokhov was able to show that “ordinary “ people, working people,, were capable of emotions no less powerful and thoughts about lives not less complex and agonizing than those of the intellectually educated.

The tragedy of Grigory Melikhov, the central character in this epic novel, a truth-seeker by nature, if that he is prepared to give his life in defense of justice, but he cannot decide where a just order of things is to be found in the world.

Grigory is a collectivist by nature, but his collectivism is narrow, restricted by consideration of class, and it clashes violently with the interests of the working people. When Grigory realizes this, he honestly and sincerely decides to join the Red forces. But life is complex, and old relations have a strong hold on him. Grigory changes sides more than once, and eventually falls in with a band made up of the dregs of society.

Spiritually exhausted and longing for peace of mind, he leaves the band, comes back to his unforgettable love, Aksinya, with the intention of running away with her to some place where no one knows them, and where two people who have lost everything can begin life anew. But a chance bullet cuts short Aksinya’s troubled life.