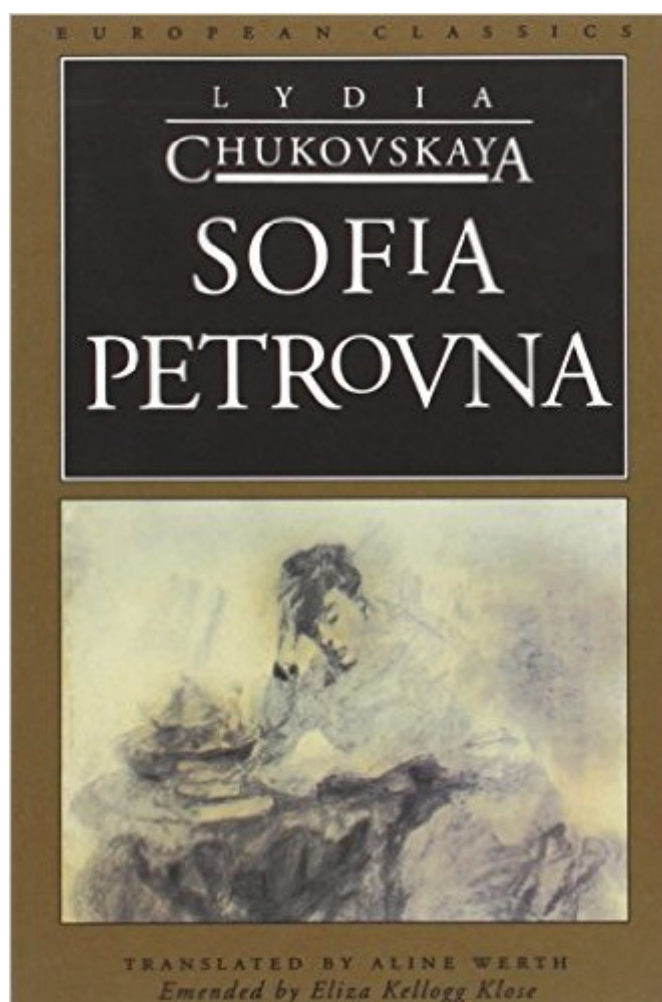


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# Sofia Petrovna (European Classics)



## Synopsis

Sofia Petrovna is Lydia Chukovskaya's fictional account of the Great Purge. Sofia is a Soviet Everywoman, a doctor's widow who works as a typist in a Leningrad publishing house. When her beloved son is caught up in the maelstrom of the purge, she joins the long lines of women outside the prosecutor's office, hoping against hope for good news. Confronted with a world that makes no moral sense, Sofia goes mad, a madness which manifests itself in delusions little different from the lies those around her tell every day to protect themselves.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Madame Chukovskaya's *Sofia Petrovna* is one of the best examples of Soviet protest literature available to English readers. Her prose style, spare and direct, is marvelously fitting for this story of a Soviet everywoman's loss of faith. Because there is little introspection, the reader is forced to look deeply into why the events in the heroine's life are causing her to go mad. The reflection on the Soviet system which this creates is one of the best ways to study the period about which Chukovskaya wrote. What is particularly moving about this book is the voice Chukovskaya uses to tell her story. It is the most feminine of voices, that of a mother, whose compassion and faith in her son, while conflicting with her identity as a good Soviet citizen, are emotions with which any female reader can relate, or any parent. This short novel is often grouped with A. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The relation between the two books is compelling. One presents the story of those who were senselessly condemned to the gulags; the other recounts the impact of this

condemnation on the families and friends left behind. Although this book is not widely read by the American public, I think it one of the most moving stories of Soviet life in the Stalinist era. For this reason, I believe it will continue to be a classic of Soviet literature for many years to come

Chukovskaya's semi-fictional memoir eloquently captures the dark moods and ongoing private terrors inflicted on the Russian people by Stalin in 1937-38. Brief, and readable in one afternoon, this book gives still-needed testimony to today's too-distracted generation on how much someone can lose by the raised fist of a remorseless, insane State, and the tender balance between illusions that keep one safe, and cold realization of a remorseless, intruding reality.

An interesting and compelling story that most people probably didn't know existed; for the main fact that it has only been published and translated in the past several decades after being blacklisted in Russia and was hidden in a drawer during the time it was written. A compelling story of the 'purge' that began before the siege of "Leningrad". A heroine that endures the arrest of her son, her son's best friend; her own termination and her best friends' termination from their jobs, her best friends' suicide and life as she knew vanishes in the stifling air of the time. The ending is abrupt and very stark to the fate that will or will not occur with the character.

This book really opened my eyes to what it was like to live during the beginning of communism. Sofia's story is real and tragic: her trust in this new form of government, her confusion when things turn out differently than expected, and her eventual despair when she realizes that it's impossible to know friends from enemies. The account is quite short--could easily be read in a day.

I had to purchase and read this book for class (given 2 day time frame). The book read extremely well and quickly. It really allows insights into life in Soviet Russia and evokes emotion from the reader making you want to turn the page!

Sofia Petrovna is a Russian classic in 2 separate ways. First we see the atrocities committed during the Stalinist era. During the great purges anyone believed to be a Kulak or have foreign relations were put on trial. There is one quote within the book that states something along the lines of "the government wouldn't lock up innocent people" only displaying the ignorance of the time. Sofia's son is taken away because his name is dropped within an interrogation leaving his mother distraught. We see the hardships she and other women of the time faced. The second aspect that makes this

book important to read is the fact that it is written in the 30's but wasn't published until the late 70's or early 80's under Gorbachev's Glasnost. From Stalin to Chernenko, the author was incapable of getting her work published because of its criticisms of the government. From a modern perspective, Sofia gives us a good view of Russian policy from pre-WWII through the cold war era.

It really gets your head into a single person right after the Reds took over. The incredible character progression is so believable it's terrible. A widowed woman sees her once beautiful life torn from her by unknown powers. If you're doing any sort of study in the Soviet Union you need to read this to grasp the mindset of the day. If you're looking for a captivating drama get this book. I read it in two bathtub sittings. I had to keep turning on the water to keep it hot!

I read this book for a world history class at the University of Tennessee and must say it was an enjoyable read. The fictional tale gave me a rather clear imagery of what women were going through during the era of the great purges and Stalinism at its peak. Sofia was a rather naive person when it came to any situation about her son being a criminal or involved with the wrong things but believing everything else around her was polluted. The funny thing is that this is how mothers react about their children believing them to be innocent at all times. The ending was somewhat disappointing because of how abrupt it was but in a sense it was fitting because reality had finally struck in Sofia's mind about never seeing her son again. I recommend this one.

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