"Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita: A Source Study"

RUS 360 / CL 323
44925/32895

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor: Thomas J. Garza
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Office hours: W 12-2 (CAL 406), M 2-4 (HRH 4.190)
            and any other time by appointment
Class time: TTh 2:00 – 3:30 in MEZ 2.124

Required texts:


• Course Packet (available at Speedway Printers in Dobie Mall), cited as CP throughout the syllabus.

Recommended text:

I. General

Stalin's Moscow, 1936. Satan and his retinue have come to the Soviet capital to determine how humankind is faring in the 20th century. They encounter a motley crew of Soviet bureaucrats, writers, politicians and artists who offer little hope for the future. Enter the "Master," an unknown writer struggling to finish a novel about the life of Christ told from the perspective of Pontius Pilate. Can one writer and his work be reason enough to prevent the apocalypse? Enter Margarita, the Master's selfless companion and heroine of Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece, The Master and Margarita. Regarded by many readers and critics as one of the greatest novels of our time, The Master and Margarita is an icon of Russian culture. This course explores not only the intricacies of the novel itself (actually, a novel within a novel), but also its place among
Bulgakov’s other literary works, and its varied sources from world literature, music and the visual arts. Unpublished in Russia until 1966 (and even then only in a censored version), *The Master and Margarita* offers us the chance to place Russia and Russian literature in the broader Western tradition of art and literature. More importantly, it reveals the brilliance and complexities of art created under a strict totalitarian regime.

This course will examine -- within the Stalin-era Soviet context -- the texts and works that significantly influenced Bulgakov in the creation of his novel. You will examine these various texts (gospels, stories, folklore, plays, paintings, operas, and films) and discover the ways that they influenced the shape of the novel and how they appear within the dual story lines and the numerous characters. Through our in-class conversations, you will have the chance to refine and articulate your conclusions. Ultimately, the course will allow you to reexamine your own understanding of Good and Evil in the 21st century.

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to attend class meetings regularly, participate actively in discussions, do all assigned readings and film viewings, and prepare written assignments. The substantial portion of this grade will be determined by an in-class presentation with a colleague(s) on a selected topic. Critical analysis, synthesis and argumentation are essential to the success of the course; precise articulation – orally and in writing – of your understanding of the texts we consider this term is essential to your own success.

**Shorter Essay:** A short (5 pages) essay on a pre-assigned topic, or one approved by the instructor, involving at least two of the texts covered in the course. This essay is to be handed in on Tuesday, *October 5*.

**Longer Essay:** Each participant is required to hand in on Tuesday, *November 23*, a paper, 8-10 pages in length, treating any one of the subjects covered during the semester. Sample paper topics and treatments will be given out well in advance of the due date. Participants are strongly encouraged [i.e., required] to talk with the instructor about the paper topics well in advance of the due date, as well as to turn in a prospectus before beginning a draft of the paper.

**Final exam:** A comprehensive final exam over all of the texts covered (readings, films, slides, and lectures) in the semester will be given during the University exam period. The specific format of the final will be announced well before the exam date.

**II. Grading**

There are four components of the final course grade. These components and their relative weights are:

- Short essay (5 pp.) 20%
- Longer essay (10-12 pp.) 30%
- Final Examination 30%
- Participation/Presentation 20%
COURSE OUTLINE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Setting the Stage

- Reading and discussion of the Gospels of Matthew and John
- Reading and discussion of The Apocrypha of Nicodemus
- Viewing of Gibson’s The Passion of The Christ
- Reading and discussion of Pontius Pilate
- Reading and discussion of Dante’s Inferno
- Reading and discussion of Goethe’s Faust: Part One
- Listening and discussion of Gounod’s opera Faust

OCTOBER

Reading Bulgakov

- Placing the novel in the Soviet/Moscow context under Stalin
- Read selected letters from Mikhail Bulgakov and His Times
- Begin close reading of Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita
- Reading and discussion of Dostoevsky’s “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”
- Reading and discussion of Pushkin’s verses
- Reading and discussion of “Ivan the Simpleton”
- Viewing of paintings, music and opera pieces influencing the novel

NOVEMBER

The Effects of The Master and Margarita

- Finish reading of the novel (IF you’ve managed to hold out this long…!)
- Reading of Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilich”
- Viewing of 1982 film Mephisto
- Review of art and artists of the novel
- Viewing of 1972 film (Italy/Yugoslavia) Master and Margarita
- Viewing of 1990 film (Poland) Master and Margarita
- Viewing of 2006 television series (Russia) Master and Margarita
DECEMBER

The Novel in the Context of the 21st Century

• What is Good and Evil?
• Manuscripts “Do Not Burn” (?)

SYLLABUS OF READINGS

Thursday, August 26
Introduction to RUS 360
Overview of syllabus and course expectations

• Why this text?
• What is the Western Canon and how do works “make the list?”

For next meeting, read the Gospel of Matthew in CP.

Tuesday, August 31
The Biblical Texts

• Language and politics in Matthew

For next session, read the Gospel of John in the CP.

Thursday, September 2
The Biblical Texts (cont.)

• Variations in John’s gospel

For next meeting, read Boyer’s article “The Jesus War” in CP.

Tuesday, September 7
Non-canonical Biblical Texts

• Textual variation and political implications
• View the temptation scene in Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ

For next meeting, read the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus (a.k.a. Pilate’s Gospel) in CP.

Thursday, September 9
The Apocryphal Tales

• Pilate’s story
• Personal and historical perspective in writing “gospel”

For next meeting, read selection from Rowe’s Pontius Pilate in CP.

Tuesday, September 14
Pilate’s Perspective

• Man vs. Hegemon
• View scenes from The Last Temptation of Christ (1988)

For next meeting, read Cantos III-XIX from Dante’s Inferno.

Ge’s “Golgotha”
Thursday, September 16  
**Views of Hell and Salvation**
- Literary portraits of damnation
- The Circles of Hell

For next meeting, finish Cantos XX-XXXIV of Dante’s *Inferno*.

Tuesday, September 21  
**The Literary Devil**
- What IS hell and who goes there?

For next meeting, begin reading Goethe’s *Faust, Part One*, pp. 3-62 (up to “Witch’s Kitchen”).

Thursday, September 23  
**The Literary Devil (cont.)**
- The place of Goethe’s *Faust* in literature and history
- Mephistopheles as ”devil”

For next meeting, finish reading Goethe’s *Faust, Part One*, pp. 63-133 (through the end).

Tuesday, September 28  
**The Postmodern Faust**
- Final discussion of Goethe’s play
- Scenes from *Bedazzled* for commentary

For the next meeting, view the film *Mephisto* in the AV Library on the 3rd floor of the UGL.

Thursday, September 30  
**Mephistopheles in the 20th Century**
- Meph in Hitler’s Germany
- What is gained and/or lost in the “translation”

For next meeting, read the libretto of Gounod’s “Faust”

Tuesday, October 5  
**Text as Music**
- Elements of the operatic stage
- Textual variation
- SHORTER ESSAY IS DUE

For next meeting, read “Mikhail Bulgakov and His Times” in *CP*.

Thursday, October 7  
**Bulgakov’s Context**
- Stalin’s Soviet Union
- Bulgakov as writer and Soviet citizen

For next meeting, begin reading Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, chapters 1-9 (pp. 3-85).
Tuesday, October 12   The Novel
   • Portrait of Moscow ca. 1935
   • The novel within a novel

   For next meeting, continue reading *M&M* chapters 10-18 (pp. 86-181).

Thursday, October 14   The Novel (cont.)
   • Philosophical tenets of the novel
   • Good and Evil revisited

   For next meeting, continue reading *M&M* chapters 19-24 (pp. 185–254), plus Dostoevsky’s “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” in *CP*.

Tuesday, October 19   The Novel (cont.)
   • The development of archetypes of Good and Evil
   • Place of the novel in the Western canon

   For next meeting, finish reading *M&M* chapters 25-Epilogue (pp. 255-335). (!)

Thursday, October 21  The Novel (cont.)
   • Resolutions and convolutions

   For next meeting, read the source materials from Pushkin’s “The Bronze Horseman” and the folktale “Ivan the Simpleton” in the *CP*.

Tuesday, October 26   The Novel in the Western Tradition
   • Tying in the literary with the historical
   • Use of literary source material in constructing the novel

   For next meeting read Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilych” in the *CP*.

Thursday, October 28   Good and Evil, and Life and Death
   • Creating a literary standard in Russia for life and afterlife
   • The role of the characters themselves

   For next meeting, read the synopses of the operas *Faust*, *Aida*, and *Yevgeny Onegin* in the *CP*.

Tuesday, November 2   The Place of Music and Opera
   • Review selections from the source operas

   For next meeting, watch first parts of the Polish and Italian/Yugoslav film versions of *M&M*. 
Thursday, November 4  The Novel to Film
  • Watch selections from M&M films.

For next meeting, watch last parts of the Polish film version and selections from 2006 Russian TV series of M&M.

Tuesday, November 9  The Novel to Film (cont.)
  • Watch selections from M&M television series.
  • Can M&M be captured on film?

For next meeting, read Russian reception of the production in CP.

Thursday, November 11  The Novel to Film (cont.)
  • Viewing of remaining parts of TV series

For next meeting, catch up on any reading or viewing you have let slide up to now…

Tuesday, November 16  Rewriting M&M in the 21st Century
  • Why the “definitive” film does not exist

For next meeting, view artistic renditions of M&M themes (on BlackBoard).

Thursday, November 18  M&M and Its Sources in Art
  • Viewing of various Russian artists’ works considered by Bulgakov
  • Art in totalitarianism

For next meeting, read literary reviews from Russia in CP.

Tuesday, November 23  M&M and the Critics
  • Reception of the novel in Russia and abroad
  • LONGER ESSAY IS DUE

For next meeting, read Barratt’s article, and begin reading Taganka play version of M&M in CP.

¡THANKSGIVING BREAK!
Tuesday, November 30  
**Bulgakov in Performance**
- *M&M on stage*
- Staging Bulgakov
- Course Evaluation

For next meeting, finish reading Taganka play in *CP* and prepare any questions for final exam review.

Thursday, December 2  
**Bulgakov’s Successors**
- Play as novel? Novel as play?
- Review for final exam
- Closing Comments

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*Have a safe and very Faustian holiday season!*