

BIO tidbits

Mikhail Bulgakov 1891-1940



- **Born** in Kiev in May 1891, Bulgakov graduated as a doctor in 1916. Fought in 1919 for a few months with the White armies in the Caucasus. In February 1920 he abandoned medicine as a career and turned to literature. From 1923-25, his chief source of income was journalism. He began publishing novels in 1925.
- **Married** three times - Tatyana Lappa (married 1913-24), Lyubov Belozerskaya 1924-32 and Elena Shilovskaya, who was the model for Margarita (1932-death.)
- In 1925 Bulgakov's career began to take off - his novel *The White Guard* attracted the attention of Stalin, and in turn, the Moscow Art Theatre, who asked him to adapt it to the stage.
- In October 1926, Bulgakov made his debut as a dramatist with plays at Moscow's leading theatres.
- He was known primarily as a playwright during his life, working extensively with the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky and Meyerhold vied for his scripts, many of which were banned before they made it to their premieres.
- He died in 1940, in his bed, pretty good for a writer who had pursued his own goals and resisted pressure to conform to the official literary demands of the Stalinist 1930s. The price was high: his reputation as a twentieth-century novelist is almost entirely posthumous.

The Master and Margarita* was written secretly during the harshest period of Stalinist rule. It is difficult to conceive of the act of writing a novel you know with utter certainty will never be published during one's lifetime - indeed - knowing that if it was seen by the wrong people, it could mean a death sentence.

From the mid -1950s onwards, in the Post-Stalin thaw, the Russian reading public gradually became aware of the literary heritage left for posterity. In 1966-67 the publication of *The Master and Margarita* furthered his reputation in the Soviet Union and abroad. With glasnost, all his works, including *Heart of A Dog*, (which had been banned since the 30's) were published in the Soviet Union.

Stylistic, rapid alternating between farce, realism and melodrama are characteristic trademarks of Bulgakov's writing.

* note: In '66-67, there were (finally) two Russian publishings of *The Master and Margarita*. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, they were both censored and incomplete. The complete text was not published until 1973, when a textologist had access to ALL drafts of the novel.

Novels and Plays (just a few)

The White Guard (Stalin's fave. Yikes. Who needs that attention?)
Heart of A Dog (political Frankenstein satire)
Flight (the first of his plays to be banned before it's premiere)
Days of the Turbins (banned)
Bliss
The Crimson Island (later banned)
Moliere (aka A Cabal of Hypocrites) banned - soon after burned his drafts in the fire

Adam and Eve
The Master and Margarita 1928-1940
Adaptations
Gogol's *Dead Souls*
Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (bad!)
Moliere's *Bougeois Gentilhomme*
Gogol's *Inspector General* (for a film)
Cervantes' *Don Quixote*

and several of his own short stories or novels to the stage and cinema

recommended reading

Bulgakov by Ellendea Proffer, Ardis Press, 1984

The MASTER & MARGARITA by Bulgakov, translated by Burgin and O'Connell, Ardis Press, 1996
(our preferred translation – with footnotes by Ellendea Proffer! AMAZING!)

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