



Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita
A Literary Mystification
Alfred Barkov

English summary of *Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': 'вечно-вечная' любовь или литературная мистификация?* or *M.A. Bulgakov's novel 'The Master and Margarita': an everlasting love or a literary mystification?* - 1996

From the archives of the website
The Master and Margarita

<http://www.masterandmargarita.eu>

Webmaster

Jan Vanhellemont
Klein Begijnhof 6
B-3000 Leuven
+3216583866
+32475260793

**Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*
A Literary Mystification**
Alfred Barkov, 1996

Note from the webmaster

In 1994, the Ukrainian polemicist Alfred Barkov published the book *Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': альтернативное прочтение* or *M.A. Bulgakov's novel 'The Master and Margarita': an alternative reading*.

It was a feat of strength which he repeated in 1996 with another essay: *Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': 'верно-вечная' любовь или литературная мистификация?* or *M.A. Bulgakov's novel 'The Master and Margarita': an everlasting love or a literary mystification?*

In both essays, Barkov ranted and raved heavily against the many so-called "erroneous" interpretations which, according to him, exist about *The Master and Margarita*. For instance, he didn't accept the idea that Bulgakov was thinking of himself when describing the Master, nor that Bulgakov's spouse Elena Sergeevna was the real life prototype for Margarita. According to Alfred Barkov, such interpretations would not correspond with the true content of the book and the real intentions of the author. Moreover, he considered such opinions as "traditional pro-Soviet and pro-Stalin presentations". Especially the English translation of *The Master and Margarita*, made by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor in 1993, and its preface written by the American scholar Ellendea Proffer, are subjects of Barkov's rage.

Barkov's essays were published only in Russian. From 2002 to 2004 he made attempts himself to publish English translations on the internet, but they are only partial.

From his first essay, he summarized the Preface and the first four chapters and published it on the internet as *Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita: The True Content*.

From his second essay, he only made a summary in English and published it on the internet in 2002.

Barkov promised that he would try to translate both essays completely, but he never made it. When I was in Ukraine in 2004 and tried to contact him, I heard that he had died earlier that year, on January 4, 2004.

In 2010, most of Barkov's English texts disappeared from the internet. The reservations for his domain name (www.megaone.com) had no longer been extended. Fortunately, I could recuperate all of Barkov's texts using the *Internet Archive Wayback Machine* (www.archive.org).

Although I don't agree with Alfred Barkov, I didn't want his musings to be lost forever, so I decided to add all his texts related to *The Master and Margarita* to the website's archives.

This paper

M.A. Bulgakov's novel 'The Master and Margarita': an everlasting love or a literary mystification? - Alfred Barkov's English summary of his second essay
Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': 'верно-вечная' любовь или литературная мистификация? - 1996

Related papers

Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': 'верно-вечная' любовь или литературная мистификация? - the complete text of Alfred Barkov's second essay in Russian. - 1996

M.A. Bulgakov's novel 'The Master and Margarita': The True Content – Alfred Barkov's English summary of the Preface and the first four chapters of his first essay
Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': альтернативное прочтение. - 1994

Роман М.А. Булгакова 'Мастер и Маргарита': альтернативное прочтение - the complete text of Alfred Barkov's first essay in Russian. - 1994

Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* A Literary Mystification

Alfred Barkov, 1996

*Mikhail Bulgakov might have been executed should the true content of his novel *The Master and Margarita* be revealed in the thirties.*

There has been developed a new Literary Theory incorporating Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts. Based on the principles of philosophical aesthetics, semiotics and narratology, the theory made it possible to address the problem of revealing the hidden content of Mikhail Bulgakov's works including his famous novel *The Master and Margarita*. The theoretical aspects and their practical implementation in decoding the inner structure (i.e., the hidden content) of similar works created by W. Shakespeare and A. Pushkin are discussed elsewhere on the Web.



This page contains the text of my book *M. Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita: an everlasting love or a literary mystification?** A short version of the work was published in 1996 - *The Novels Eugene Onegin and The Master and Margarita: a Tradition of Literary Mystification*, 1996, Kiev, *Stanitsa*. However short, it contains the first ever description of the sophisticated multiple-plot inner structure of such class of fiction (the *menippeah*).

As the texts published on the **Mikhail Bulgakov** page are in Russian, the table of contents of the book is in Russian as well. To enable the readers who do not read Russian to get an idea of the content intended by Bulgakov, I will attempt to present a brief description with some links to corresponding documents.

It should be noted that the traditional interpretation of *The Master and Margarita* ignores the facts delineating the true Bulgakov's intention. The novel turned out to be a bitter satire aimed at the Soviet repressive regime. It depicts V. Lenin as devil Woland who brought disaster to Russia. The satirical characters of Master and Margarita do not depict Bulgakov and his third wife as it is traditionally believed. The Master represents the odious figure of M. Gorky, whom the Soviet regime officially endowed with the functions of supervising the whole literary process in the Soviet Russia.

The image of **Margarita** reflects the odious figure of unofficial Gorky's wife **Maria Andreyeva**, a myrmidon of V. Lenin. It was on Lenin's demand that Maria Andreyeva involved gifted writer M. Gorky into the Bolshevik's activities. That very situation has been satirically described in *The Master and Margarita*.

A more detailed analysis of the multiple reflections pointing to Lenin, Gorky and Andreyeva as being depicted as Woland, the Master, and Margarita has been presented in my earlier book *Mikhail Bulgakov's Novel The Master and Margarita: a New Approach*.

Should the true content of *The Master and Margarita* be disclosed in the thirties, Mikhail Bulgakov most certainly would have been executed.

On this page I render the content of my next work on *The Master and Margarita*. In it, the emphasis has been made on the aspects characterizing the inner structure of the novel. Actually, this is the very first work containing an attempt to reveal the 'secret key' to the inner structure of the masterpieces created by Shakespeare, Pushkin, and Bulgakov. A more detailed description of the *menippeah* class of fiction was published two years later (see the text of the book **on the novel *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin**). In 2000 there was published the paper describing the decoded content of *Hamlet* (see on the WEB a rendering in English: ***Hamlet: a Tragedy of errors or the Tragical Fate of the Author?***).

A very important feature should be stressed. In all *menippeahs* created by Shakespeare, Pushkin, and Bulgakov the principal compositional 'secret' is the role of the Narrator whose biased narrative is deliberately aimed at the indoctrinating the readers with a false perception of the 'real' content. Among other composition means, this strictly psychological method involves intense wordplay. Due to the inflicted impression, we are apt to perceive the meaning of the words and expressions according to what the Narrator implants, thus neglecting the appropriate interpretations. This phenomenon takes place even when we read such works written in our native language. The situation becomes especially grave when we read a translation. Of the multiple meanings of words in the original text, the interpreter would certainly choose in his language a word magnifying the Narrator's intention but stripped of the alternative original meanings. Therefore, any attempt to perceive the true content of a *menippeah* translated without considering the true author's intention is futile. Factually, the readers of such translations are deprived of any chance to approach the text from a different position. To a foreign reader without a command in Russian, *The Master and Margarita* must seem even more cryptic than to a Russian.

Unfortunately, all that is true with the translations of *The Master and Margarita* into English. With the real content in mind, it becomes only too evident that many of the key words and expressions should be translated differently so as to preserve the alternative meaning intended by Bulgakov. One of the latest translations, namely *THE MASTER & MARGARITA By Mikhail Bulgakov. Translated by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor. Annotations and afterword by Ellendea Proffer*. is no exception. Besides, based on the standard pro-Soviet interpretation, Dr. Ellendea Proffer's annotations lead the readers still further away from what Mikhail Bulgakov intended. I would like to warn the readers against trusting the black PR type marketing inventions:

Its author, Mikhail Bulgakov, had written two versions, one he had worked on at home and another he wrote while he was living with a mistress — and did not have the original one in front of him — before he died in 1940. In 1989 a version different from the 1973 one was published in Bulgakov's native Kiev, and it is on

that edition that Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor rely for their new translation. (*ibid.*)

Mikhail Bulgakov **never** lived at his mistress place. The *mistress* in question was his would be third wife Yelena Sergeyevna Bulgakova. Before Bulgakov married her in 1932, she peacefully lived with her husband and their son, and there was no room for a lover be him Mikhail Bulgakov or somebody else. After having moved to Bulgakov's place in 1932, they never separated till March 1940 when Bulgakov died. The two allegedly controversial versions were created after 1936 - well after Bulgakov officially married Yelena Sergeyevna. These versions reflect different stages of work on the text, and there are no drastic differences between them. What was published by Ellendea Proffer is merely an earlier and less accurate version than the canonized ultimate one.

The content of the beautifully designed US based WEB sites featuring the issues of *The Master and Margarita* is grounded on the same misleading translations and erroneous interpretations. Maybe I will be able to publish sometime a description in English of the key elements which still remain unnoticed by the scholars and commentators of *The Master and Margarita*. As there are plenty of such elements in its text, re-editing the comments contained in two books (more than fifty chapters all in all) let alone the process of translating is going to be a bulky job. And again, there still remains the lingual problem: the existing translations are useless because they were performed without the consideration of Bulgakov's intention and the significance of the key elements.

* * *

I believe it would have been more proper if I began the job with the rendering the content of my first 300 p. book. Yet I can offer now only a very brief description of the second one devoted to the revealing of the content of *The Master and Margarita*.

Besides the Preface, the book consists of 23 chapters comprising six sections:

Section I consists of 4 chapters devoted to the issues of the Literary Theory. Among other things, a possibility of strict syllogistic proofs in philological studies is discussed in Chapter III. A description of the unique multi-plot multi-subject menippeah inner structure is presented in Chapter IV. (A more elaborated description of the theory can be found in my other book: *The Promenades with Eugene Onegin*.)

Section II (Chapters V through IX) is devoted to the description of the complicated inner structure of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*. This was the very first time when the issue of the Narrator as the main means of the composition in menippeahs is discussed. Maybe the most striking thing for the scholars engaged in the studies concerning Mikhail Bulgakov's works is the identity of the Narrator and his specific role in the comprehension of the true content of *The Master and Margarita*. The complete text of the novel is narrated by Koroviev-Fagot, a character from Dr. Woland's gang. Yes, it's not Master or Margarita but Koroviev who happens to be the principal character of *The Master and Margarita* novel. This compositional significance of the Narrator is the key feature of *any* menippeah. (I am in a

position to assert that the scholars engaged in the Shakespearean studies will have to admit the fact that prince Hamlet is **not** the central character within the true plot intended by Shakespeare).

In **Section III** containing Chapters X - XII the content of multiple plots and subjects of *The Master and Margarita* is analyzed. It is argued that the novel itself parodies the *Faust and the City*, a procommunist drama by A. Lunacharsky, the head of the department of Culture of the Soviet Union. Being one of the most principal ideologists of totalitarian rule, Lunacharsky was the very person who organized the anti-Bulgakov campaign in the twenties. Unfortunately, even in the post-Soviet studies, the odious Lunacharsky's policy still remains shadowed. (See Chapter XI. The Godfather of the Socialist Realism.)

In the novel *The Master and Margarita*, A. **Lunacharsky** is depicted as two different characters: as **Latunsky** - one of the leading figures in the anti-Master campaign (see how accurately the *Latunsky* name fits into that of Bulgakov's antagonist), and as Sempleyarov, the Director of Theatres and Shows (which exactly specifies the official position of A. Lunacharsky).

As far as I know, no other study devoted to *The Master and Margarita* mentions Lunacharsky as a satirical object let alone the fact that Bulgakov's novel parodies his drama *Faust and the City*. Traditionally, the attitude to Lunacharsky in the Soviet studies has always been respectful. The study of the text of *Faust and the City* has made it only too obvious that while creating *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov incorporated the text of Lunacharsky's drama very extensively. When the book was completed, I was still wondering why Bulgakov constructed the main plot of *The Master and Margarita* in such a way that multiple details and situations of *Faust and the City* became objects of parody.

It was only recently that P. Maslak having decoded the hidden content of the very first Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard* discovered that its plot also parodies Lunacharsky's *Faust and the City*. In this case the parody is even more obvious because in Bulgakov's novel the symbolical notion of *the City* parodies that employed by Lunacharsky in his drama (in both cases the word *City* is capitalized, and Bulgakov stressed that feature.)

Section IV (Chapters XII - XVI) is devoted to the ethical issues covered in *The Master and Margarita* as well as to some aspects of Mikhail Bulgakov's biography reflected in the novel. It was disclosed that in the twenties and in the thirties Bulgakov remained to be a drug addict, that his third wife Yelena Bulgakova assisted him in obtaining the drugs (see Chapter XV.) This very situation with the drug injection has been depicted in the Epilogue to *The Master and Margarita* where Bulgakov portrayed himself as Ivan Bezdomny (Ponyryev).

In Chapter XVI the situation connected with the famous 1930 Bulgakov's Letter to the Government is analyzed. As a result, there has been disclosed the identity of the secret police contact who had been reporting on Bulgakov. The text of the contact's April 1930 secret report concerning the letter in question was published recently in mass media. That secret police contact happened to be Bulgakov's third wife Yelena Bulgakova who was then still the spouse of a high standing Red Army officer (Bulgakov married her in 1932).

In the Chapters XVII - XX comprising **Section V**, the multiple references in *The Master and Margarita* to A. Pushkin's versed novel *Eugene Onegin* are analyzed. It was established that the content of Pushkin's novel had been interpreted incorrectly. *Eugene Onegin* happens to be a menippeah as well, and it was intended by Alexander Pushkin as a satirical mystification. It has become obvious that Bulgakov was aware of the real content of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and signaled about that in *The Master and Margarita*.

The XXIst, XXIIInd and XXIIIrd Chapters comprising **Section VI** are devoted to structural features which are common in the menippeahs created by Pushkin, Bulgakov and Alexei Tolstoy. The XXIVth chapter describing the hidden content of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was withdrawn because it has become a separate paper (see the text of *Hamlet: A Tragedy of Errors or the Tragical Fate of the Author?*). It should be mentioned that at least one of Bulgakov's dramas (*The Cabala of the Devotees*) is factually a novel belonging to the menippeah class with the hidden content much differing from the traditional interpretation (see Chapter XXII.) That feature makes its inner structure very much alike that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. (In the paper on *Hamlet* mentioned above I dare to assert that considering the true inner structure and the hidden content, *Hamlet* appears to be a prosaic novel rather than a pentametre drama, the later being an *inner drama* within the main prosaic text. The content intended by Shakespeare also differs very much from the traditional interpretation).