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The Master And Margarita



Synopsis

The Master and Margarita is one of the most famous and best-selling Russian novels of the 20th century, despite its surreal environment of talking cats, Satan, and mysterious happenings. Naxos AudioBooks presents this careful abridgement of a new translation in an imaginative reading by the charismatic Julian Rhind-Tutt. With War and Peace and Crime and Punishment among the Naxos AudioBooks best-sellers, this too promises to be a front title.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 21 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Abridged

Publisher: Naxos AudioBooks

Audible.com Release Date: April 25, 2011

Language: English

ASIN: B004XVU2HI

Best Sellers Rank: #66 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Russian #154 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Literary Criticism #588 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Classics

Customer Reviews

Take these as essential ingredients: Satan, Jesus, Stalin, Pontius Pilate and Caesar's Empire, assorted literary critics, a great Artist and the woman who loves him, life in 1930s Moscow, a poet on the bitter road to truth, and various demonic henchmen including a big black cat. They add up to one of the greatest novels of the 20th Century, and one of the handful of most moving books I've ever encountered. The fundamental purpose of Bulgakov's magnum opus is to hold up the harsh light of truth to the sins and hypocrisies of Stalinist Russia. There are three storylines here: one of them concerns the misadventures of Satan's retinue as they wreak havoc on Muscovite literary society, and presents some of the most penetrating satirical writing you'll ever come across; the second storyline centers around the fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate, and his fateful encounter with Jesus leading to the latter's crucifixion; the final story presents the fates of a great writer (the master), and his lover (Margarita). Bulgakov brings the three stories together in a demonstration of narrative genius, to bury the oppressive fallacy of Soviet society and ideals beneath the combined forces of good and evil, of love, of freedom, and of magic and mysticism. One

brief note about available translations: after sampling most of the available English translations, I am firmly convinced that the Pevear/Volkhonsky version is far and away the best. The notes are excellent, and the introduction by Richard Pevear gives invaluable insight into the history of the novel and its ideas. But most of all, they give the narrative much greater vividness and depth, especially in the wonderfully lyrical Pilate chapters. This translation of Bulgakov's most remarkable novel is enthusiastically recommended!

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky are very special translators of this highly complex work. Before you buy any other edition, check out the footnotes here which help to explain the more arcane elements of '30's Soviet culture and the context for much of the parallel story based on the Gospels. I read the first two pages of every edition in print and this had the best narrative flow and a richer texture. But, what else would you expect from the PEN translation award winners for "The Brothers Karamozov"?

This translation of Bulgakov's classic is unbeatable, and its endnotes are very helpful. In terms of accuracy and faithfulness to the original Russian text, Pevear and Volokhonsky's work here is unmatched, and it puts the Glenny translation to shame. With that said, I would recommend this edition particularly to those interested in understanding the novel's remarkable Soviet context. The Glenny translation will leave the average reader blind to much of Bulgakov's satire, but it offers perhaps a smoother overall read, often because of the liberties that Glenny takes in his translation.

The novel is a masterpiece, even though it is unfinished and unresolved. It is truly one of the great novels of the 20th century. I am saddened that the Mirra Ginsberg translation seems to have been usurped by this lifeless and leaden, Pevear/Volokhonsky translation. I am afraid that this inferior version has become the default and I don't understand why... perhaps simply due to marketing opportunities. I am curious to hear what other admirers of Bulgakov feel about this. This being said, it is still a great novel and I'm sure it will be enjoyed in this translation. But I implore you, do yourself a favor and get hold of the Mirra Ginsberg translation.

I came upon this book--The Master and Margarita--by one of those fortuitous accidents one morning before work that don't exactly change your life, like getting run down by a crosstown bus might, but change your life in the sense that I would have no doubt read another book entirely if I hadn't thought to stop on my walk in to work at a small, stuffy thrift store/pawn shop on the corner of 9th

and something or other, maybe 44th. Anyway, sitting there, moldering away on a pressboard shelf among a lot of other forgotten, dog-eared paperbacks of bygone times was the edition of Bulgakov's classic--I say classic though I'd never heard of Bulgakov before--translated by Richard Pevear and his wife, whose new translations of Dostoyevsky I'd already enjoyed. I figured it was worth the fifty cents the store was charging. So I bought it along with some little volume by PD Ouspensky about the possibly future psychology of man. Egads. Anyway, "The Master and The Magician" is a fantastic read--the kind of novel you sort of expect from Russian writers: sprawling, philosophical, packed with characters of every description with names and nicknames you can hardly keep straight, comic, tragic, rollicking, digressive, transgressive--in short, something we don't see much in American literature outside of Melville's "Moby Dick." It all starts with a conversation in a Russian park between an editor and a poet about the non-existence of the historical Jesus. Enter a strange character who claims to have actually been there when Pontius Pilate condemned Christ to be crucified. From that point on, all Hell breaks loose. Satan has come to the Soviet Union, literally, accompanied by his theatrical retinue, which includes a talking cat who walks about, in plain sight, on his hind legs. This bunch put on a magic show, purportedly to debunk and expose the falsity of magic, but in reality causing all kinds of mischief, completely disorganizing the harshly oppressive organization imposed by Stalinism on Russian society. People's heads fall off (and are then magically reattached), women become witches and fly naked on broom sticks over the city, cats shoot it out with secret police agents, cramped apartments open up into other dimensions....and so it goes, the illogic of the dream-world invades our waking one. Stalin is Caesar, Pilate is the obedient Soviet functionary, Christ is a kind of holy fool, Judas is a snitch, the secret police are the same everywhere, in every time, and life on earth, which Satan, as the ultimate dissident, cannot, in the end, be controlled, not even by a Stalin. This is a book that was written largely in secret by Bulgakov, that didn't become well-known until some twenty years after he croaked, a book that he probably would have been shot for writing if it had come to the attention of Stalin and his henchmen--a book, in another words, that was worth the writing and the reading because the author felt he had to write it, even under the shadow of death. I can't help but wonder in this context how many so-called "writers" today would write if such were the stakes of putting their pens to the paper? Can you imagine John Grisham or James Patterson writing what they write if they were risking their lives to write it? If Dan Brown faced being burned at the stake instead of earning gazillions of dollars do you figure he'd write "The Lost Symbol"? Somehow I think not. Well, there's one good thing you can say about Stalin, and tyrants in general. At least he inspired great literature.

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