

I do not have a favorite book. Instead, I have fallen in love with countless books over the years. Perhaps that is why I have had so few crushes in my life – I've been too busy being in love with books. One such love is entirely unexpected. It is Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Though Russian by birth, I have been a proud Anglophile for as long as I can remember. While I enjoy Russian literature, Pushkin does not get my heart pounding the way Keats does, and I will take *Ulysses* over *War and Peace* more often than not. And yet *The Master and Margarita* retains a claim on my heart like no other work.

Maybe it is the magic, or perhaps the mystery, or, more likely, the mischief. Or it could be the proliferation of m's. My first introduction to the story, known in Russia almost as well as some fairy tales, was a glimpse of the novel's latest cinematic reincarnation. It was the scene of Margarita hosting Satan's Ball, and my extended family was glued to the tiny television in the kitchen. I had no idea what it was, but it looked cool. Later, I heard about the novel's story, almost as mysterious as the one in its pages. Written about literary oppression and disappearances at the height of Stalin's purges, then secreted away in some drawer for years, later smuggled across the border, while inside the USSR, copies were printed in pieces, passed from person to person as black market contraband. Who wouldn't want to read something so forbidden? Then, when it was no longer censored, all sorts of strange mishaps happened to the people who tried to put the dark classic on film. Russians are an inherently superstitious lot, so when people start dying while filming a movie about the devil and a writer's supposedly-fictional-but-actually-somehow-entirely-accurate account of Pontius Pilate, a curse is the only logical explanation. After reading the book and discovering its history, the idea of a curse seems a little less far-fetched...

Supposedly, the novel is now popular not for its notoriety, but for its love story. The professor of my Russian literature class seemed to find the idea of *The Master and Margarita*, romance, as pretty hilarious. I just sort of avoided his gaze and became intensely interested in my pen. One of

my favorite parts about the book was the love story! It was convoluted, seemingly hopeless, and then one of the characters gets turned into a witch and flies naked on a broomstick halfway across Russia. What's not to love? Margarita is daring and passionate and utterly devoted to the Master, even though she believes him to be dead. She is not a swooning maiden or a femme fatale, and that is what makes her such a wonderful character. I would consider naming a future daughter Margarita, if the name wasn't more commonly associated with a tequila-based drink.

Speaking of drinks, my second favorite character is undoubtedly Behemoth, the enormous black cat in the devil's retinue who walks on his hind legs, loves chess and pistols, and guzzles vodka like it's cream. Woland's retinue is quite possibly the best part of the novel. This band of evil consists of the aforementioned Behemoth, a demon; Koroviev/Fagot, an abominably dressed ex-choirmaster and Woland's assistant; Azazello, violent and fanged, and possibly one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse; Hella, a naked, redheaded witch/succubus; and Abadonna, who is none other than the angel of death, of course. They are the wickedest of the wicked, and I can't help but find them absolutely delightful.

My greatest sin in regards to *The Master and Margarita* is the fact that I have never read the novel in Russian. I realize this is an unpardonable offense, and I intend to rectify my failing in the near future. In fact, I'm impatient to start. I think I will discover so much more to it in the original. Not to say the translation is anything less than stellar, but every language has its own wonderful quirks and charms, and falling in love in Russian is bound to be different from falling in love in English. Regardless, it is this novel's story that has me so bewitched, and I cannot wait to experience it again.