



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

## HUMANITIES SEMINARS

### Writing in the World That Stalin Built

Professor Adele Barker

WEDNESDAYS 10 AM - 12 PM

February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 16, 23, 30, April 6, and 13, 2022

Welcome to the USSR and to Stalinist Russia. Together we will embark on a journey deep into the complicated history of the world that Stalin forged into place. We will be reading two novels--*The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov and *Life and Fate* by Vasily Grossman--both of which chronicle a world of oppression and survival. Neither novel saw the light of day during their authors' lifetimes. Grossman completed *Life and Fate* in 1960. Even today the novel--suppressed, smuggled out and published abroad only in 1980--remains relatively unknown in the West. The novel will feel Tolstoyan to those of you who have read *War and Peace*. Grossman takes us not only through the horrors of Stalingrad where he was a war correspondent for the Red Army newspaper but into the textured lives of ordinary Russians living through these most complicated times.

Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* takes us to Moscow in the 1930s and to Jerusalem at the time of Christ in a magisterial blending of these two extraordinary times in history. It is at once a love story, an indictment of Soviet authoritarianism, and a magical *tour de force* of how art survives times that seem unsurvivable. The novel was finally published in 1966, twenty-six years after Bulgakov's death. He didn't think there was a future for himself as a writer in the Soviet Union and thus burned an early draft of the book. He rewrote it from memory, providing us with the stunning tale we have today.

In our journey together we are going to move in and out of the novels. We will look at film clips from the Stalin era. We will move around communal apartments, stores, exhibits of Soviet propaganda posters, and look at why for many Russians Stalin "s nami," (Stalin is still with us).

Russians do not write short books! Grossman's *Life and Fate* comes in at 896 pages. Do your best. It often helps to have done at least some of the reading before you come to class. We will begin with Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and from there move into Grossman's *Life and Fate*. I will let you know each week what I think I will be covering the week after.

I will be working with the following editions of the two novels. You are welcome to use whatever format or edition you would like though it may be difficult to follow in class if you have a different edition than the one I will be using.

Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (1966, Penguin 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition), revised version of the Pevear and Volokhonsky translation. Available on Amazon.

Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans; Robert Chandler (New York Review Classics, 2006). Available on Amazon.

I know I can't always answer all the questions you may have in class. Feel free to reach out to me through email as well: [adeleb@email.arizona.edu](mailto:adeleb@email.arizona.edu)