

Title: The Spanish Knight Among the Soviet People: Dramatic Re-accentuations of Don Quixote as a Doomed Performer

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Abstract:

Theatrical interpretations of Cervantes's novel were especially popular with the early Soviet audiences. In the 1920s and '30s several high profile dramaturges attempted creatively topical re-workings of the Spanish original. For example, in *Освобожденный Дон-Кихот* (1922) Anatolii Lunacharsky "freed" the famed Spanish knight from the textual confines of the source text, in order to refract the idea of the Quixotic personality through the lens of contemporary class struggles and the recent revolutionary events. In 1935 Georgii Chulkov's *Дон Кихот: Трагикомедия в 4 актах* re-imagined his noble madness as a path to salvation leading back to mystical, Earth-bound forces. Mikhail Bulgakov's 1938 dramatic reincarnation of the Knight of the Doleful Countenance parts way with both of these precedents in terms of his approach to the source material and use of Don Quixote's character. Bulgakov's *Дон Кихот*, as Mikhail Bakhtin predicted would be the case with the proper re-accentuation of any classical text, morphed into an Artist whose vision and integrity are threatened by the status quo, a hero equally at home in the interpreter's time and in the original author's world.

In addition to tracing the history of the Soviet dramatic engagement with the Spanish hidalgo, this talk will focus specifically on the ramifications of Bulgakov's authorial choices and on the heightened theatrical nature of the presented events, which will shed new light on several major themes introduced in the adaptation: 1) the symbiotic, and thus doomed in the Soviet context relationship between the Artist and his community; 2) the character-building but also self-destructive consequences of the merging of theater and life; 3) the creative Artist, his pupils, and the pursuit of self-expression in a highly restrictive society.