

Venice and Toronto 2011. Aleksandr Sokurov's "Faust"

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Published on **12 September 2011** / Last Updated on **13 September 2011**



"Freshly awarded the [Golden Lion](#) at Venice, [Sokurov](#)'s latest is pitched as an allegorical coda to his trilogy of historic tyrants (*Moloch*'s Hitler, *Taurus*'s Lenin, *The Sun*'s Hirohito)," writes Fandor's [Kevin B Lee](#) at the top of our roundup following [Daniel Kasman](#)'s review, wherein he notes that *Faust* "opens the group up, beginning and ending in a world outside man's spaces." Back to Kevin: "[H]ere the Faust legend is interpreted as a depressed Everyman's discovery of life's meaning through lust for sex and power. As Faust and Mephistopheles (bearing a tail shaped like a shriveled penis) walk and talk their way through several shaggy set pieces depicting worldly vanity, the meandering but playful proceedings at times evoke a Medieval Euro art film turned stoner movie (all the more amusing since Putin reputedly pushed this film to convey Russian values to European audiences.)"

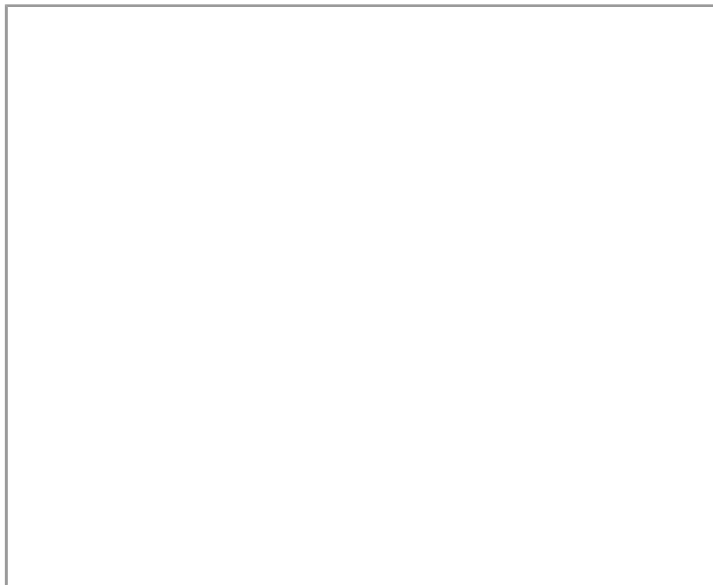
"In some respects Sokurov's straightest, most linear effort, its touches of the fantastic and the grotesque all directly occasioned by Goethe's text, there is a urine-colored ugliness saturating the very texture of the celluloid — call it *Piss Faust* — that speaks quite directly to the film's base, bodily orientation." [Michael Sicinski](#), blogging for *Cargo*, senses "a grueling, attenuated pre-modernity right down to the marrow of *Faust*, as though narrativity itself were being etched in acid before you rather than simply performed and recorded. Since seeing *Faust* and adamantly disliking it, it is growing in my memory, but this could well be because its glorious moments stick with me in ways its agonizing ones do not."

In "sheer strangeness," it "outdoes even [Jan Svankmajer](#)'s puppet-theater 1994 [version](#)," claims [Fernando F Croce](#) at the *House Next Door*. "A wheezing human-blob in a glass, a steaming geyser piercing through an ashen purgatory and a prancing [Hanna Schygulla](#) done up like a Kabuki Queen Victoria are some of the jolly grotesqueries... The throb of opera and the fart of scatological comedy are never far from each other in the grand, disconcerting spectacle of a Russian artist liquefying German legend for all the doubt, bile, and madness that go into devils and dictators."

At *In Contention*, [Guy Lodge](#) finds that "the accumulated visual and sonic clutter is more reductive than resonant.... [T]he film too often feels like being trapped in an elevator with [Terry Gilliam](#)'s id. [Bruno Delbonnel](#)'s moss-hued lensing doesn't much aid penetrability."

Noting that Delbonnel "has shot several films for [Jean-Pierre Jeunet](#), as well as *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*," *Movieline*'s [Stephanie Zacharek](#) adds that the film has a "dreamlike look that's reminiscent of the delicate color tinting [DW Griffith](#) sometimes used."

"The basic concept of Faust ([Johannes Zeiler](#)) the man is here," [Jay Weissberg](#) assures us in *Variety*, a "professor and alchemist, craving knowledge yet incapable of being satisfied with the limitations of human understanding. He falls in love with Margarete ([Isolda Dychauk](#), Lucrezia Borgia in the French-German TV series), for whom he signs away his soul. Sokurov's Mephistopheles however owes little to any other manifestation: He's known in the film as the Moneylender ([Anton Adasinskiy](#)), and unlike most literary embodiments, this devil is no charmer. He's a snivelly creature, quick with words but the opposite of Goethe's jocular and sensual beguiler."



"Sokurov has said that his is not so much an adaptation as a 'reading of what remains between the lines,'" notes [Deborah Young](#) in the *Hollywood Reporter*. "Zeiler, a relatively unknown actor outside of German TV, energetically fills the main role with quick intelligence and unflagging self-confidence, which helps the viewer negotiate the dangerous ground he walks on. The Russian-born Dychauk has a delicately eerie white face out of a Brothers Grimm fairy tale. She seems to be disturbed but not shocked by the strange goings-on around her, even when Faust's student of alchemy ([Georg Friedrich](#)) tries to impress her with a live homunculus he has created."

Update, 9/13: [Barbara Petsch](#) talks with Zeiler in *Die Presse* — and in German.

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