



The Master and Margarita
Deconstructing Social Realism
Kristina Belyk

Belyk explores the creation of Russian Socialist Realism as a genre, and considers the ideology that is so imbibed within it. She elucidates, with a richly theoretical approach, Mikhail Bulgakov's inversion of the genre in *The Master and Margarita* to create a critique not just of life in 1930s Moscow, but of humanity itself.

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The Master and Margarita

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Introduction

The genre of Russian Socialist Realism is closely tied up with the political change that took place in the Soviet Union in 1920s through to the 1930s after the Bolshevik Revolution, and has dominated all artistic fields until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. With the new post-revolutionary ideologies that were being put into use by the Soviet government to encourage the process of collectivisation and industrialisation, the enforcement of Socialist Realism as a main literary genre was one of the key strategies generated in the effort to create the 'new' man who would fully partake in 'a grand historical endeavour called building Socialism'. The Communist Party enforced a policy on the publishing houses of the USSR proclaiming the only acceptable literature to be one that adhered to '*sotsialny zakaz*', meaning 'social order/command', which dictated specific pro-Soviet themes, content and styles of writing that simulated the ideals of social construction. The literature that was suitable for the Party's aims and adhered to their request became what is known as the Socialist Realism genre. In effect, writers who followed '*sotsialny zakaz*' and produced Socialist Realist work were 'employees of the state', and any writer dissenting from this genre would rarely be published, or worse, marked as the 'enemy of the state' if their literary work was deemed to hold contra-revolutionary ideas. The strict enforcement of the Socialist Realism genre coincides with the time period within which Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* was written, however the novel is known not for its affinity to this genre, but quite on the contrary for stepping away from it at a time when nothing other than Socialist Realist literature was accepted by censorship. There is no complete settlement amongst the critics of the novel whether Bulgakov intentionally and consciously opposed and parodied Socialist Realist literature, although there is a general agreement that the novel does in fact dissent from the expected norms of literature of the time. By combining a close reading of the novel with an awareness of norms of Socialist Realism, a definite discrepancy is visible which indicates a possible conscious engagement, as well as conscious criticism and movement away from the Socialist Realism genre. This often has been noted by studies of the novel, however the idea of Bulgakov's dissent is rarely explored through close textual analysis. Due to the time period of the composition of the novel, which falls on the post-revolutionary era of the USSR, and Bulgakov's biographical aspects such as his will to gain writer's freedom definitely allows the possibility that his novel *The Master and Margarita* is purposefully dissenting from Socialist Realist literature, both through criticism and satire of the genre itself, and the ideological bases upon which it is set.

Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* has received a lot of scholarly and critical attention, researching the origins of its various mystifications, allusions and intertextualities with religious and mythological texts. More importantly, the novel touches upon numerous thought-provoking topics such as Soviet history,

culture and politics of the difficult Communist time period, which are the most influential aspects of this novel, as the context of its production has directly influenced its content. This dissertation will explore *The Master and Margarita* in relation to the genre of Socialist Realism as the only acceptable genre during the time of the novel's creation (between 1928 and 1940). Analysis of the novel will be interlinked with a focus placed on historical context and how Bulgakov's own beliefs have influenced his most famous novel, closely relating between Communism and Socialist Realism as factors that go hand in hand with each other. In Chapter One this work will outline the genesis of Socialist Realism, researching its origins and principles, as well as historical background of the USSR in which Socialist Realism developed and flourished, with some emphasis on Bulgakov's biographical examples of how the Soviet regime affected his work. Chapter Two will go on to a close analysis of the novel, examining *The Master and Margarita* in relation to the techniques of its structural subversion of the Socialist Realism genre, and analysing the social commentary which Bulgakov provides throughout the novel via drawing parallels and comparisons between societies of the past and the future (modern Moscow and ancient Jerusalem). This chapter will also explore the functions of various characters, importantly the subversion of the 'Socialist Realist hero' through the character of the Master, and the problematic place the protagonist holds in the novel. In Chapter Three the dissertation will focus on Bulgakov's deeper level of dissent from Socialist Realism through his philosophical and satirical deconstructions of Communist and Socialist Realist ideology. The chapter will first examine Bulgakov's philosophical views on ideas such as authenticity of political power, and the ways in which Woland and his retinue convey notions of deep meaning through comical episodes. The chapter will go on to explore the negative aspects of society such as arrests, the housing problem and shortage of goods and provision as Bulgakov's satirical representations of flaws within the new Soviet government. Lastly, this chapter will look at the novel's fictional MASSOLIT as a parody of RAPP (Russian Association of Proletariat Writers), which is a subject personally important to Bulgakov, as RAPP was both the heart and the mechanism of production of Socialist Realist literature, and an institution Bulgakov was extremely adverse to.

Chapter 1

Construction and Influence of Socialist Realism

Socialist Realism was the main genre proliferated amongst all of the arts in the USSR from the 1930s, encapsulating all artistic spheres: literature, theatre, art, music and even architecture. It was the sole method allowed by the state censorship in the different periods of development of the USSR, and is therefore closely associated with ideology and propaganda. The ideological content of the Socialist Realist method is based on dialectic-materialistic philosophy of Marxist-Leninist discourse. Lenin's original idea was that art should stand on the side of the proletariat: 'Art belongs to the people. The deepest wellspring of art must be found among the wide-ranging class of labourers [...] Art should be based on their feelings, thoughts, and demands, and should grow along with them.' The roots of Lenin's idea can be traced back to 1917, just before the Revolution, when an organisation called *Proletkult* was created by a Marxist philosopher Alexander Bogdanov, aiming to 'develop creative potential of the working masses'. Later this organisation became RAPP (Russian Association of Proletariat

Writers), which reformed its aim to creating art that serves the purpose of the Communist Party, rather than encouraging art created by the proletariat.

Built on this prevalent yet up to this point vague foundation, Socialist Realism did not exist as a clearly defined genre until the 1930s. The term 'socialist realism' was first proposed by the Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the USSR Writers Ivan Gronsky in the *Literary Gazette* on May 23, 1932 and consequently was officially approved. In 1932 and 1933 the term was heavily propagated. Starting from this period and throughout the whole of the 1930s Bulgakov and other dissenting writers experienced the heaviest criticism from the periodical press, as the enforcement of Socialist Realism was in its prime, and any 'non-party' writers were under huge pressure to conform.

The statute of Socialist Realism was that 'the Soviet artist should reflect in his or her own works the great achievements of socialist construction and educate Soviet readers in the spirit of party consciousness and socialist patriotism.' Characteristically, Socialist Realism is the artistic presentation of events of the epoch, which were 'dynamically changing in their revolutionary development'. In fact, Socialist Realism did not have much to do with actual 'Realism', as it did not describe reality but a glorified version of life, therefore it could more accurately be called 'Socialist Idealism'. As remarked by Abram Tertz, the writer had to see the 'Purpose with a capital P' instead of the present. Similarly, Rufus Mathewson believes that under the Socialist Realism guidelines literature became a "healthy", controlled ideological instrument, not a mirror any more but a weapon.' These critical comments are accurate, as intentions of Socialist Realism can be traced even from the original meditations on it, such as one by Lunocharsky, a Socialist Realist author. He wrote that the (Socialist Realist) author 'not only understands the world, but tries to change it. [He is] completely goal orientated, he knows what is good and what is evil, he can see those forces that hinder development and those that stimulate powerful forward motion toward the great goal.' It is important to note that critical commentary on the genuine purpose of Socialist Realism was not allowed to exist in the USSR, and criticisms such as that of Sinyavsky (Abram Tertz) originated outside the USSR and even published under pseudonyms.

At the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 Maxim Gorky made a speech which set the foundation of Socialist Realism, and established bases for themes of many novel plots within this genre:

Socialist Realism asserts existence as action, as creativity, the aim of which is to continually develop valuable individual qualities of a person, for the sake of his victory over the forces of nature, for the sake of his health and longevity, for the sake of great happiness in life on Earth, which he, in the constant growth of his needs, wants to wholly work at, as it is a great home of humanity, united in one family.

Many Socialist Realist writers went on to portraying ideas similar to those represented in Gorky's speech, such as Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement* which depicts the theme of 'existence in action' as the novel's hero returns from the war and wholly dedicates himself to reconstructing the abandoned cement factory in his home town. Maxim Gorky's own novel *The Mother* is a great portrayal of what he meant by the 'develop[ment of] valuable individual qualities of a person', as in

the novel the mother of a revolutionary young man becomes 'enlightened' with Socialism, giving her life for handing out socialist propaganda leaflets. Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* is exemplary of the idea of dedicating one's life to achieve 'great happiness in life on Earth' for the sake of 'humanity, united in one family'. In this novel, the hero wholeheartedly focuses on living out his life for the benefit of Soviet society, as he sees it as the only life worth living. These particular novels were noted as some of the exemplary and significant by the Soviet critics, and to this day remain the 'classics' of the Socialist Realist genre. They adhere to the idea that the Soviet man is not supposed to ponder negativity, he has to put all his efforts into the Party idea, honestly and dutifully labouring, suppressing personal desires and needs. Caryl Emerson questions: 'What should the new Soviet person strive to see? This person should not dwell on the dark or perverse side of human nature', meaning that scepticism or social criticism were unacceptable literary subjects in Socialist Realism, unless a conversion and enlightenment of a sceptic was carried out.

From the vague themes outlined by Gorky, four official principles for literary subject choice were set out. A good Soviet 'conscious subject', either fictional or real, was expected to encompass the following categories: *Partiinost* (Party-mindedness) meaning that every creative expression was considered political, because the foundation of all knowledge is the Party. *Ideinost* (Idea-mindedness), emphasising that ideas within creative works should reflect those of the Party, as well as motivating people for a certain aim, for example raising production levels. *Klassovost* (Class-mindedness), acknowledging the working class as the 'origin of art'. This principle was eliminated in 1936, when the Soviet Constitution declared a classless society. *Narodnost* (People/folk-mindedness) orientated art towards accessibility for the masses, both through language and values. Resulting this narrow conceptual scope within the genre, Socialist Realist novels were moderately similar in content and aim, as there was a reasonable limit to pro-socialist topics they could address. Wachtel and Vinitsky describe a good example of a Socialist Realist novel:

In these works, the model Communist taught political 'consciousness' to the peasants and workers who remained politically immature, and were hated by villainous enemies of the Soviet regime and by those pitiful intellectuals who were weak in their socialist convictions.

A writer was expected to take the position as 'an engineer of human souls' and use their talent as a way of propaganda, educating the reader to be loyal to the Party in the struggle for the victory of Communism. Actions and aspirations of the writers, as well as their readers, had to meet the objective course of history. To quote Lenin:

[Literature] must become party literature [...] Down with nonpartisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class.

Resulting from the expectations placed on writers, their literary characters, and the readers, Socialist Realism produced its main tool for inspiration- the character of the 'new Soviet man', a 'positive hero' lacking psychological

complexity. It was not suitable for Socialist Realism to inwardly explore literary heroes, who instead had a motivational and inspirational role. Morson notes on this subject: 'Soviet novels usually depict the hero's quest for *impersonality*, his struggle to become one with his Marxist-Leninist role.' This is a logical reflection of the non-individualistic system of Communism. The Socialist Realist hero was a hero of Communism itself, and had the purpose of 'leading' and inspiring the reader to be the same- simple and unquestioning.

Wachtel and Vinitsky quite accurately sum up the task of Socialist Realism in the history of Russia: '[...] Socialist Realism played a crucial role in forming and nurturing the Soviet myth, or more accurately the Soviet religion focused on transforming the world.' To solidify the Socialist Realist method as core allowed the government better control of creative individuals and better propaganda of politics. Gorky, as the founder of the outlined Socialist Realist principles, headed the specially created Union of Writers of the USSR, which consisted mainly of pro-Soviet writers and poets. Socialist Realism became the 'sole method appropriate for literature.' Such strict control over the arts left little room for any other 'realistic' accounts of Soviet life, and as Laura D. Weeks points out 'created an officially sanctioned History, history with a capital "H". Whether this history had anything to do with reality is another matter.'

The actual reality of Soviet life was harsh and fast-paced. The 'revolutionary development' began in 1917, when Russia made the transition from the monarchically ruled empire of Nicholas II to a Communist government via the Russian Revolution, and remained under the totalitarian Communist government for most of the 20th century, past Bulgakov's death in 1940. Vladimir Lenin was in power from 1918 through to the 1921, keeping Russia as a nationalised and partially privatised economy. The radical changes began in 1922 as Joseph Stalin rose to power. Stalin felt that the Soviet Union was well behind other industrialised nations; he created his renowned 'Five Year Plans' which had the intention of quickly raising production rates, focusing on several main areas. One of the areas was agriculture, as there was a vast amount of farms in the USSR, yet only a few produced enough to feed anyone other than the families that lived on those farms. The idea proposed was that all land would be confiscated, nationalised, and made into state-run agricultural collectives, which should produce enough food for the whole country. Food, however, was still scarce and many problems arose due to the resistance of private land owners, who were consequently sent to prison camps. Around one-third of Russia's crops and livestock were destroyed during the fights to attain state power over their land. Industry was also one of the main areas of focus and grand change. 'Gosplan' was created as an organisation in charge of setting productivity goals for all other industries, and monitoring the progress of their work. Any worker who was deemed to be holding back the progress was detained or sent off to labour camps. Although production rate was immensely raised by thousands of present, the quality of people's lives degraded, as fear of arrests was forcing the workers to labour for over fourteen hours a day. Paperwork was frequently falsified when an industrial unit had no hope of meeting their set output levels. In reality, people were not wholly interested in expanding the heavy industry when there was not even enough food, and their real preoccupations such as arrests, hunger and acquisition of goods were never portrayed in Socialist Realist literature, which focused on exactly the opposite - creating the 'socialist hero' who expands the industry and has no personal needs. The Soviet regime needed to be glorified

for the purposes of sustaining and promoting it, and literature was an immense aid in this purpose. It is only through dissent of writers like Bulgakov who could not suppress himself and conform to the Socialist Realism genre, the modern reader has a chance to engage with a true and contextual representation of life in the 'new' Socialist society of USSR in the 1930s.

Mikhail Bulgakov's creative period coincided with all these vast changes in the USSR. A substantial amount of his work, prose and drama alike, was banned or left unpublished during his lifetime due to the troubled historical period within which he lived and worked. In this time period, anything that was considered 'counter-revolutionary' in the artistic world was oppressed- all oppositional press was closed down, purges and deportations of 'counter-revolutionary intelligentsia' were carried out, creating a huge fear of arrests among the people.

As it can be seen from the historical course of the Communist period, activity within the country was focused on collectivisation and gaining a high industrial position. Due to this, literature had to take the role of an aid rather than an autonomous process, explaining the emergence of the Socialist Realist genre. This led to the lack of freedom of creative expression, as an artist had very few options: produce Socialist Realist work, resist, or attempt to be positioned 'above the literature wars or outside group battles.' Writers such as Pasternak, Akhmatova and Bulgakov himself attempted to 'rise above', however, the latter two options were quite similar, neither being of great benefit. Pasternak ended up immigrating, and Bulgakov struggled to publish even the least amount of his work, much of which was requested to be re-written, disapproved, censored, banned or taken off stage. Surprisingly, although Bulgakov was heavily criticised, he was never arrested, and even seemingly had some patronage from Stalin himself, who was said to have been an admirer of his play *Day of the Turbins*, based on his novel *The White Guard*. Bulgakov eventually lost tolerance with the lack of given autonomy, and attempted to immigrate, following the example of writers such as Pasternak and Nabokov. Even after writing several letters to Stalin, Bulgakov was not granted permission, and was forced to remain in Russia until his death at the age of forty-nine.

The significance of Socialist Realism and its historical context in relation to *The Master and Margarita* is that Bulgakov's longing for freedom in writing, and the inability to attain it, led to huge adversity towards Socialist Realism and the political ideologies that triggered it. Bulgakov's novel is full of scepticism towards Communism and Socialist Realism, subtly written in through satire and criticism, as he never hoped for *The Master and Margarita* to be published within his lifetime, instead writing it 'for the desk drawer' similarly to *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak. Bulgakov said of his own work: 'I have heard again and again suspiciously unctuous voices assuring me, "No matter, after your death everything will be published".' This was Bulgakov's own way of evading censorship, Pevear noting that because of this, 'the novel breathed an air of freedom, artistic and spiritual'. Themes that were close to the hearts of the citizens of the USSR appear throughout the narrative: the lack of food, the housing problem, corruption and creative constraint, as well as philosophical enquiries into the authenticity of governmental power, all acting as a dissent from the prescribed norms of Socialist Realist literature. A Socialist Realist novel simply could not explore any of these topics, as its function was the complete opposite- to remain blind to negativities, stimulating readers to do the same.

Chapter 2

***The Master and Margarita* Deconstructing Socialist Realism**

Bulgakov's scepticism towards the Soviet regime, in addition to his adversity of writing in the style of Socialist Realism enables his reader to receive a true glimpse of life in Moscow in the 1930s, something rare for a work that was created in the shadow of the Revolution. The genre of *The Master and Margarita* was stimulated by the 'disillusionment' with the changes brought by this Revolution. Due to this, the content and style of the novel are unusual for a literary work created in the Soviet era, and hardly fit into the requirements of the master narrative of Socialist Realism. Yurchenko notes that '[the novel's] elaborate structure, independence of events, mystical characters and historical figures having philosophical conversations would not have pleased the "new" reader looking for simplicity and practical recommendations in literature'. Similarly, David Gillespie believes that 'The novel eschews realism- both critical and socialist - from its very first pages', making it rather dissimilar from the dictated realities portrayed by Socialist Realist literature, which had no room for anything mystical or 'paranormal'.

The opening of the novel delves straight into the realm of supernatural, depicting the arrival of Woland in Moscow, a questionable mysterious character who the reader later discovers to be Satan himself. The main reason for Woland's presence in Moscow is to take a look at the result of the new 'social experiment' carried out by the Soviet government: 'I simply wanted to see the Muscovites *en massé*'. Woland later compares the 'modern' people to the people of ancient Jerusalem (Yershalaim in the novel), and conceivably to all people of all times.

His verdict is:

They are people like any other people... They love money, but that has always been so ... mankind loves money whatever its made of [...]
Well, they're light-minded... well, what of it... mercy sometimes knocks at their hearts ... ordinary people ... In general, reminiscent of the former ones... only the housing problem has corrupted them.

This can be interpreted as Bulgakov's scepticism towards both the Socialist belief that human beings are able to cardinaly change, and the Soviet idea that reinvention of social structure will automatically lead to transformation of the human 'soul'. The Socialist concept of creating the 'new' person appears futile through Bulgakov's lens. Through Woland, an eternal observer of humanity, Bulgakov is conveying the idea that in the ever-changing world, even after centuries, there is no fundamental change in people, no matter under which political reign.

As a technique of portraying the above idea, the content of *The Master and Margarita* has been constructed by Bulgakov in a way that allow the reader to follow Woland's observation of humanity over time, as it consists of two main timelines, one set in contemporary Soviet Moscow, and the other in ancient Jerusalem. The dual narrative and a splitting of time is effective not only in a sense of comparison between the two, but, as Weeks points out, takes the 'action' out of the current history where all Socialist Realist novels were placed. There are parallels that exist between the Moscow and Yershalaim narratives

which serve as ties that bring together the two strands of the whole plot, more closely than it initially seems as both characters, imagery, and events are counterpartyed between each other. Significantly, the events that take place in Moscow and in Yershalaim happen over the same days of the year, on Easter.

The recurring image of the moon is frequently omnipresent throughout the novel. David Gillespie writes: 'The Holy Land and Moscow are brought closer [...] for the full moon shines in Moscow in the 1920s as it does almost two thousand years earlier in Yershalaim (Jerusalem), and there are images (the heat and the smell of roses) that occur in both episodes.' The significance of these similarities is the continuation of Bulgakov's idea that regardless of the different periods of political influence throughout history, the natural world has not changed in any way. To follow up on this idea, Bulgakov provides further proof of it by making a comparison of characters and their actions between the two narratives, offering a detailed social commentary by giving an insight on Woland's observations of humanity, specifically, internal human qualities. During the course of the novel, Woland presents an unbiased view of people's unchanging positive and negative traits, deconstructing the myth of creation of the 'new' Soviet man, a favourite character of the Socialist Realist novel. The moral qualities of both the population of Yershalaim and Moscow are compared and placed under scrutiny in several scenes of the novel. In 'The Execution' chapter, the crucifixion of Yeshua and two other criminals takes place. The scene is set in 'scorching heat' but this does not put off 'about two thousand curious onlookers', as crowds gather to 'witness an interesting spectacle.' A similar love for a public spectacle is seen in the citizens of Moscow around two thousand years later. After hearing of Woland's infamous 'Black Magic' debut at the Variety theatre a 'double queue [...] almost a kilometre long' gathers to acquire tickets for the next performance:

The queue hummed with agitation, attracting the curiosity of passers-by with its inflammatory tales about previous night's fantastic demonstration of black magic. [...] The ushers talked of incredible events, of ladies running around in the street in indecent attire [...]

Another parallel drawn between the 'old' and 'new' people is their never-changing love of money and life's luxuries. In Yershalaim, Judas' love of the material drives him to the betrayal of Yeshua. As symbolic punishment, the money he receives eventually leads to his death. Similarly, the Moscow people's love for the material is punished by Woland in several scenes, one of which is the highly meaningful scene of Woland's 'black magic' performance. In this scene Koroviev and Behemoth rain down money on to the audience and set up a 'boutique' on stage where women can get new fashionable clothing in exchange for their own:

Hundreds of arms were raised, the spectators help up the bills up to the lighted stage and saw the most true and honest-to-God watermarks. The smell also left no doubts: it was the incomparably delightful smell of freshly printed money [...] The word 'money, money!' hummed everywhere [...] One or two were already crawling in the aisles, feeling under the chairs. [...] In the dress circles a voice was heard 'What're you grabbing at? Its mine, it flew to me!'

In this satirical and rather naturalistic episode greed and vanity of the people is made visible, both individually and as a mass. Later, similarly to Judas, they are punished, as the women's new dresses disappear off their bodies, leaving them 'running down Tverskaya in nothing but their bloomers' and the 'free money' disappears turning into paper, wasps, or even illegal foreign notes. McIntosh-Byrd writes that Bulgakov's aim here is to point out that '[...]money, no less than fiction and religion, is dependent on faith, on the willingness to believe that objects of material culture are greater than the sum of their parts.' Seemingly, Bulgakov saw the Soviet society to be far from the un-materialistic ideal drawn by Socialist Realist literature, in which citizens laboured voluntarily, unconcerned with personal gain, and de-constructs this myth in his novel.

It must be noted that not all of Woland's observations are negative as Bulgakov is not attempting to represent a completely critical view of society, and unlike Socialist Realist literature, creates a realistic representation. Woland sees compassion that 'knocks at [people's] hearts', for example when Behemoth rips Bangalsky's head off during the performance, the audience ask to replace it. Similarly, in Yershalaim, Yeshua is portrayed as a character full of mercy and compassion. Just before his death, as Yeshua is receiving a drink, Dysmas angrily shouts- 'Unjust! I am an outlaw like him!' Hearing this, Yeshua begs for him - 'Give him a drink'. His character is visibly modelled on Christ, an ever-existing figure of compassion. Mercy is another quality that appears in the text. This quality can be seen amongst the people of Yershalaim through their tradition of giving freedom to one criminal in celebration of Easter every year: 'According to law, according to custom, one of these two criminals had to be released in honour of the great feast of Passover'. In the Moscow tale Margarita appeals to Woland for forgiveness of the murderess Frieda, as she was 'careless enough to give [Frieda] hope' instead of asking for her lover, the Master, the sole aim which has been driving her through the narrative so far. As well as displaying the idea of never-changing humanity, these positive qualities observed by Woland draw attention to the possibility that it is mercy and compassion are the greatest qualities in human nature, and not the qualities that are so highly praised by Socialist Realism, such as unity, selflessness and hard work. All of the above observations made by Woland allude to the philosophy that people essentially remain the same, both with their good and bad internal qualities. This idea can be traced in Bulgakov's other works, for example his novel *Heart of a Dog*, where Preobrazhensky eventually returns Sharikov from the human state back to being a dog, as his true nature could not be changed. Following this conclusion, the novel raises the question: is the mission of the state futile, and is it at all possible to create a wholly good 'new' man? To answer this question Bulgakov poses his own interpretation of good and evil. In the conversation between Woland and Mathew Levi a certain truth can be seen: You spoke the words as though you do not recognise the existence of either shadows or evil. But would you be kind enough to give some thought to this: what would your good be doing if there were no evil, and what would earth look like if shadows disappeared from it? After all, shadows are cast by objects or people. There is the shadow of my sword. But there are also shadows of trees and living creatures. Would you like to denude the earth of all the trees and living beings in order to satisfy your fantasy of rejoicing in the naked light? You are a fool.

Mathew Levi has nothing to reply to this, and the moral coming out of this passage seems to be that only through the co-existence of good and evil either can be distinguished. Bulgakov was adverse to any 'utopian' social experiments, and in this conversation between the characters a critique of the attempt to build a perfect society can be seen. Bulgakov seems to be saying that society cannot exist without having both good and bad individuals, just like there cannot be shadows without objects and vice versa, therefore the goal of exterminating human qualities that are not favoured by the state is unreasonable.

The above philosophy allows Bulgakov to set up his own value system within the novel. Unlike Socialist Realist novels in which good citizens and deeds are praised and the 'bad' are punished or reformed, *The Master and Margarita* contains no clear definition between 'good' and 'bad' characters, and the boundaries of right and wrong are highly blurred. The characters that apparently 'serve the state' are exposed to be selfish, greedy and fraudulent, and the classically 'evil' characters, such as Satan and his retinue are sympathetic, often very endearing and in fact function as the ones who reprove unfair aspects of society and deal out punishments to those who deserve it. David Gillespie defines Woland as 'a figure of evil [that] hardly fits the bill; he is, rather, an agent of justice and retribution.' The epigraph of the novel indicates this as an important theme, quoting from Goethe's *Faust* in direct relation to Woland: "'Who art thou, then?' 'Part of that Power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good.'" Woland is portrayed symbolically as the character that trespasses both extremities of 'good' and 'evil', and his existence stands for the difficulty in making a clear distinction between either. Consequently, through assigning this ambiguous role to Woland, Bulgakov is possibly commenting on how any person under the Soviet regime could be labelled as 'bad' or 'good' for no concrete reason, an innocent person could get arrested, or instead a person of no worth could be praised and admired. Just like Bulgakov's name carried negative connotations created by the Soviet critics, Bulgakov is portraying the Satan falsely 'branded', criticising the unethical classification system behind state ideology. Curtis expands on the socially significant function of Woland:

So Woland in the novel figures as a kind of plenipotentiary ambassador from the supernatural realm; his task is to establish contact with mankind at a moment when it appears to have cut itself off from its spiritual heritage. Soviet man has ceased to see that upon his action will hang consequences which may not even become apparent until the next life, that he is responsible for determining his own destiny through the choices he makes. In this existentialist vision of the dilemmas of choice confronting the individual, Woland is not empowered to influence decisions that each person takes. By meeting out punishments and allocating rewards, he can only hope to give modern man a salutary reminder of his own responsibilities in the spiritual domain, responsibilities which have not been swept away with the setting up of a materialist state power.

It is true that Woland never performs any typical 'devilish' deeds as would be expected of an antagonist, and his function is to bring out the worst in the seemingly good Soviet people in order to expose them and teach them a lesson, as well as rewarding truly worthy individuals, such as the Master who has been antagonised by the state within the novel. It is Woland that provides a motion

that drives the narrative, as opposed to state ideology being the driving force of a Socialist Realist novel. Without him a historical and social commentary would not be possible, as all the characters would remain in the same place as at the start of the novel.

Similarly to Woland, the Master also holds an uncertain, ambiguous position in the novel, as his label as the 'hero' has been placed under doubt by many studies, and his significance has been termed as 'problematical'. Weeks writes that 'most Soviet novels open as the hero leaves his habitual environment and goes to another place. This new environment functions as a testing ground for his manhood'. By this definition, the Master does not match the criteria of a hero, especially as it would seem strange that he appears only in chapter thirteen, and has no name. As a character, the Master is also weak by nature, completely different to the Socialist Realist hero, who is typically a strong devoted person that leads the team and serves the higher purpose of building a brighter future. The path of the Master throughout the novel is also unusual for a protagonist. Typically of Socialist Realism, as Weeks goes on to say, 'the positive Soviet hero moves from isolation to social integration and collective rather than individual identity'. The Master however is completely uninterested in society, and does not appear to have a goal towards which he is progressing. This has been noted by many critics, such as Delaney describing the Master as a 'passive, broken victim', similarly to Gillespie who writes of him as 'weak and incipit, burning his novel in a moment of despair and retiring voluntarily to the asylum.' His defeated attitude is clear, contrasting the 'undefeatable' morale of a Socialist Realist hero, as the Master appears to have given up on any possible improvement of his problems: 'I am no one today [...] I am mentally ill' and further, 'I want nothing further from life, except to see you [Margarita]. But I advise you once again to leave me, or you'll perish with me.'

The spiritual journey of the Master is also different to that of a Socialist Realist hero, which, as Clark defines, 'involves a young man's quest for consciousness'. An almost impossible task appears which is supposed to be achieved by the hero. Through overcoming obstacles, and mastering one's own desires, the hero grows to a new level of consciousness; thereby the 'spontaneity/consciousness dialectic' is resolved as the hero becomes a part of a new Socialist collective identity. The Master however does not try to overcome his obstacles, instead allowing Margarita to 'save' him, and never reaches 'political consciousness' that is so desirable in the Socialist Realist narrative. The Master does not wish to partake in collective society, removing himself from it as far as possible. Weeks makes an excellent point that '[...] the fact that [the main characters of the novel] move in spatial terms from the ideological centre of Soviet life to the periphery and in temporal terms backwards, away from the utopian communist future, indicates the real reason for discrepancy between *The Master and Margarita* and the classical Socialist Realist novel.' This could be the explanation for the ambiguous ending of the novel and the fate of the protagonists which has 'puzzled critics for years'. Yeshua asks Woland to take the Master and Margarita with him and grant them 'peace'. Woland questions this decision - 'And why don't you take him with you, into the light?' to which Mathew Levi replies with sadness 'He has not earned light'. Delaney states that 'Perhaps [Master] knows that all mysteries are not unravelled through knowledge, nor does happiness lie in touching the distant star.' This is plausible, however, the 'peace' granted to them can be compared with the fate of Pontius Pilate, the 'eternal now' he has endured 'twelve thousand

moons, for one moon long ago'. Another indication that the protagonists are indeed sharing the fate of Pilate is the parallel established between him and the Master, who both repeat the same phrase throughout the novel- 'even in the moonlight I have no rest'. It could be due to the weakness of the Master's character that he does not earn light- he does not even strive for it, paralleling Pilate's weakness of character, as he does not save Yeshua from death even though he really wishes to. It is possible that due to these parallels, the Master's fate can be interpreted as punishment, backed up by Gillespie's reminder that at the end of the novel the protagonists are in fact dead, which leads to a conclusion such as Stenbock-Fermor's that the characters are indeed punished.

After all, it is Satan who takes patronage of them, and 'they drink not in the memory of Christ, but to the health of Woland'. In the light of this reading, the Master becomes a sort of antagonised hero, a binary opposite of the Socialist Realist hero, who is rewarded for all his efforts with progress to the 'greater future'. Bulgakov's novel appears rather pessimistic towards the idea of attaining happiness. None of the characters really achieve a 'happy ending', the exception being Pontius Pilate, who is finally granted release and gets to join Yeshua in the 'light'.

Bulgakov's way of structuring the novel and character roles appears to be complicated yet is highly effective in allowing an in-depth social commentary. Deconstruction of Socialist Realist concepts such as the 'new' Soviet man/ Socialist Realist hero surfaces the doubtfulness of values that are propagated by Soviet culture. Bulgakov's use of the supernatural allows a deeper exploration of human traits, as well as a construction of his own value system as a critical response to the value system within Socialist Realism. It seems like the myth of working together towards the 'great Soviet future' that was circulated by Socialist Realism never deluded Bulgakov, as throughout his novel his movement away from Socialist Realism demonstrates him to be continuously sceptical of the fundamental aspects that the Socialist Realism genre is built on.

Chapter 3

Satire and Philosophy as Subversion of Socialist Realism

In the light of the novel's production during 'one of the darkest decades of the century', several critics have interpreted *The Master and Margarita* as having a substantial basis for being a parody of a Socialist Realist novel. Colin Wright speculates why Bulgakov's novel gained such high recognition after being published:

In the former Soviet Union, as well as in the countries of Eastern Europe, it was appreciated first of all for its satire on the absurdities of everyday life: involving Communist ideology, the bureaucracy, the police, consumer goods, the housing crisis, various forms of illegal activities and, above all, the literary and artistic community.

Satire was not appreciated in the Socialist Realist novel, and as Emerson notes, 'outright mockery of the heroic task of socialist construction was not permissible.' Through the course of the text Bulgakov, with the use of Woland and his retinue,

not only exposes the faults of individuals and general masses, but also the faulty state structure and ideologies. David Gillespie writes:

Bulgakov [does not] need to resort to the fantastic to satirize the life in the USSR: he attacks the very paucity of material existence, whether this be in the form of the bullying petty officials, Sokolov's sandwiches 'of secondary freshness', the facts that certain restaurants are reserved only for a certain *nomenclatura*, or the severe housing shortage. The result is the brutalisation and sheer opportunism of the majority of the populace.

Through parodies and satirical scenes, Bulgakov touches upon serious matters of society, as a way of exposing them, and drawing attention to their sheer ridiculousness, unnecessary and often falsity. One of the deepest political and philosophical subjects Bulgakov explores in his novel is man's ownership of power and creation of history. In the Soviet era, the Party in power was proclaimed as the creator of the better future and as the driving force of the grand historical Communist motion. First Lenin, then Stalin were pedestalled as the men creating a grand history. Bulgakov's scepticism of this is present right from the start of the novel. In the first chapter a significant conversation takes place between Woland and the two Moscow characters, Berlioz and Ivan Bezdomniy, which sets the ground for doubt of 'true power' proclaimed by the state. This scene is a fusion of humorous and occurrences and philosophical interlocutions, such as Woland pretending to be a 'foreigner' and seemingly talking nonsense whilst posing serious questions. In answer to Woland's query- '[...] if there is no God, then, one may ask, who governs life and, in general, the whole order of things on earth?' Ivan confidently answers: 'Man governs it himself'. Woland finds this idea amusing, retorting:

[...] in order to govern, one needs, after all, to have a precise plan for a certain, at least somewhat decent, length of time. Allow me to ask you then, how can man govern, if he is not only deprived of the opportunity of making a plan for at least some ridiculously short period – well, say, a thousand years – but cannot even vouch for his own tomorrow? [...] imagine that you, for instance, start governing, giving orders to others and yourself, generally, so to speak, acquire a taste for it, and suddenly you get [...] lung cancer [...] And sometimes it's worse still: the man just decided to go to Kislovodsk [...] a trifling matter, it seems, but even this he cannot accomplish, because suddenly, no one knows why, he slips and falls under a tram-car! Are you going to say that it is he who governed himself that way? Would it not be more correct to think that he was governed by someone else entirely?

To support his argument, Woland states an indisputable truth: man cannot take charge of history, as he cannot even take charge of his own life, not just because man is mortal but is 'unexpectedly mortal'. The bizarre and satirical death of Berlioz, who, just as Woland predicts, has his 'head cut off [...] by a Russian woman, a Komsomol girl' straight after this conversation stands as the final proof of these words. A parallel of this theme is also found in the Yershalaim narrative, as Pontius Pilate is eventually reprimanded for his belief in the sole power of his authority. He boasts that he is able to 'cut the hair' upon which people's lives are

hung, however Yeshua refutes his surety by saying: 'There, too, you are mistaken [...] You must agree that the hair can surely be cut only by him who had hung it up?' Here Bulgakov's own critique of the new regime can be seen, as Lazslo Tikos writes- '[Bulgakov] was greatly sceptical of the historical optimism professed by Marxism, concerning man's discovering history's laws and "taking future into his own hands."' The Party as the 'great mind' becomes a doubtful concept through Bulgakov's lens, and the government's (or even Stalin's) claim to power becomes questionable, as Bulgakov exposes the limitations of the mortal man, as well as reminding the reader of the possibility of a greater unperceived power. Through proposition of this idea Bulgakov reveals the unjustness of the constraints unrightfully forced by the government, or possibly he is creating hope for eventual redemption by the 'higher' powers. This hope can be heard in the voice of Yeshua, the only 'enlightened' character of the novel:

All authority is violence over people and that a time will come when there will be no authority of the Caesars, nor any other authority. Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice where there will be no need for any authority.

This hope appears idealistic, however understandable, as Bulgakov believed that 'authority destroys spiritual freedom and creative work', displaying this idea through the characters of Yeshua and the Master, who are both oppressed. Through critical dismissal of authority and state power Bulgakov is criticising Socialist Realism itself, as a tool of attaining influence over writers and readers.

Another way Bulgakov explores authenticity of power is through reviewing the concept of religion as powerful narrative. The struggle between religion and Communism is a theme that appears both through intertextual references and employment of religious discourse throughout the plot. Religious belief was very much a taboo subject in Socialist Realist literature, as faith was oppressed by the Soviet government. Berlioz's words are good example of the internalisation of the anti-religious discourse: 'The majority of our population consciously and long ago ceased believing in the fairy tales about God.' The reason for this was that the idea of creating the 'new' Soviet person was a faith in itself, and any other faiths, such as religious, were simply in the way. The Communist Party held the position as the 'new religion', which 'upheld the state as the creator and guardian of a just and righteous world.' As Weeks ascertains, the model of history Bulgakov poses in his novel closely resembles the pre-Augustinian, or primitive Christian, rather than Marxist-Leninist discourse that shapes Socialist Realist literature. Bulgakov's movement away from the required historical discourse into the realms of the 'forbidden' theme of religion is a seemingly purposeful dissent from Socialist Realism. Although it cannot be said that Bulgakov was creating a narrative of Biblical truth, there are some aspects borrowed from Biblical texts, such as dates, characters and names. Woland, Mathew the Levite, Pontius Pilate, Yeshua as a modification of Christ, as well as many others, are pre-existing literary characters, both of the Bible, mythologies, and other existing texts such as Goethe's *Faust*.

Touching on the theme of religion, Bulgakov also ponders the authenticity of any existing 'highly regarded' narratives, destroying every last form of dictatorial influence by presenting the disputability of the words as recorded in the Gospel.

The greatest blow to the Biblical narrative comes from Yeshua/Christ himself, speaking of how the Bible was written:

[...] there's one with a goatskin parchment who follows me [...] and keeps writing all the time. But once I peeked into his parchment and was horrified. I said decidedly nothing of what's written there. I implored him: 'Burn your parchment, I beg you!' But he tore it out of my hands and ran away.

Bulgakov poses this significant idea of inconsistency between reality and literary representations, not only in recorded history, but also to the fundamental bases of human existence with Christian faith for thousands of years. This is an important theme, as the untruthfulness of recorded history directly relates to Socialist Realism with its rose-tinted account of life under the Soviet regime. Here Woland's notion that 'nothing has changed' applies, as Bulgakov is reminding the reader that false narratives have always existed, Socialist Realism being the current deceitful 'grand narrative'.

Bulgakov does not resort to simple criticism of Communist power but provides reasons for it by giving a realistic insight on the frequently unspoken excesses and shortfalls of the Soviet regime. Purges and arrests were some of the main horrors people of the USSR had to face due to the new regime. There was a constant sense of fear of prosecution or arrest from Russia's secret police, the OGPU that engulfed the people. The essence of this mania-like anxiety is captured several characters of the novel. The Master caves in to this fear and burns his novel, luckily just before there is a 'knock at [his] window', which this saves him from being compromised. The burning of Master's novel parallels Bulgakov's own experience, as he burned the early copy of *The Master and Margarita* in 1930, since, as Pevear and Volokhonsky state, 'the mere existence of the manuscript, had it come to the knowledge of Stalin's police, would almost certainly have led to the permanent disappearance of its author.' The famous phrase of the novel 'Manuscripts don't burn!' became historically significant as Bulgakov later reconstructed his own novel, just as Woland returns the Master's novel to him. Pevear and Volokhonsky quite rightly call this Bulgakov's '[...] absolute trust in the triumph of poetry, imagination, and the free word, over terror and oppression'.

In another episode when a stranger comes to the Master's apartment which Aloisy Magorych took over, Margarita manages to scare him away by mentioning arrests: "'Aloisy? [...] He was arrested yesterday. Who's asking for him? What's your name?'" That instant the knees and backside vanished; there came the bang of the gate'. People were frightened by mere mention of arrests, and especially of being compromised or associated with ones who were considered subversive or radical by the Party. Although there is no direct reference to OGPU in the novel, their omnipresence is played on through the various references to 'them' and 'there'. For example, when Berlioz meets Woland and suspects him of being a 'foreigner', he wants to report him to 'them' (the OGPU), thinking: '[...] what a strange specimen ... Call, call! Call at once! They'll quickly explain him!' The thoughts of possible arrest never leave the Moscow characters. Rimsky (The director of the Variety Theatre) sends Vareukha (his employee) on business, and when he does not return, Rimsky immediately assumes he was arrested, but cannot figure out the reason: 'Rimsky knew where he [Vareukha] had gone, but

he had gone and... not come back! Rimsky shrugged his shoulders and whispered to himself: "But what for?" Disappearances of people were not uncommon, and it was encouraged not to question them. Purges, arrests and the existence of Gulags were specifically banned from mention in literature, their existence forbidden from being acknowledged. Writers such as Sinyavsky and Daniel were famously trialled in 1965 for trespassing these taboo topics, and it seems that even Bulgakov is being slightly cautious of outright mention of the OGPU, however still revealing it as a topic at the forefront of people's minds. Alongside the fear of arrests, another typical feature of life in the 1930s was the 'housing problem' that Woland believed to have 'ruined' the Moscow citizens. David Gillespie believes that it is specifically the problem of living space in the novel that defines the nature of the Soviet present. In the Socialist Realist novel one's place of living did not matter. Subversively, Bulgakov surfaces the reality of people's preoccupations with the 'housing problem'. There is a humorous description in the novel of how the public reacts to a possibility of acquiring Apartment Fifty:

[Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy (chairman of the tenants' association)] began to receive telephone calls and then personal visits with declarations containing claims to the deceased's living space [...] They contained pleas, threats, libels, denunciations, promises to do renovations at their own expense, references to unbearable overcrowding and the impossibility of living in the same apartment with bandits [...] Nikanor Ivanovich was called out to the front hall of his apartment, plucked by the sleeve, whispered to, winked at, promised that he would not be left a loser.

Bulgakov is showing that people often went to any lengths to receive a quality apartment. The extent of preoccupation with the 'housing problem' is portrayed through Berlioz's uncle Poplavsky, who is humorously punished by Woland for his determination to inherit the Moscow apartment: 'An apartment in Moscow is a serious thing! For some unknown reason, Maximilian Andreevich did not like Kiev, and the thought of moving to Moscow had been gnawing at him so much lately that he had even begun to sleep badly.' The sheer opportunism of gaining a sought after living space is exposed as a task that was highly important to citizens of the USSR, contrasting the disinterest portrayed in Socialist Realist literature. Pittman writes of the problems this preoccupation brought:

The utilitarian aims have failed to bring about material happiness for all. Corruption and bribery are commonplace. Genuine contact between human beings has been sacrificed for the sake of personal, material gain.

As it is rightly pointed out by Pittman personal gain was definitely on the minds of people, as there was also a problematic shortage of goods in the USSR in the 1930s. Representations of the material, such as food, personal belongings and clothes was rarely present in Socialist Realist novels, as ideally these things should not have mattered to the 'new' selfless Soviet man. In reality however there was a vast problem of inability to purchase decent provisions and clothing. A stark contrast between the privileged and un-privileged classes is present in the descriptions of the goods available to them. A good example of this is the

accounts of the food available to the MASSOLIT writers at Griboyedov's restaurant:

Griboyedov's beat any restaurant in Moscow, and because this fare was served at the most moderate, most reasonable prices. [...] But at the Coliseum a portion of perch costs thirteen roubles and fifteen kopecks, and here it's five-fifty! Besides, at the Coliseum the perch is tree days old.

Similarly Behemoth's and Koroviev's antics during their visit to the foreign currency store satirically draw attention to the quality food and other goods available to those who possess the money to purchase it: 'Hundreds of bolts of cotton in the richest assortment of colours [...] calicoes, chiffons and flannels for suits [...] plump pink salmon [...]' In glaring contrast, the buffet at the Variety theatre, a place for the ordinary citizens, is described as very poor-quality. Koroviev describes it: 'Feta cheese is never green in colour[...] it ought to be white. Yes, and the tea? It's simply swill! I saw with my own eyes some slovenly girl add tap water from a bucket to your huge samovar, while the tea went on being served.'

The lack of good quality clothes and other products of personal use are evident in the 'Black Magic' show episode where all the women excitedly trade in their own clothes for new ones at the magical stage boutique. Another mention of this happens as Margarita leaves her house on the broom once she has turned into a witch, and tells her maid Natasha to take all her belongings- 'Take all my rags, take my perfumes and put them in your trunk'. Margarita is displaying a common knowledge of the inability of acquisition of goods by common workers like Natasha. A confirmation of the common people's hardships can be seen in Natasha's statement: 'We, too, want to live and fly!' as she chooses to live as a witch rather than a cleaner.

The main parody of the novel lies within the satirical subversion of the place of origin of Socialist Realism, MASSOLIT, which is a parody of RAPP (Russian Association of Proletariat Writers). Bulgakov was never a part of any such association, and did not support the ideologies which they promoted- to him, constrained writers were not 'true' writers. Consequently, none of the characters of the novel who are a part of MASSOLIT are presented as authors of any worth or talent, nor do they possess any visible interest in literature. As a true representation of the authors that would have belonged to RAPP, only the supporters of the Socialist Realist genre would have belonged to the MASSOLIT organisation, and only those who fulfilled the 'social order' in their works would be rewarded. The incentive for this would be receiving privileges such as vacations, quality living spaces, dachas, and many other royalties, which is confirmed within the novel as the writers discuss the dachas some of them received: 'There's twenty-two dachas, and only seven more being built'. Bulgakov believed that such literary associations were not only useless, but also harmful as they blocked the way for truly talented writers. Bulgakov's own views of the quality of writing produced by MASSOLIT/RAPP can be heard through the words of the Master, who claims he knows Ivan Bezdomniy's poetry is no good without even reading it, saying 'As if I haven't read others.' The Master is alluding to the fact that, on the surface level, to know one Socialist Realist work would mean to know them all. Delaney writes that '(Like Bulgakov) the Master is

a disappointed author, embittered by the treatment he has received from editors, fellow artists, critics- in a word, the whole corrupt artistic-political world'. The Master's story within the novel has often been interpreted as a parallel to Bulgakov's own life story and his struggle with Soviet critics. Gleb Struve suggests the affinity between the Master and Bulgakov. He asks, is the Master 'Bulgakov himself? Or a synthetic image of a creative artist?' This is a possibility that has been proposed by many critics, with various supporting evidence. Just as the Master's novel is rejected, Bulgakov's own struggle with publishing and Socialist critics is seen in the Master's story. The words of the fictional critic in the novel can be applied both to the Master's and Bulgakov's work:

Saying nothing about the essence of the novel, he asked me who I was, where I came from, and how long I had been writing, and why no one had heard of me before and even asked what in my opinion was a totally idiotic question: who had given me the idea of writing a novel on such a strange theme?

A Socialist Realist critic would definitely deem the content of *The Master and Margarita* strange and intolerable, as well question Bulgakov's literary background of many unaccepted works. McIntosh-Byrd states that 'in [the Master's] story we can see a metamorphosed version of the struggle of all authors, the master's story presenting a sort of extended meditation on being an author.' Bulgakov's struggle for freedom of writing can certainly be seen as a motive for his literary parody of RAPP, Socialist Realist writers, and the literature they produced. The episode of the gun fight with the police, Behemoth 'flying like a pendulum over the heads of the visitors', humorously drinking benzene to recover, as the Union of Writers' headquarters (Griboyedov's house) are burned down, as well as the scene where Margarita destroys critic Latunski's apartment, can be seen as Bulgakov's own satirical revenge on the system created by officials and the privileges that are available to them. In the light of this reading, *The Master and Margarita* can be seen as what McIntosh-Byrd calls a 'novel about novels- an argument for the ability of literature to transcend both time and oppression, and for the heroic nature of writer's struggle to create that literature'.

Bulgakov's successfully deconstructs Socialist Realism both through satire and philosophical inquisition into the political ideologies that it is built on. As Communism and Socialist Realism go hand in hand with each other, dissent from one leads to dissent from the other. The satire that is present throughout the novel not only acts as a dilution of the serious issues, but also helps the reader see the comical ridiculousness of some aspects of society, such as greed, fraudulence, obsessions and hunger for power. Bulgakov questions authorities and their claim to power, longing for the elevation of political constraint, as it appears that he believed authority, both political and religious to be false. Bulgakov's satirical surfacing of problems of the Communist society displays that the new regime's utilitarian chase of happiness for the whole of society has failed to bring about personal and material happiness to the people.

Conclusion

Socialist Realism took up a significant part in the literary history of Russia, not only by producing works specific to this genre, but also bringing differing novels

such as Bulgakov's to the forefront of the readers' attention after the removal of censorship in the USSR. *The Master and Margarita* is one of the few novels that dissented from Socialist Realism at a time where it was practically impossible to do so, offering a truly 'realistic' account of life in Soviet Russia in the 1930s. The greatest dissent from Socialist Realism of *The Master and Margarita* lies in the portrayal of society within which it was created. As Pevear and Volokhonsky write:

[the novel] accompanied Bulgakov through the greatest suffering of his people – the period of forced collectivisation and the first five-year plan, which decimated Russia's peasantry and destroyed her agriculture, the period of expansion of the system of 'corrective labour camps', of the penetration of the secret police into all areas of life, of the liquidation of the intelligentsia, of the vast purges and the Moscow 'show trials'.

None of these topics could have appeared in a Socialist Realist novel, as it was against the aims the genre was founded on, as well as plainly censored. Socialist Realist literature presented a victorious Communist future for the purpose of inspiring readers to strive to it, remaining oblivious towards the regime's downfalls. For this reason, Socialist Realist works were idealistic, and severely different to the reality they were describing. Any oppositional or anti-Soviet beliefs had to be crushed by censorship in order to keep people on the desired course towards Communist 'utopia'. Bulgakov however did not believe in the promised 'glorious Communist future', and his novel displays this conviction through criticisms of Soviet society and political ideology. With the use of supernatural characters, parallels and comparisons Bulgakov creates a narrative of observation over humanity, comparing the qualities of the people of the past and of the present. Through the use of Woland Bulgakov concludes that the essence of humanity has not changed, and Soviet ideology has not been internalised. Rendering the mission of the state to change human nature as impossible allows Bulgakov to deconstruct the key myth and inspirational tool of Socialist Realism- the 'new' Soviet hero. Defiantly, Bulgakov refrains from creating 'complete' a hero at all, instead leaving the Master as a questionable version of a protagonist.

Bulgakov's use of sharp satire aids in the surfacing of a flawed reality, bringing all the negative aspects of individuals and the state into the light of pettiness. The humorous episodes of the novel are often interlinked with Bulgakov's philosophical thought on serious issues such as the authenticity of the governmental power, the foundations of human culture, and historical accuracy, surfacing the potential errors in these praised or unquestioned ideas that so often appear in Socialist Realist literature. The main subversion of Socialist Realism lies in Woland's (Bulgakov's) assertion that in fact there is no 'utopia' towards which the country is moving. The people have remained the same, concerned as ever with their personal unhappiness. The new regime has unseeingly given reign to inequity and fraud, as well as placing constraint on creative freedom for those to whom it is essential. Drawing on these ideas, it appears Bulgakov is indeed dissenting from the Socialist Realism. Possibly, 'to dissent' was not an intentional goal, however factors such as governmental oppression and enforcement of literary constraints would logically force a writer whose beliefs differ to do so. As Bulgakov believed that the new Soviet regime is

not leading to the promised idyllic future and the fundament it is built on is essentially flawed, he could not have possibly built his novel on the foundations of Soviet ideology which Socialist Realist novels are built on. Instead, Bulgakov criticises and satirises the factors that forced him to dissent.

The atypical freedom for a novel of such a dark historical period is instigated by Bulgakov's lack on intention of publishing *The Master and Margarita* during his life. This allowed him to produce his 'crowning work', freely conducting himself and moving away from Socialist Realism, the principles of which went against his own. Bulgakov sadly never lived to know the colossal success of *The Master and Margarita* when it was finally published after the removal of censorship. Ever since then *The Master and Margarita* has firmly stood as an enormous contribution to the historical exploration of the period within which it was created, as well as being morally elevating due to its shattering of all constraints.

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