Through the Lens of Carnival

Identity, Community, and Fear in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*

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Many scholars of *The Master and Margarita* point out that Bakhtin's notion of carnival fits Bulgakov's novel perfectly.[1] In fact, the most bizarre but simultaneously most memorable events of the novel are carnivalesque, and-similarly to Bakhtin's medieval carnival- they mock and challenge the Soviet authorities represented by various bureaucrats. Carnivalesque havoc frees ordinary citizens from the censoring power of the Soviet ideological golem, and they venture into an almost obscene equality: the bureaucrats are brutally punished, and, for a while, ordinary citizens enjoy an unrestrained freedom. Berlioz, a "literary" bureaucrat, is removed from his position of authority when, bewitched by Woland, he falls under a streetcar. The bureaucrats from the Variety Theatre-Likhodeyev, Rimsky, and Varenukha-are removed from their positions of authority and punished. The director of the theater, Likhodeyev, is magically transferred to Yalta, dressed only in his nightshirt. Rimsky and Varenukha are frightened to death by Woland's accomplices. George Bengalsky's head is torn off by Behemoth who is enraged at the master of ceremonies' repetitive attempts to impose the "appropriate" interpretations of black magic upon his audience during the ill-fated show at the Variety Theatre. While the baroque and inventive carnivalesque events in *The Master and Margarita* are the main source of entertainment for the reader, carnival serves a far more important social function: it conveys an alternative vision of identity and community in the context of Soviet public monologism-not conformist and fearful, but capable of dissent and overcoming political fears.

Mikhail Bakhtin-who explored the social functions of carnival in his work *Rabelais and His World*-points out several traits of carnival that are important for the interpretation of carnival in *The Master and Margarita*.[2] Mikhail Bakhtin explains that during carnival ordinary citizens were freed from the censoring power of the Catholic Church: all hierarchical distinctions were temporarily suspended, and people became metaphorically "equal." In addition, carnivalesque upheaval suspended fear and conventional morality as the primary tools for the hierarchical oppression. Projecting this interpretation of carnival from the Early Modern onto the Soviet context, in the 1920-30s much of the popular laughter or carnival-whether folklore or literary satire-was interpreted by the authorities as potentially subversive of the regime, especially if, as Bulgakov explains it in his letter to the Soviet government, this laughter "penetrat[ed] into the forbidden zones"-Soviet ideology.[3] These forbidden laughter zones expanded steadily in the late 1930s (during the period of the Great Terror), forcing public popular laughter-the laughter of the ordinary people at the shortcomings of the Soviet rule-from the public sphere into the "underground."

Although popular jokes weren't eliminated in Soviet society as such, they were made increasingly unwelcom by the authorities, who furthered their influence over the lives of individuals through a system of informers. An oft-cited remark, attributed to the Soviet writer Isaac Babel, captures this atmosphere of fear surrounding the expression of one's private views: "Today [the late Thirties] a man only talks freely to his wife-at night, with the blankets pulled over his head."[4] In the Soviet literary context, carnival in *The Master and Margarita*-the Black Magic show at the Variety Theater and other trickery devised by Korovyov's and Behemoth's criminal ingenuity-is an attempt to bring the "undesirable" private "truths" about "Soviet people" (a Soviet rhetorical label for the imaginary ideological homogeneity of Soviet identity) from under the ideological "blanket" and into the light of public attention. Carnival "spills" into forbidden-for-laughter zones-Soviet ideology vs. private views of Soviet citizens-thus exposing official hypocrisy, subverting the existing power relations and habitual Soviet moralism, and diffusing fear pervading the lives of ordinary Soviet citizens.

The Master and Margarita contains many examples of secondary characters' concerns about their own or someone's identity. Ivan Bezdomny accuses his colleague poet Ryukhin of having a "typical kulak mentality."[5] Bezdomny and Berlioz assume that a strange foreign professor Woland is a spy. These and other examples highlight

Bulgakov's awareness of the issues concerning identity in Soviet Russia. In fact, during the 1920s and 1930s, the need to have a Soviet identity-i.e. to belong to the proletarian class and to agree with Soviet policies-became a source of anxiety for many people. Some were anxious because they had to conceal certain facts from their biographies in order to avoid being labeled as belonging to an "alien" class. Others with a less ambiguous proletarian background were beset by paranoid fear of enemies concealed behind forged proletarian identities. However, as Sheila Fitzpatrick points out in her article "The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society," there were certain difficulties in "properly" identifying who belonged to the proletarian class and thus possessed Soviet identity. Fitzpatrick explains that often class was determined on the basis of an individual statement, and sometimes these identities were challenged. In order to acquire desired proletarian identities, people could "trick" the authorities by choosing a different occupation from that of their parents, by working for a few years at the factory before college, by being adopted by a friend from a "better" social background, or by renouncing one's ties to the political beliefs of their parents.[6]

Mostly, these actions-aimed at establishing politically safe Soviet identities-did not lead to an instant ideological transformation, but political pressure that gradually increased after the onset of Stalinism helped to instill political conformity among Soviet citizens. Because of this conformity, defining one's loyalty to the Soviet system became more difficult. In fact, although verbal allegiance to the government was important, Soviet authorities became more suspicious. Often, people who publicly supported the authorities were accused of dissidence and counterrevolutionary activity based on the mere fact of their indirect association with an alien class. An interesting example of this complex relationship of language and identity is a story of Veit, whose career was destroyed by an undesirable relationship:

> Veit [a party member since 1923] concealed the fact that he was the son of a noble, a former assistant district police officer. When Veit's social position was disclosed, and he was expelled from the party for hiding it and for inactivity, his relations with his father worsened acutely, and in the end, Veit killed him.[7]

This story is fascinating because it shows how easily Veit "lost" his Soviet identity in the eyes of his immediate community. As Veit's story illustrates, already during the late 1920s, proving one's Soviet mentality and loyalty to Soviet policies became increasingly difficult. Moreover, by publicly ostracizing individuals like Veit, the authorities instilled fear of a possible ideological exposй and subsequent punishment in citizens, which lead to an increased distrust and weakening social ties within various sub-communities (at work, in the party, neighbors, etc).

It is not accidental that the growing controversy about Soviet identity-the concern of whether certain individuals belong to the group called "Soviet people"-found its way into fiction. Specifically, *The Master and Margarita*-by means of carnival-allows the reader to have a closer look at the Soviet identity-formula and its practical inapplicability to the fictional characters of the novel. While many characters claim to be "Soviet"-like Ivan Bezdomny, for example-they often slip from behind their Soviet masks as the carnivalesque events force their silenced doubts to the surface. After Ivan Bezdomny sees the chair of MASSOLIT Berlioz fall under the streetcar, his Soviet identity is exposed as a simplification of self, forced upon him by the official ideology. During carnival his other self-darkly ambiguous, tinted with religious mysticism and doubt-appears: in his pursuit of Woland, Ivan carries a paper icon (an object clearly incompatible with his public Soviet identity).

In addition to awakening the self, carnival stirs the dialogic within community: during carnival, people speak and act freely, impudently disregarding all bureaucratic directives. This openness to each other-a stunning and subversive experience for the secondary

characters in *The Master and Margarita* -is instrumental for the formation of different identities-non-Soviet, non-formulaic, and full of dialogue with the outside world. In a highly prescriptive Soviet society portrayed in *The Master and Margarita*, carnival offers the only opportunity for individuals to transcend the ideological cocoon created by the monologic authoritarian discourse and connect to the variety of views present in the community, thus moving towards a more dialogic self. To illustrate this, at the beginning of the novel Ivan Bezdomny holds a highly inflexible view of the world. His world of ideas is so limited that when he encounters opposing views on atheism, he resorts to almost anecdotal rhetoric. In response to Woland's comment about Kant's proof of God's existence, Bezdomny exclaims: "This guy Kant ought to get three years in Solovki [a prison in the North of Russia] for proofs like that."[8] However comic and "Soviet" this reply might appear, after this fateful encounter and the carnival-like fulfillment of Satan's prophesies (Berlioz is beheaded, and Bezdomny is admitted to a mental institution), Bezdomny has no choice but to listen to others. His ideological horizons are expanded as he encounters truths and realities, the existence of which he did not acknowledge or understand before. After his encounter with Satan, he consciously accepts the idea that there might be Satan as there might be God; he also acknowledges that one might be a good writer even if he writes about Pontius Pilate, just as one might be a bad poet even if he is loyal to the official ideology and his rhymes praise the red banner. Although "cured" from his "schizophrenia" at the end, Ivan Bezdomny acquires the awareness that some things are beyond one's control:

> Everything is clear to Ivan Nikolayevich, he knows and understands everything. He knows that in his youth he was the victim of hypnotist-criminals and that he had to go in for treatment and was cured. But he also knows that there are things he cannot cope with.[9]

Things which Bezdomny can't cope with are rather elusive: for example, the full moon brings him into an anxious and restless state. The new Bezdomny is certainly different from the boisterous and ideologically ignorant proletarian poet he used to be. His inexplicable anxiety signifies his mental and ideological transformation; after his encounter with the supernatural, he sees and understands something that he did not see and understand before, which many other characters cannot see: discourse not as a monolithic entity, but rather as a mosaic of ideas, values, and beliefs.

The carnivalesque events in *The Master and Margarita* are associated either with Woland, the Satan-character who happens to visit the fictional Moscow of the ideologically turbulent late 1920s, or with his faithful accomplices Korovyov[10] and Behemoth. The intervention of these supernatural characters into the lives of Muscovites leads to schizophrenia (Ivan Homeless falls victim to the Woland's mind games), multiple odd disappearances (the management of the Variety theatre, etc.), and carnivalesque death and abuse (the MASSOLIT chair Berlioz and a spy Baron Meigel are killed, and George Bengalsky's head is torn off). Other carnivalesque events include fires at the Griboyedov restaurant and apartment No. 50 on Sadovaya Street and chaos at the Torgsin store. However bizarre the carnivalesque events of the novel are, Woland (and his accomplices) are highly strategic in their efforts to create havoc: Woland comes to Moscow as a judge who wants to see whether the Socialist Revolution transformed the Muscovites in any "significant way," and he attempts to answer this questions by observing the Muscovites during the carnivalesque havoc. The morale of the Muscovites is tested when Woland's accomplices tempt them with scarce foreign goods-French outfits and rare perfumes. The test is followed by the carnivalesque apotheosis when the streets of Moscow are flooded with half-naked citizens, whose foreign clothes vanish together with the "foreign" performers. By exposing the Muscovites as not changed and possibly not changeable (they are sinful and still hold onto their petty bourgeois values and habits), Woland exposes the official discourse-discourse that makes unrealistic claims-as deceitful. The purpose of carnival is not to subvert the existing power relations permanently, but to improve the ability of a given society to view itself as a diverse, dialogic community and

to look critically at the official discourse.[11] In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss the implications of carnival in two chapters: chapter 12 ("Black Magic and Its Expose") and chapter 28 ("The Final Adventures of Korovyov and Behemoth").

The carnivalesque events in *The Master and Margarita* expose the multi-voicedness of the Soviet discourse, concealed under the thick veil of the official propaganda. The individuals-who witness to the carnivalesque violence-become aware of other discourses and their own ideological skepticism. In fact, during the Black Magic Show the audience ignores the attempts of Bengalsky (the master of ceremonies) to invest the show with an appropriate ideological meaning (thus showing that they are somewhat skeptical of him and the officialdom he represents). The Muscovites don't laugh at his hackneyed anecdote and don't applaud his stale rhetoric, but they roar with laughter when Korovyov pokes fun at Bengalsky's petty lies. It suggests that whatever Korovyov and Behemoth have to offer-in this case, slap-stick comedy and the abuse of the authority represented through the character of the master of ceremonies-is more engaging for the audience than the scripted performance of Bengalsky.

Korovyov (or Fagot as Bulgakov calls him in this chapter) and Behemoth have more power over the audience than the master of ceremonies Bengalsky. While Bengalsky's joke produces no laughter because it does not have spontaneity necessary for genuine humor, Korovyov and Behemoth are hilarious. Their behavior and responses are not predictable because they derive not from a script but from specific situations. The audience is bored by Bengalsky's age-old joke: "Just recently I met a friend and said to him, 'Why don't you come and see us? Yesterday half the city was here.' And he says, 'But I live in the other half.'"[12] Korovyov and Behemoth do not tell trite jokes, but use other comic devices; they know laughter inside and out, and in order to "unwind" their timid audience, they utilize farce-a form of comedy with an emphasis on appearances and slapstick. Korovyov in his clown-like costume (Bulgakov describes him as "buffoon in checks") and Behemoth who walks on his hind paws create an immediate comic effect for the audience: as Bulgakov explains, Behemoth "made a big hit with the audience."[13] Finally, Korovyov's frank comments about Bengalsky and his deceit get a laugh from the previously unresponsive spectators: they laugh at Bengalsky, and at the same time they laugh at themselves and at the circumstances which subdued their laughter. They laugh, and it is an abusive laughter: it is directed at Bengalsky and everything he symbolizes (the oppressiveness of the authoritative discourse and the fear of saying words that would compromise one's safety). Arguing about the medieval festive forms, Bakhtin suggests that carnivalesque abuse reveals the "true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king's uncrowning."[14] In this specific episode of *The Master and Margarita*, abusive laughter performs exactly the same function: it reveals the attitudes of the audience towards authoritative discourse, discourse which prescribes what is allowed to laugh at and what is not.

As a literary device, carnival in *The Master and Margarita* draws the attention of readers to the actions, words, and thoughts of the Muscovites who found themselves in the middle of extraordinary and unbelievable circumstances created for them by Woland. At first, Woland's intention to study the Muscovites individually and en masse is not obvious to either his victims or the reader, but as the show progresses, the meaning of the events on stage comes into a sharper focus. While George Bengalsky demands the exposй or a scientific explanation for the devilish tricks, he fails to see that a different type of exposй-the unveiling of how unsubstantiated the official claims about Soviet identity and community are-is already underway. Woland, a Satan-figure, fools the Muscovites with a pun on the word "exposй," thus showing that rhetoric-one of the ideological weapons employed by the Soviet authorities-can be turned against the authorities themselves. As a result of this verbal subversion, it is not the Black Magic which gets laughed at, but the bureaucrats like Likhodeyev, Rimsky, Bengalsky, and Sempleyarov (and the authoritative discourse in general) who fall into a trap of their own demagogy.

As opposed to the grand "exposй" expected by Bengalsky and Sempleyarov (a scientific explanation of the tricks), the show consists of many "mini-exposйs," designed to extract certain reactions from the audience. At the beginning of the show, Woland mystifies the audience by conducting a short and seemingly irrelevant dialogue with his accomplice Korovyov. In response to Woland's question about the Muscovites, Korovyov is quick to point out outward changes-changes in fashion and technology-but he does not say much about the changes in the morality of Muscovites. This is one of the most bewildering episodes for Bengalsky, who does not expect to encounter any skepticism towards the notion of "Soviet"-especially in front of the audience. Although the show does not get out of hand yet, it does not go according to the expectations of the administration either, and while the audience follows the show passively, George Bengalsky tries to take control over the conversation on the stage. As Ellendea Proffer points out in her commentary to *The Master and Margarita*, this sort of behavior would be typical for any Soviet master of ceremonies, who was often more a political worker than an entertainer (and Woland exposes Bengalsky as such). The presence of the master of ceremonies on stage was a guarantee of the "educational value" of an event.[15] Bengalsky-a fictional master of ceremonies-behaves like an actual master of ceremonies would behave: he tries to impose his interpretations upon the events on the stage, trying to conceal the real meaning of the dialogue between Woland and Korovyov. For example, Bengalsky chooses to ignore Woland's skepticism about the Muscovites' moral and ideological transformation. Bengalsky says, "The foreign artist is expressing delight with Moscow, which has advanced technologically, and with its inhabitants as well."[16] Bengalsky exaggerates Woland's feelings towards Moscow, and he obviously lies about Woland's perceptions of the Muscovites themselves.

The next episode of exposй occurs when the audience becomes enchanted by Korovyov, preferring his spontaneity and frankness to Bengalsky's scripted humor. This strange preference for the magic trickster illustrates that although Bengalsky attempts to speak for the audience, he is not the voice of these people, but the voice of the authorities by whom he is employed. The polarity of these two characters-Bengalsky and Korovyov- is even more apparent in their speeches. Bengalsky is overly formal and rhetorical in his speech, and even his jokes are clichйd, while Korovyov's language is direct and almost vernacular. For example, when Bengalsky tries to lie to the audience, it is Korovyov who calls him, in an almost intimate tone, a liar ("My compliments, citizen, on your lies," Korovyov says).[17] To some extent, Korovyov mediates the innermost thoughts of his silent audience, bored by Bengalsky's ideological clichйs, but too fearful to express their feelings aloud. However, Korovyov's lack of concern for the political consequences of his words liberates the spectators: if at first the audience does not laugh at Bengalsky's obvious lies, the laughter breaks out when Korovyov points out that Bengalsky *lies*.

As the Black Magic show progresses, Woland's accomplices surprise the audience with various tricks, which-similarly to the previous actions of the gang-reveal that the Revolution did not transform people in any significant way. It neither created a new Soviet identity, nor did it spread ideological consensus among the population. Because of the nature of the show (it is a carnival), Woland has a rare opportunity to observe his audience more intimately. While the Muscovites are preoccupied with the magic tricks, Woland can enjoy an unobstructed view of their sins and virtues. For Woland, this is truly the "exposй" part of the show-a fact that the audience fails to recognize. Citizen Parchevsky is "exposed" when Korovyov casually points out that the deck of cards in his pocket is "between a three-ruble note and a summons to appear in court for non-payment of alimony to citizeness Zelkova."[18] A card trick performed by Korovyov on Parchevsky highlights the fact that the private morals of Soviet citizen did not undergo any revolutionary change. Like his non-Soviet predecessors, Parchevsky gambles and avoids paying alimony. Parchevsky's public disgrace illustrates that changed political and social circumstances did not improve the morals of Muscovites (as Woland suspected before the beginning of the show).

In yet another trick, Woland's henchmen tempt the audience with money. As it turns out, the Muscovites did not develop "resistance" to age-old greed. When the ten-ruble bills start to fall from the ceiling, the citizens are swept with amazement and greed:

> Hundreds of hands went up, people held the bills up to the light from the stage and found watermarks that were perfectly genuine and authentic. The smell of the bills also left no room for doubt: it was the incomparably delectable smell of newly minted money. First merriment and then astonishment swept the theater. It was all abuzz with the words "ten-ruble notes," "ten-ruble notes," and happy laughter was heard and shouts "ah, ah!" Some people were already in the aisles, looking under the seats, and many were standing on top of their seats, trying to catch the capriciously twirling bills.[19]

An almost cinematic vision-the Muscovites holding crisp bills in their hands-accentuates Woland's point: the Muscovites have not changed on the inside.

In their last provocation, Korovyov and Behemoth put on a show designed to highlight the Muscovites' vanity. Like the previous episode of temptation with money, the "vanity" episode is highly visual. Bulgakov describes the stage as a sort of an exotic boutique: it is covered with Persian rugs, decorated with the huge mirrors and colorful lights. The performers tempt the women from the audience with the latest Parisian styles, hats with feathers and without, hundreds of shoes with buckles and without-"black, white, yellow, leather, satin, suede, shoes with straps and shoes with gems, and perfumes-Guerlain, Chanel No. 5, Mitsouko, Narcisse Noir."[20] This scene-full of material excess and luxury-is certainly a temptation, especially for the Muscovites of the 1920s and 1930s, plagued by poverty and lack of even staple goods.

Through his magic trickery, Woland leads the reader to believe that, like their predecessors, the Muscovites are susceptible to all conventional sins. This conclusion destroys the historical optimism promoted by the official discourse: when *The Master and Margarita* was written (in the period 1928-40), the official discourse-represented through the genre of socialist realism-proclaimed the inevitable triumph of everything that was revolutionary and new. In literature, it emphasized the importance of the positive hero-the ultimate vision of Soviet identity, promoted by the authoritative discourse.[21] *The Master and Margarita* defies the idea of a positive hero's existence, bringing into the focus the utopianism of the claim. The novel asserts that the idea of a positive hero is utopian because it is in human nature to be sinful. Lesley Milne, a scholar of Bulgakov's work, emphasizes the anti-utopianism of *The Master and Margarita* in her study *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*: "Against this background *The Master and Margarita* begins to look a defiant peacock display of all old, discredited, discarded, outmoded literary styles, themes and genres."[22] Despite the claims that the Revolution transformed the ordinary citizens ideologically, the show reveals that nothing changed in the Soviet society: people are still plagued by philistinism, greed, vanity, and dishonesty. Despite the negative revelation about the Muscovites, the importance of carnival shouldn't be underestimated: carnival and subversive laughter reunite the audience by recognizing and accepting their differences and weaknesses. The official discourse does exactly the opposite: it destroys the social ties between individuals by denying the multi-sidedness of human experience and forcing everyone to fit within the safe realm of Soviet identity.

While carnival offers an alternative vision of people and their identities-sinful, un-transformed, too scared to act or speak freely, or even unaware of their own thoughts about the official system and discourse-the rather non-flattering portrait of self that emerges via carnival is important. Before carnival, there is too much mistrust in the community. In fact, people in the audience don't laugh at Korovyov's jokes for their fear of appearing "non-Soviet" in front of other fellow-citizens. Carnival reunites people by creating a special kind of carnivalesque community: knowledgeable of others'

shortcomings, but capable of trust, sincere human interactions, and unrepressed communal responses (screams of terror and laughter). The carnivalesque show liberates the audience from the ideological "etiquette," and people in the auditorium lose their initial timidity and partake in the revelry on the stage. For example, when Bengalsky-in a vain attempt to explain the unexplainable-takes over the interpretation of the show and announces that the show is an instance of scientific mass hypnosis, the audience does not like his speech. However, their dislike is silent, non-interactive: Bulgakov comments that a "total silence ensued" after Bengalsky's announcement.[23] While silence (a sign of alienation) is the only reaction to Bengalsky's "bogus" comments, the audience is more prone to interact and respond to Korovyov's mockery. When Korovyov inquires what should be done to the liar, the audience becomes vocal: one spectator suggests tearing his head off.[24] Korovyov interprets this suggestion literally, and-to the sheer terror of the audience-Behemoth immediately executes the ill-fated master of ceremonies. The description of the executed body and terror of the audience is highly graphic:

> The two and a half thousand people in the theater screamed in unison. Fountains of blood spurted from the several arteries in the neck and poured down the emcee's shirt front and tailcoat. The headless body's legs buckled absurdly, and it plopped onto the floor. The hysterical screams of women were heard. The cat handed the head to Fagot, who lifted it up by the hair and showed it to the audience, and the head cried out desperately to the whole theater, "Get a Doctor!"[25]

The carnivalesque abuse, somewhat reminiscent of the medieval beheading, plays an important role here. First, it shows the importance of language as a means of obtaining, exercising, and abusing power. Bengalsky is punished because of his deceitful words and because of the careless treatment of words by the audience (someone in the audience suggests the beheading as an option). This transformation of a metaphor ("Tear off his head") into an action shows that Woland and his accomplices, contrary to Bengalsky and other Muscovites, perceive a much closer link between language and action. Second, the carnivalesque abuse brings people closer together: the terror of witnessing the execution of Bengalsky extracts some unpretentious reactions from the audience-who transform from a group of independent individuals (concerned only with their own interests and reputations) into a much closer community of people who have compassion for each other. When later a woman pleads Woland to revive Bengalsky, Woland sees that the Muscovites are much like their predecessors: "They [Muscovites] are like people anywhere. They love money, but that has always been true…People love money [. . .] And they are thoughtless… but, then again, sometimes mercy enters their hearts… they are ordinary people."[26] When Woland calls the Muscovites "thoughtless," his conclusion is based on the observation of the audience during the show: the Muscovites do not reject the hypocritical words actively, believing that hypocrisy is not of any moral consequence. However, carnival shows that the Muscovites are still capable of ordinary human reactions and interactions when they overcome their ideological fears.

Arkady Apollonovich Sempleyarov, a guest of honor at the Black Magic show and the chairman of the Acoustics Commission for Moscow Theaters, is another victim of carnival. Similarly to Bengalsky, he is punished for a "crime" of verbal deception: he demands the explanations of the magic tricks from Korovyov and asks him to return the emcee to the stage, falsely claiming that the audience is worried about the emcee.[27] Korovyov immediately sees through Sempleyarov's rhetoric and sarcastically points out that the audience "seems to have said nothing."[28] Although Sempleyarov does not suffer any physical abuse for his petty lie, his privacy is brutally violated. Instead of "exposing" the magic (as Sempleyarov demanded), Korovyov exposes Sempleyarov as an adulterer, and he does so in front of the audience and Sempleyarov's wife: "Here you have, respected citizens, the kind of exposй which Arkady Apollonovich so persistently asked for!"[29] Here Korovyov skillfully utilizes a pun as a means of subverting Sempleyarov's authority. Although Korovyov and his audience know that Sempleyarov requested a different type

of exposй, Korovyov is aware that his little deception will ultimately subvert Sempleyarov's ideological influence by making him a target of carnivalesque laughter.

Bengalsky's beheading and Sempleyarov's public disgrace are not the only instances of carnivalesque abuse. Many other characters are "abused" by Woland's gang. Berlioz and the informer Baron Meigel are murdered, and many other characters simply disappear from Moscow.

For example, the whole management of the Variety theatre goes on a carnivalesque "exile." The unfortunate Styopa Likhodeyev is brutally banished from Moscow by Woland and is magically transferred to Yalta, where without much success he tries to clarify his identity to criminal investigators. Rimsky, the financial director, escapes to Leningrad where he hides in the wardrobe of his hotel room. Varenukha disappears from Moscow and later reports spending several days in Woland's apartment, serving as vampire-bait. Amidst multiple "magic" disappearances, Bulgakov's subtle comments about other disappearances-political-go almost unnoticed. For instance, Bulgakov mentions that Likodeyev's disappearance is preceded by the chain of odd disappearances of the tenants from the apartment No. 50 on Sadovaya Street. All tenants are gone within days under mysterious circumstances. The first tenant leaves the apartment with an alleged police officer, but never comes back. Another tenant leaves for work, and disappears too. Subsequently, all other inhabitants vanish mysteriously shortly afterwards, including the owner of the apartment-Anna Frantsevna de Fourget and her housekeeper Anfisa. Bulgakov's comment about these disappearances-"Once witchcraft gets started, there's no stopping it"-is tinted with bitter irony. Although he blames the disappearances on witchcraft, his words are simply a rhetorical move. The disappearances happen before Woland arrives in Moscow, and these disappearances are all too reminiscent of the political arrests of the 1930s: inhabitants vanish without any trace, and no one bothers to investigate their whereabouts. While these "other" disappearances seem to be irrelevant in the discussion of carnivalesque abuse, both types of disappearances have a relationship to the issue of Soviet identity. While Woland's carnivalesque violence targets Soviet monologism, forcing the Muscovites to reveal their skeptical "private selves," the purpose of political violence is to instill fear. By maintaining a magic-like secrecy around political disappearances, the authorities implant fear within community, thus making this community more receptive to the official ideology.

Carnivalesque abuse escalates gradually, and, in chapters 27 and 28 ("The End of Apartment No. 50" and "The Final Adventures of Korovyov and Behemoth"), Woland's accomplices Korovyov and Behemoth employ carnival as a weapon against literary bureaucrats. They show up for a brief visit in Griboyedov (the restaurant to which only the members of MASSOLIT are admitted), and leave it after setting the building on fire. Surveying the revelry of MASSOLIT's literati, Korovyov says to Behemoth, "How nice to think that a veritable multitude of talent is sheltered and ripening under this roof," and Behemoth retorts in a similarly whimsical metaphor: "Like pineapples in a hothouse!"[30] Behemoth's metaphor suggests that MASSOLIT "cultivates" writers like plants, or in other words, manufactures a specific identity of a writer, a writer who is loyal to the Soviet authorities (and who can survive in a Soviet literary "hothouse"). In yet another commentary, Korovyov expresses his deep concerns for the Soviet writers, who he thinks might not be able to produce masterworks if some vicious "microorganism" attacks their "roots."[31] Although Korovyov states this hypothetically, this is rather a statement of fact, as the "microorganisms" (or the bureaucratic machinery) had already attacked these "plants" (freedom of the literary expression). The scene ends with an apocalyptic exit: Korovyov and Behemoth escape the crossfire of the police agents, and the building is consumed by the fire set by Behemoth's primus. Although the scene does not resolve the problem of bureaucracy in literature, it exposes the ways in which self can be influenced: through the ideological pressure and cowardice of those who choose to conform to the system out of fear of persecution.

Although not always explicitly tied to ideology, fear is one of the most persistent themes in *The Master and Margarita*: many characters experience fear in some degree. For example, the Master explains that after his novel about Pontius Pilate was rejected by the publisher fear became his "constant companion" (124). Ivan Bezdomny continues to scream and cry in his sleep. In other cases, fear takes a form of ideological anxiety, thus making secondary characters unable to express their opinions or act freely. Overall, fear in *The Master and Margarita* seems to inhibit the ability of Muscovites to maintain their autonomous public selves. It is remarkable that Mikhail Bakhtin's study *Rabelais and His World* ascribes a similar inhibitive function to fear: "Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter. Complete liberty is possible only in the completely fearless world."[32] In the context of *The Master and Margarita*, fear is a byproduct of the authoritative pressures in the Muscovites' everyday lives. Bulgakov illuminates this ideological pressure by portraying Bengalsky's eagerness in assuring the educational value of the show and the audience's overall non-responsiveness. Despite the fact that Bengalsky lies, his timid spectators resist laughter; they abandon their fears and laugh freely only when Korovyov sets an example of carnivalesque laughter by mocking Bengalsky and his "bogus" comments.

Not only ordinary citizens in *The Master and Margarita*, but bureaucrats are susceptible to fear. For example, the financial director of the Variety Theatre Rimsky is terrified of the consequences of the scandalous Black Magic show. In chapter 14 ("Praise to the Rooster"), when the distraught Rimsky witnesses naked women running in the streets, he is frightened of his responsibility and puzzles over the possible ways of making the director of the theatre Likhodeyev a scapegoat:

> The time to act was approaching, he would have to drink the bitter cup of responsibility. The telephones had been repaired during the third part of the program, and he had to make calls, report what had happened, ask for help, lie himself out of any responsibility, blame everything on Likhodeyev, get himself off the hook, and so forth.[33]

This excerpt shows that Rimsky is not immune to fear. This is certainly true not only for *The Master and Margarita* or any other work of fiction: there is historical evidence for the fact that the majority of those purged during the late 1930s belonged to the communist bureaucracy and were in positions of authority. Thus, because of their visibility bureaucrats ran a significantly higher risk of being accused of the ideological dissidence. Fear is an important motivation behind many of the ideological interventions throughout the novel: Sempleyarov takes over Bengalsky's responsibilities for monitoring the show, possibly realizing that he might be later responsible for the lack of action on his part. Berlioz fulfills his responsibility to guide the young poet Bezdomny through his anti-religious project, perhaps in attempt to prevent negative consequences in his own career. In a similar situation, the editor-who is not as ideologically cautious as Sempleyarov and Berlioz- publishes an excerpt from the Master's novel and is accused of dissidence along with the unfortunate Master in a review titled "An Enemy under the Editor's Wing."

Before or after carnival in *The Master and Margarita*, the fictional Moscow-community is divided by multiple ideological distinctions, fear, and distrust, thus making the individuals unwilling to share their views with each other. However, during carnival the community experiences a revival. Because carnival highlights the inadequacies of the system and the characters, it helps in shattering the unrealistically high ideological standards created by authoritative discourse. With these flaws exposed by a carnivalesque clown-provocateur-Korovyov or Behemoth-the individuals achieve carnivalesque equality, which allows them to speak and act more freely.

The episode at the Torgsin store (the chapter "The Final Adventures of Korovyov and Behemoth") is an example of carnival as a unifying force: Korovyov and Behemoth wreak

havoc at the store, but their speeches and actions seemingly appeal to the onlookers' personal experiences. Despite the fact that Korovyov's and Behemoth's insinuations enrage and frighten the manager of the store, the ordinary Muscovites feel sympathetic towards Behemoth-"this poor man," as Korovyov calls him, who starves and has no currency to purchase food at the Torgsin store. In the 1920s, several stores like Torgsin were opened by the Russian government in an attempt to extract hard currency from the Soviet citizens and foreign visitors. Such stores offered goods-nice clothing and exotic foods-not easily obtainable in the country where industry and commerce virtually collapsed. Although theoretically anyone could go into these stores, many people could not afford purchasing goods there: the majority of the population was devastated economically, and according to statistics, in 1924 the unemployment rate among urban workers reached 18 percent.[34] Rural areas suffered from massive starvation. The Soviet government did not like to acknowledge these problems because according to the official mythology, socialism and communism were supposed to be "higher" stages of historical development than capitalism. The government wanted to maintain the myth that eventually the Soviet citizens would enjoy a higher standard of living than the capitalist countries. From this point of view, Korovyov and Behemoth debunk the myth of the Soviet citizens' satisfaction with their lives. In this scene, Behemoth plays a role of a "proletarian" (of an everyman who is working on his broken primus stove and has no money to buy food), while Korovyov is a justice seeker, who vocalizes the economic and social concerns of Behemoth and of the majority of the Soviet population.

The scene at the Torgsin store is one of the most grotesque scenes in the novel. The allegedly hungry Behemoth savors food directly from the displays, ignoring any etiquette (as a starving man might do). He gobbles the tangerines, destroys the "ingenious arrangement of chocolate bars" by pulling one from the very bottom of a display pyramid, and gulps down a few herrings which he fishes from the barrel.[35] Not only are the actions of Korovyov and Behemoth grotesque and provocative, Korovyov's address to the audience is almost a call for a carnivalesque revolution:

> "Citizens!" He shouted in a thin, tremulous voice, "What's this all about? Huh? Let me ask you that! This poor man," Korovyov added a quaver to his voice and pointed to Behemoth, who then put on a pathetic expression, "this poor man's been fixing primus stoves all day long; he's starved… and where can he get foreign currency?"[36]

Bulgakov intensifies the provocative appeal of this speech by showing the audience's reactions to the Korovyov's motivational speech:

> This whole extremely foolish, tactless, and no doubt politically dangerous speech made Pavel Iosifovich [the manager of the store] shake with rage, but, strange as it may seem, one could tell from the eyes of many of the other customers that Korovyov's words had aroused their sympathy! And when Behemoth put his torn and dirty sleeve up to his eye and cried out tragically, "Thank you, true friend, for standing up for a victim!" a miracle took place. A quiet, very proper little old man, poorly but neatly dressed, who was buying three almond pastries at the confectionary counter, was suddenly transfigured. His eyes flashed with martial fire, he turned crimson, threw his package of pastries on the floor, and shouted, "It's the truth!" in a thin, childlike voice. Then he grabbed a tray, threw down what was left of the chocolate Eiffel Tower destroyed by Behemoth, brandished it, tore the foreigner's hat off with his left hand, and used his right to hit him flat on top of his bald head with the tray.[37]

Carnival, provoked by Korovyov and Behemoth, awakens the audience. Once again, Korovyev's buffoonery unifies the community, by making the participants aware of each other's grievances. Laughter and improper behavior allow the proper little old man to overcome his reservations and fear and offer his support to Behemoth by joining the

carnival. He not only expresses his support verbally, but becomes an active participant in the carnivalesque abuse.

In summation, carnival in *The Master and Margarita* is an essential addition to the representation of official Soviet culture. While the official discourse shuns laughter as such in an attempt to preserve the ideological monologism, the novel shows that slapstick comedy and honesty of carnival contain more appeal to the Muscovites than the staleness and hypocrisy of the official discourse. Sincere and unrestrained laughter, understood and enjoyed by many, becomes in *The Master and Margarita* the ultimate tool of social criticism: it exposes the weaknesses of the authoritative discourse and reveals the underlying dialogism of a seemingly monologized Soviet culture. Further, laughter draws attention to language as a tool of manipulation. When the carnivalesque clowns-Korovyov and Behemoth-expose the bureaucrats as demagogues and liars, official discourse suffers a significant ideological defeat. This defeat of authority suspends fear and distrust prevailing in the fictional community of *The Master and Margarita*, thus empowering individuals to dissent publicly. By lifting the dialogic to the surface, by bringing dissent from its ideological exile back into community, carnival provides individuals within the fictional community of *The Master and Margarita* with a more complex, multi-voiced vision of the world and self, thus creating multiple options for one's identity-options otherwise unavailable in an authoritarian Soviet society.

Notes

1. Many works link *The Master and Margarita* to either Bakhtin's notion of carnival or Menippean satire (concept, similar to carnival: fantastic situations are created to test a philosophical idea). Among these works are Vladislav Krasnov, "Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* in Light of Baxtin's Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics," *Russian Language Journal* 41 (1987); Leslie Milne, *The Master and Margarita: a Comedy of Victory* (Birmingham, England, 1977). Other works that contain interesting references to carnival in *The Master and Margarita* are Ellendea Proffer, *Bulgakov: Life and Work* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984); M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin, and Modern Russian Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).
2. In their study of Soviet fiction, M.Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga argue that the authoritarian monologism of the Stalinist Era inspired Bakhtin's interest in the social function of carnival. M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin, and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism, and History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 45.
3. This quotation comes from Mikhail Bulgakov's letter to the Soviet government written in March of 1930. Qtd. in Riita Pittman, *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's* The Master and Margarita (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 84.
4. Robert W. Thornston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule: Humor and Terror in the USSR, 1935-1941," *Journal of Social History* 24/3 (1991): 541. This article discusses types of humor which existed in the Soviet Union at the time. Thornston explains that certain types of humor were permitted and even encouraged in authoritarian Soviet society. For example, the authorities welcomed humor that targeted lower echelons of bureaucracy; however, the higher leadership was certainly a taboo for the official humor.
5. "Kulak" is a prosperous peasant, i.e. a member of an alien class. Mikhail Bulgakov, 56.

6. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society," in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinovitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). 26.
7. Qtd. in Fitzpatrick, 27.
8. Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Diana Burgin and Katherine O'Connor (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 8.
9. Bulgakov, 333.
10. Korovyov has another name as well: in the chapter "Black Magic and Its Exposй," he goes by the name "Fagot" (this word means a "bassoon" in Russian). To avoid confusion, I use the name Korovyov throughout this paper.
11. Although carnival highlights the contradictions within the Soviet official discourse, oftentimes these inconsistencies go unnoticed by the secondary characters of *The Master and Margarita*. For example, as Ellendea Proffer points out in her book *Bulgakov: Life and Work*, carnival leads to many unpleasant results, but many Muscovites fail to recognize the presence of supernatural forces in Moscow (as they possibly ignore the dissidence of carnival). Proffer argues that the failure to recognize the supernatural is most likely due to the "supernatural" quality of life in the USSR at this time, with its almost "diabolic" nighttime disappearance of people during the purges. Proffer claims that Bulgakov consciously plays on these habitual occurrences of Soviet life by emphasizing the ease with which the characters cope with other characters' disappearances.
12. Bulgakov, 100.
13. *Ibid*., 101.
14. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 197.
15. The commentary by Ellendea Proffer comes from Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, 346.
16. Bulgakov, 101.
17. *Ibid*., 101.
18. *Ibid*., 102.
19. *Ibid*., 103.
20. *Ibid*., 105.
21. Katerina Clark discusses the genre of Socialist Realism in her book *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Clark argues that after 1932, Stalinist writer is not a creator of the text any more, but a "teller of tales already prefigured in Party lore" (p. 159). According to this "Party lore," the fictional hero should have specific traits (which can be called "Soviet identity"): "In a prototypical Socialist Realist novel, a hero sets out consciously to achieve his goal, which involves social integration and collective rather than individual identity for himself. He is inspired by the challenge of overcoming the obstacles that bar him from those aims: those "spontaneous," i.e. arbitrary and self-willed, aspects of himself and forces in the world around him (predominantly the elements themselves but also other obstacles that have the force or quality of the elements). The hero is assisted in his quest by an older and more "conscious" figure who has made just such a successful quest before him." (p. 167). Clark points out that it becomes the main task of the editors and critics to make sure that the master plot is preserved in the novelist's work.
22. Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 257.
23. Bulgakov, 103.
24. *Ibid*., 104.
25. *Ibid*., 104.
26. *Ibid*., 104.
27. *Ibid.*, 107.
28. *Ibid*., 107.
29. *Ibid*., 108.
30. *Ibid*., 298.

31. *Ibid*., 299.
32. Bakhtin, 50.
33. Bulgakov, 127.
34. This information comes from an article "'Rasmychka?' Urban Unemployment and Peasant In-Migration as Sources of Social Conflict" by Douglas R. Weiner. *Russia in the Era of NEP.* Eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinovitch, and Richard Stites. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. 144-55.
35. Bulgakov, 296.
36. *Ibid*., 297.
37. *Ibid*., 298.

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