Bulgakov's Master and Margarita
Masking the Supernatural and the Secret Police

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Kevin Moss, Professor at the Middlebury College in Vermont, explains how the devices Bulgakov uses to mask tie actions of the secret police produce grotesque effects because these actions are distinctly threatening. Russian Language Journal, XXXVIII, Nos. 129-130 (1984), 115-131.

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BULGAKOV'S MASTER AND MARGARITA:
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Barely two pages into Bulgakov's Master and Margarita, the Devil appears and proceeds to play a substantial role in the text. The part played by the secret police, however, is somehow hidden, though it is nearly as important--almost all of the characters are arrested in the course of the novel. Bulgakov achieves this by describing the actions of the secret police in Aesopian language that masks the identity of the agents (in both senses) involved Bugakov avails himself of the many grammatical, syntactic, and lexical devices avai able in the Russian language to achieve such masking, the narrative goal of which is to cause the reader to hesitate between a supernatural and a natural explanation for the events described. Such hesitation lies at the root of the fantastic as described by Todorov[2], which when the effect produced on the reader is markedly disorienting or ominous, opens into the grotesque

Confronted with an event which cannot be explained by the laws of the familiar world, the characters are faced with a choice: either the events described are an illusion of the senses or they are really supernatural In the first case the laws of the familiar world stand firm; in the second, new laws unknown to us hold sway. According to Todorov's definition, "the fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty."[3] Basically there is a vacillation or a confusion of two realities: familiar everyday reality and the reality of dreams, of insanity, of the supernatural All three "other realities" play an important part in Bulgakov's novel.

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1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the Annual Meeting of AATSEEL, 29 Dec. 1982, in the section on Parody and Satire in the Slavic Literatures.

2 Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1970).

3 Todorov,25.

The fantastic becomes grotesque when its effects are particularly disorienting and threatening The devices Bulgakov uses to mask tie actions of the secret police produce grotesque effects because these actions are distinctly threatening. In The Grotesque in Art and Literature, Wolfgang Kayser defines the grotesque as the estranged world[4], "something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one."[5] To a certain extent, Bulgakov's creation is a reversal of the traditional grotesque structure. While the supernatural and the real are confused, what is threatening comes not from the supernatural, unknown side of the dichotomy, but from the unspeakable reality of Soviet life.

Such a hierarchical shift, which is the basis of the stucture of the novel as a whole (where contemporary Moscow is overrun by the Devil's band and Biblical Jerusalem obeys the laws of rational reality), provides a Key to understanding the genesis of the novel in the Soviet Union under Stalin. One of the fundamental differences between the Soviet system and that of the West may lie in the approach to the relationship between word and reality. Simply stated, reality is taken as primary in the West, while the word (or propaganda or dialectic) is the primary test of truth in the East. Czeslaw Milosz wrote in 1953 of the "split between words and reality" and the "ingenious methods by which Stalinists isolate themselves from reality."[6]

Efim Etkind describes this hierarchical shift in terms of primitive mentality in his article "Soviet Taboos."[7] He describes the various aspects of reality that are better passed over in silence in the

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4 Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Artand Literature (Gloucester: Peter Smith,1968), 184.

5 Kayser, 21.

6 Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind, trans, Jane Zielonko (NY: Vintage,1951-81), 237.

7 Ефим Эткинд, «Советские табу», Syntaxis, no 9 (1981), 3-20. In his description of the absence of V. N. Nekrasov's name from the index of the Краткая литературная энциклопедия he draws an analogy using a subjectless expression: Как говорят в очередях: «Вас тут не стояло»: Не было тут вас. (7)

Soviet Union. The crux of the theory is that what is not expressed does not exist:

> То, чего мы не признаем официально -- призрак, фантом, небытие. То, чего мы не называем, утрачивает реальность.[8]
> [What we do not recognize officially is a shade, a phantom, nonexistence. What we do not name loses reality.]

Or, in the words of the Master,

> Раз нет документа, нету человека. (706)[9]
> [No document—no person.]

But, as Tomas Venclova has pointed out, the contrary is also true: "It is thought that certain combinations of graphemes and words must be constantly repeated—then the phenomena they signify somehow descend from the world of Platonic ideas to the level of reality."[10] Both of these phenomena imply a well-ordered system in which the veneration appropriate to the meaning of a symbol is focused on the symbol itself, which is identified with its import.[11]

Because Soviet language is so highly ritualized, the absence of a symbol perceived against the background of the code can be as significant as its presence. This is particularly true in the case of prominent symbols like personal names. In the High Stalinist period, the name "Stalin" was surrounded by strictures worthy of the

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[8] Эткинд, 5.

[9] Russian quotations are to Михаил Булгаков, Романы (Л: Художественная 1978).

[10] Tomas Venclova, "The Game of the Censor," The New York Review of Books, Mar. 31, 1983, 34.

[11] Suzanne K. Langer, "On Cassirer's Theory of Language and Myth," in The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer (Evanston: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949),389.

Hebrew "YHWH."[12] In Aitmatov's The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years the heroes friend Kuttybaev is arrested because according to his memoirs he failed to remark to an Englishman that WWII could not have been won without the genius of Stalin[13] . Solzhenitsyn's "Incident at Krechetovka Station" is based on a similar situation: Tveritinov is arrested because he does not know of Stalingrad.[14] Cleverer interpreters of the Soviet system inferred that Brezhnev had died from the absence of his name in a letter of congratulations to Angola on its national day.[15]

Kathleen Parthé has examined the device of masking in Russian literature of the 19th century in her dissertation, Masking the Fantastic and the Taboo in Russian Literature: A Hierarchy of Grammatical Devices, and in several articles.[16] She arrives at a definition of masking as "an incomplete, indefinite reference to the agent of an action, the result being a disorienting effect on the reader."[17] Forms she discusses in terms of their use as masking devices include depersonalized (temporarily subjectless) verbs, indefinite pronouns, and demonstrative and anaphoric pronouns with obscured referents. The same devices--and others like them--are used to similar ends by Bulgakov in Master and Margarita.

While some of the devices available in Russian cannot be rendered exactly in English translation, in many cases equivalents

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[12] In a chapter of Voinovich's Chonkin (В. Н. Войнович, Жизнь и необычайные приключения солдата Ивана Чонкина (Paris: YMCA Press, 1976), 176-194) a man is released immediately upon proving his name is Stalin.

[13] Chingiz Aitmatov, The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years, tr. John French (Bloomington: Indiana, 1983), 190.

[14] А. Солженицын, «Случай на Кречетовке», Сочинения (Frankfurt/M: Посев, 1964),135-193; p. 186.

[15] Compare Pravda 11.11.81 and 11.11.82.

[16] Kathleen Parthé, Masking the Fantastic and the Taboo in Russian Literature: A Hierarchy of Grammatical Devices, Unpubl. Ph. D. Diss., Cornell, 1979; "Masking the Fantastic and the Taboo in Tolstoj's Polikushka," SEEJ, Vol. 25, No.
1 (Spring '81), 21 -33; "Death Masks in Tolstoi," Slavic Review, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer '82), 297-305.

[17] Parthé, "Death Masks," 297.

can be found. Nevertheless, an examination of the available translations shows that this aspect of Bulgakov's art has more often than not been lost. Written in the late 20s and 30s, Master and Margarita was first published in the journal Moskva in November 1966 and January 1967 with substantial cuts. The dream of Nikanor Ivanovich (about the prison for people who speculate in foreign currency) as well as several references to the theme of power were missing. It was this version that was translated by Mirra Ginsburg in 1967.[18] In the same years Scherz Verlag published the missing passages[19] and Michael Glenny, a complete English translation.[20] The complete Russian text was published in the Soviet Union only in 1973.

Reference to the natural agent of an action can be made incomplete or indefinite in many ways. The natural agent of the arrests, interrogations, and internments in Master and Margarita is the secret police. Needless to say, the secret police is never mentioned by name, nor are any of its agents. (The one exception is Baron Maigel', who functions in the novel primarily as a patiens or logical object rather than as agens or logical subject.)

Indefinite pronouns and pronominal adjectives help render reference to the secret police and its actions indefinite: When Berlioz's uncle from Kiev, Poplavskii, inquires at the apartment committee office about the possibility of inheriting the Moscow apartment, an agent comes in:

какой-то **что-то** **нин,** **пошептал** (674)

[some citizen came in, whispered something]

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[18] Mirra Ginsburg, trans., The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov (NY: Grove Press,1967).

[19] М. А. Булгаков, Мастер и Маргарита: неизданные отрывки и эпизоды (Bern: Scherz Verlag,1967).

[20] Michael Glenny, trans., The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov (NY: Harper & Row,1967).

He leaves with the man Poplavskii was talking to. When Nikanor Ivanovich's wife returns from answering the door accompanied by two citizens who later take her husband away, she is described as

> очень бледная Пелагея Антоновна (517)
> [the for some reason very pale Pelageia Antonovna]

Soon thereafter someone arrives at Timofei Kondrat'evich Kvastsov's and takes him away:

> неизвестный гражданин. . . **что-то** ему сказал и вместе с ним пропал. (518)
> [the unfamiliar citizen . . told him something and vanished along with him.]

In Nikanor Ivanovich's dream the MC warns the audience what will happen if they fail to turn in their foreign currency:

с вами случится **что-нибудь** в этом роде, если только не хуже (584)
[something like this, if not worse, will happen to you]

Later Korov'ev tells Margarita an anecdote about a man who kept exchanging apartments to get more and more rooms until his activity

suddenly stopped "по не зависящим от него причинам" [as a result of causes which were beyond his control]:

> Возможно, что он сейчас имеет **какую-нибудь** комнату, но только, смею вас уверить, что не в Москве. (666)
> [It is possible that he now has some sort of room, only I can assure you it isn't in Moscow.]

Similarly, Bulgakov uses pronouns without establishing their referents:

На вопрос о том, **откуда** спрашивают Аркадия Аполлоновича, голос в телефоне коротко ответил **откуда**. (748}
[To the question of where they were asking for Arkadii Apollonovich from , the voice on the phone briefly answered where from .]

Надо отдать справедливость **тому, кто** возглавлял следствие (750)
[You have to be fair to the one who was in charge of the case.]

It is interesting to note that the first English translations insert nouns at this point. Ginsburg has "in justice to the man who headed the investigation" (346), Glenny, "The officer in charge of the case was, to give him his due, a man who knew his job" (325). The empty, purely relational pronoun, is lost. In the original Russian, these pronouns retain only their general, relational meaning on the syntactic level. Only in the context of the narration, when other semantic information is taken into account, can they be made referential.[21]

Bulgakov achieves a similar semantic emptying of the subject node by using participles. Long form participles, which transformational grammar interprets as a transformation of pronoun + verb (or as a verb dominated by a noun phrase node),[22] allow

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21 Vladimir Voinovich uses pronouns to a similar grotesque end in the same chapter of Chonkin mentioned above (FN 12), pp.176-77.:

ничего не оставалось делать, как бить старого наглеца за то место, которое в народе обычно называется шкирюй, и отвести Куда Надо. Тем более, что именно там, Где Надо, Свинцов как раз и состоял на службе, он был сержантом.

22 Cf. the works of Leonard H. Babby, "Towards a Formal Theory of 'Part of Speech,'" in Slavic Transformational Syntax, ed, Richard D. Brecht and Catherine V. Chvany (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Materials, 1974), 150-81; The Syntax of Gerunds in Russian (Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club,.1975); Transformational Grammar of Russian Adjectives, Janua Linguarum, Series Practica, 234 (1975); "Participles in Russian: Attribution, Predication, and Voice." International Review of Slavic Linguistics, 1978.

Bulgakov to express the subject only as a relation to the verbal action. The agents who lay siege to apartment 50 are described alternately as

подымающиеся (758)
[those coming up]

пришедшие (758)
[those who had come]

бросавший (759)
[the one who threw]

вошедшие (759)
[those who had come in]

стоящие (760)
[those who were standing]

присутствующие (760)
[those who were present]

бывшие (761)
[those who had been]

At least one of these semantically empty nodes is filled by Glenny in his translation:

[Кот] мигом навел его [браунинг]**ближайшего к нему стоящего**, но у того раньше, чем кот успел выстрелить, в руке полыхнуло огнем. (759) [In the blink of an eye the cat took aim at the one standing closest , but before the cat couid shoot, there was a flash from the other's hand . .]

In a flash [the cat] took aim at the nearest man , but the detective beat the cat to the draw and fired first. (Glenny, 332)

The same semantic emptiness may be claimed for the noun sledovatel', (investigator) used eleven times in five pages (751-56). Sledovatel' is a verbal agent noun which, like a participle, carries no more information about the subject than its relation to the verbal action.

The focus can be shifted away from the agent by yet other grammatical means--passivization and impersonalization. Bulgakov uses passive, indefinite personal (неопределенно-личные), and temporarily subjectless constructions to focus the sentence on the patiens and avoid the agens, the secret poline.

Passive:

был доставленч в клинику. (577)
[Nikanor Ivanovich was taken to the clinic.]

меры, чтобы их разыскать . (757)
[Measures were taken to find them.]

данные**лись** (754)
[evidence was added .]

были обнаружены Никанор Иванович Босой и несчастный конферансье (751)
[Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi and the unfortunate MC were discovered .]

The indefinite-personal (неопределенно-личная) form in Russian consists of the third person plural form of the verb with no subject. The subject is interpreted as necessarily human (something like our "They say . . ."). Often these are translated into English as passives,

but they contain the added information not provided by true passives that the agent of the action is human.

Indefinite-personal:

арестовалиановича . (611)
[(they) arrested Vasilii Stepanovich.]

повысилиуже **намекнули.** . .(577)
[on the other side of the desk (they) had already raised (their) voice dropped hints …]

In this scene from the chapter of Nikanor Ivanovich's dream, Ginsburg introduces a subject, "the interrogator," (180), while Glenny uses "they" (158).

На Садовую **съездили** и в квартире № 50 **побывали** (577)
[(They) had dropped by Sadovaya and been in apartment no. 50

One lodger disappears from apt. 50 after a policeman comes to inform him,

. . . что того **просят** на минуту (491)
[. . . that (they) would like to see him for a minute]

After Baron Maigel disappeared the apartment was visited again, but no one was there:

посетили звонков квартиру (754)
[(they) visited the apartment without calling first]

Filling the agens node can also be avoided by embedding the infinitive in a subjectless construction (transformational grammar

treats the infinitive itself a the subject[23]). In such cases the subject of the infinitive may be expressed in a dative in the main clause, but this is not obligatory:

установитью (751)
[(it) was simple to determine]

пришлось возиться. . . разъяснять необыкновенный случай (751)
[(it) was necessary to work. . . to clear up the unusual incident]

уже, кого и где ловить (753)
[(it) was already known , for whom to look and where]

Супруга Аркадия Аполлоновичя ответила мрачно, что он подойти к аппарату не может. Однако, Аркадию Аполлоновичу подойти к аппарату все-таки **пришлось.** (748)

[Arkadii Apollonovich's wife answered gloomily that he couidn't come to the phone. However, (it) became necessary for Arkadii Apollonovich to come to the phone all the same.]

Other subjectless constructions accomplish the same end:

, как барона впустили (754)
[(one) could hear the baron being let in]

прибавилось (754)
[of material there was added]

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[23] Babby, A Transformational Grammar; "Towards a Formal Theory of 'Part of Speech.'"

The natural agent and logical subject of all of these sentences is the secret police. Bulgakov also masks the actions of the secret police through his choice of lexicon. He chooses intransitive verbs which encode the logical patiens as the subject, thus avoiding any reference to the logical agens while implying at the same time that the instigators of these actions were the victims themselves:

Люди начали бесследно исчезать (491)
[People began to disappear without a trace.]

сквозь землю провалился Беломут (492)
[Belomut vanished into thin air]

Анна Францевна опять-таки спешно уехала на дачу...
. Нужно ли говорить, что она не вернулась! (492)
[Anna Francevna once again rushed off to her dacha....
Need one mention that she did not return!]

С тем и уехали с Садовой, причем с уехавшими
отбыл...Пролежнев. (577)
[With that they left Sadovaya, and with those who were leaving
departed... Prolezhnev.]

Here again the translations lose the nuance of the Russian form: Ginsburg has "They left with nothing, but in the company of… Prolezhnev" (180); Glenny, "They left the building taking with them… Prolezhnev" (1 59-60).

When the agents do appear as subjects in the sentences, they are usually referred to not by name or profession, but by some more general noun or attribute:

двое граждан (517)
[two citizens]

неизвестный гражданин (518)

[the unfamiliar citizen]

какой-то гражданин (614)
[some citizen]

одинокий человек (664)
[a lone man]

Another means of masking used by Bulgakov to avoid reference to the real agents of the action is substitution of something contiguous for the masked agens—masking by metonymy. Direct reference is made not to the secret police, but to its cars, tables, buildings, and cases:

Утром за ним заехала, как обычно, **машина**, чтобы отвезти его на службу, и отвезла, но назад никого не привезла и сама больше не вернулась. (492)
[In the morning a car came to pick him up as usual to take him to work, and it took him away, but didn't bring anyone back and never returned itself.]

Попал он, однако, к профессору Стравинскому не сразу, а предварительно побывав **в другом месте.** (576)
[He ended up at professor Stravinsky's, however, not right away, b having spent some time beforehand in another place .]

Но в это время. . . не спал **целый этаж** в одном из московских учреждений, и окна в нем, выходящие на залитую асфальтом большую площадь, . . . светились полным светом. (747)
[But at this time. . . a whole floor of a certain Moscow office was not asleep, and its windows, which opened onto a large asphalt-covered square, . . . were shining brightly.]

был занят следствием. (747)
[The whole floor was on the case.]

"The whole floor of the institution" and the "case" often occur as subjects through the last chapters of the book. For example,

Весь вечер Аркадий Аполлонович провел в том самом этаже, где велось следствие. (748)
[Arkady Apollonovich spent the whole evening on the same floor where the case was being conducted.]

This passage was cut in the original version and, consequently, in Ginsburg. Glenny introduces a specific agent: "Arkady Apollonovich spent the rest of the evening with the investigators" (324).

Contiguity of cause and effect provides Bulgakov with yet another device for masking the sphere of the secret police. The effect of the appearance and actions of the secret police is described, while the cause is left for the reader to infer. People who are about to be arrested display signs of fear and confusion:

очень бледная Пелагея Антоновна (517)
[the for some reason very pale Pelageja Antonovna]

и Никанор Иванович и поднялся (517)
[Nikanor Ivanovich also turned white and got up]

отбыл и **растерянный и подавленный** секретарь (577)
[the distraught and crushed secretary also departed]

При виде вошедшего сидящий за столом **побледнел** (614)
[On seeing him come in the man sitting at the table turned pale]

Вошедший что-то пошептал сидящему, и тот, совершенно **расстроенный**, поднялся со стула, и через несколько секунд Поплавский остался один в пустой комнате правления. (614)
[The man who came in whispered something to the man who was sitting down, and the latter, completely distraught , got up from the table, and in a few seconds Poplavskij was left alone in the empty room of the directors of the apartment.]

испуганным лицом (748)
[his wife with a frightened face]

In all of the cases I have mentioned, indefinite reference to the secret police and its actions causes the reader to hesitate in his explanation of the events described. Since the actions of the secret police are invariably ominous, sinister, and terrifying, as the effect on the characters in the novel demonstrates, the effect on the reader is grotesque The same narrative end is served by similar devices in the Jerusalem novel embedded in Master and Margarita.

Throughout most of the Jerusalem novel, which makes up four entire chapters of Bulgakov's work, Pilate's head of the secret service is anonymous. In chapters 2, 16, and 25 he appears only as человек вкапюшоне [the man in the hood] (445, 588, 717, et al.), his hood representing iconically the device of masking his identity. In the scene in which we finally learn his name, Afranii, it is his hood that appears first and disappears last from view (717, 725).

Even after we learn his name, Afranii's identity is markedly masked in chapter 26. He is referred to as гость прокуратора [the procurator's guest] (726) and at the murder as третий. . . в плаще с капюшоном [a third, in a cloak with a hood] (732). After the murder Bulgakov bares the device of masking by showing the man in the hood disguise himself:

человек в капюшоне остановил лошадь, слез с нее на пустынной дороге, снял свой плащ, вывернул его наизнанку, вынул из-под плаща плоский шлем без оперения, надел его. Теперь на лошадь вскочил человек в военной хламиде с коротким мечом на бедре. (733)

[The man in the hood stopped his horse, got down onto the deserted road, took off his cloak, turned it inside out, took out from under his cloak a flat helmet with no plume, and put it on. Now onto the horse jumped a man in a military mantle with a short sword at his thigh.]

Henceforth he is referred to simply as военный [the military man] (733) until he appears again at the palace of Herod as начальник тайной стражи. . . человек в капюшоне. . . Афраний (736) [the head of the secret guard. . the man in the hood. . . Afranii.] The rich variety of terms used to refer to Afranii causes the reader to hesitate in identification of his role in the action described. These vacillations in reference are supported by the indefinite and contradictory physical description given of Afranii by the narrator (a characteristic he shares with Woland):

Волосы его были какого-то **неопределенного** цвета
[His hair was of a sort of indefinite color.]

Национальность пришелца было бы трудно установить.
[It would have been difficult to pin down the nationality of the man who had just arrived.]

Основное, что определяло его лицо, это было, пожалуй, выражение добродушия, **которое нарушали**, впрочем, глаза, **или вернее, не глаза**, а манера пришедшего глядеть на собеседника. (718)

> [The basic thing that distinguished his face was, if you like, a certain expression of good will, which was counteracted , however, by his eyes, or rather not the eyes , but the way he looked at anyone he was talking to.]

The reversals and reservations in the last passage (the syntax of which recalls Dostoevsky's underground man) are ideally suited to describing a slippery character like Afranii.

Within the novel, the device of masking is not limited to the narrator's text; it is obviously encoded in the language of the characters, who recognize the taboo against talking about the secret police and its actions. This is the major difference between the use of masking in the 19th century as discussed by Kathleen Parthé and its use in 20th century Soviet literature.

In a Jakobsonian analysis, the passive and impersonal contructions mentioned above have a general meaning that is unmarked for agens. But the particular narrative use of these constructions is unusual. The unmarked form can be used as the marked form; a form with the general meaning "no statement of A" may have the particular meaning "statement of -A"--and such is the case here. These constructions cannot be read as impersonal; they are re-personalized with a 0-subject or a 0-agens. The indefinite personal forms can be interpreted only this way--as -human agent The reader who shares the taboo against speaking of the secret police knows for whom this "-agens" stands. This process is laid bare in the scene in which Poplavskii tries to find the housing committee officials. When he asks where he can find the president, the "sitting man" displays a typical secret police syndrome:

> Этот, казалось бы, простенький вопрос **почему-то расстроил** сидящего, так что он даже **изменился в лице** (613)

[This apparently simple question for some reason upset the man who was sitting there so much that his face even changed .]

He can give no precise answer (the answer asks for a node which is empty):

"Ага!" - сказал сам себе умный Поплавский и осведомился о секретаре. (614)
["Aha!"—said the clever Poplavskii and inquired about the secretary]

Again the response is indefinite.

"Ага!" - сказал себе Поплавский (614)
["Aha!"—Poplavskii said to himself.]

When the "sitting man" is taken away, Poplavskii thinks,

Эх, какое осложнение! И нужно было, чтобы их всех сразу... (614)
[Ekh, what complications! And wouldn't you know that all of them (acc.) at one time. . .]

Nothing definite is mentioned, but Poplavskii comes to the right conclusions, filling the O-agens node with the agents of the appropriate institution. Interestingly enough, he does not mention the institution himself either, even in his thoughts. Similar conclusions must have been drawn by Margarita when the Master disappeared:

Она сделала все, чтобы разузнать что-нибудь о нем и, **ничего,** не разузнала (633)
[She did everything to find out something about him, but of course she found out nothing at all .]

A process similar to this filling of empty nodes is at work in the resurrection of dead metaphors involving the word черт [devil] in Russian. Such expressions as "черт их возьми" (484) [the devil take them] and "черт знает" (520) [the devil knows] occur throughout the novel. In standard Russian such phrases are merely dead metaphors unmarked for reference to a real devil. But from the first scene, where Berlioz's "пора бросить все к черту и в Кисловодск" (424) [it's time to throw everything to the devil and set off for Kislovodsk] leads immediately to the appearance of what we learn is the Devil himself, the reader is prepared to see the metaphor realized every time the devil is mentioned. (Both translations lose this first reference to the Devil. Ginsburg has "perhaps I ought to drop everything and run down to Kislovodsk" (4); Glenny, "I think it's time to chuck everything up and go to Kislovodsk" (10).) We are prepared

to see the conventionally empty node represented by черт filled with the real Devil. Realization occurs again when Margarita says, "Дьяволу бы я заложила душу" (639) [I'd sell my soul to the Devil], and Azazello answers her thoughts.

"Черт знает, что это такое" (519) [the Devil knows what this is] acquires an ironical and humorous reading, laid bare by Margarita, when she says to the Master,

> Ты сейчас невольно сказал правду.... Черт знает и черт все устроит. (780-81)
> [You just spoke the truth without knowing it.... The Devil knows and the Devil will fix everything.]

The device is also laid bare in the scene in which Prokhor Petrovich's secretary says,

> Я всегда всегда остановила его, когда он чертыхался! Вот и дочертыхался. (6O6)
> [I always, always stopped him when he swore by the Devil! Now he's sworn by the Devil for the last time.]

This scene also represents iconically the emptying and filling of nodes described above: the empty suit continues the work of the bureaucrat, who approves all the resolutions the suit has made in his absence (750).

The appearance of the Devil when he is mentioned is not merely the revitalization of a dead metaphor; it is also punishment for breaking an ancient taboo. The Devil and his suite are very sensitive to such language taboos. When Margarita cries, "Боже!" [God!] (642), another empty metaphor, Azazello responds, frowning,

> Пожалуйста, без волнений и вскрикиваний
> [Please, no screaming.]

Similarly, when the cook raised her hand to make the sign of the cross,

> Азазелло грозно закричал с седла:
> -Отрежу руку! (787-88)
> [Azazello cried threateningly from the saddle, "I'll cut off your arm!"]

The semantic fields of the secret police and the Devil intersect openly twice in the novel with ironic and humorous effect. In Nikanor Ivanovich's dream he is asked where the dollars, which were, in fact, magical, had come from:

> -Волшебные! -явно иронически сказал кто-то в темном зале.
> -Так точно, волшебные, -робко ответил Никанор Иванович. (580)
> ["They're magical! " said someone in the dark hall, obviously ironically.
> "That's right, they are magical," Nikanor Ivanovich replied shyly.]

Finally there is one intersection of the two taboos--against the secret police and against the supernatural--that strongly suggests that the two phenomena are homologous in the novel: the superstitious Anfisa tells Anna Frantsevna,

> что она прекрасно знает кто утащил и жильца и милиционера, только к ночи не хочет говорить. (492)
> [that she knows perfectly well who took away the lodger and the policeman, only she doesn't want to say who at night.]

Likewise Bulgakov knows perfectly well who is responsible, only he doesn't want to say in print.

Abram Terc describes the effect of this reversal in the hierarchy of signifier and signified, of literature and reality, in his "Литературный процесс в России":

> Metaphorical expressions like "the lackeys of imperialism," "traitors to the working class," "hirelings of capital," "left deviation," "right deviation," were realized by Stalin in the full incarnation of the image in life. The pathos of 1937 lay in the unusually bright realization of metaphors, like in a novel, when the whole country was suddenly crawling with some kind of invisible (and therefore particularly dangerous) monsters, snakes, and scorpions under the terrible names "Trotskyite" or "wrecker"… It turned out that Russia was filled with literal (even if invisible) "enemies" who acted like demons and erased the boundary between reality and invention. Stalin turned on (perhaps without even suspecting it) the magical powers locked in the language, and Russian society, which has always been susceptible to a figurative perception of the word, to the miraculous transformation of life into the plot of a novel (hence, by the way, the beauty and greatness of Russian literature),

> succumbed to this weird illusion of living in a world of miracles, magic, treachery, and art, which as everyone can see control reality and cause a chill to run down one's back while they present some kind of strong visual pleasure.[24]

If we return with this description of Soviet reality to Bulgakov's novel, we find numerous points of similarity. Metaphors are realized in the novel as in life. In life as in the novel the line dividing reality from fantasy is blurred. The magical powers of the language (taboos in Bulgakov) are invoked, and the result is a world of miracles and sorcery, a theatrical world. Again, in the words of Milosz, "it is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails among people in the East otherwise than as acting. Even one's gestures, tone of voice, or preference for certain kinds of neckties are interpreted as signs of one's political tendencies."[25] (Is it any wonder semiotics flourished on such ground?)

What is expressed in words takes precedence over reality itself. This can clearly be seen in yet another filling of a conventionally empty node:

> Никанор Иванович до своего сна совершенно не знал произведений Пушкина, но самого его знал прекрасно и ежедневно по несколько раз повторял фразы вроде: "а за квартиру Пушкин платить будет?" или "Лампочку на лестнице, стало быть, Пушкин вывинтил", "Нефть, стало быть, Пушкин покупать будет?" (583)
>
> [Nikanor Ivanovic before his dream didn't know the works of the poet Pushkin at all. But Pushkin himself he knew very well and every day he repeated several times

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[24] Абрам Терц, "Литературный процесс в России" № 1 _Intent_ (1974), 143-190; quotation from 161-62, my translation.

[25] Milosz, _op. cit._, 54.

sentences like "And who's gonna pay for the apartment, Pushkin?" or "I suppose Pushkin unscrewed the light bulb on the staircase?" "I suppose Pushkin will buy the gas?"]

The real Pushkin, он сам, is not the 19th century one or the one who wrote poetry; the real Pushkin lives in the words of the typical Soviet.[26] The primacy of Soviet linguistic reality over any other mode of existence can be seen in yet another reversal; the Soviet functionary Misha Berlioz does not have the same name as the composer, rather the French composer is described as "однофамилецМиши" (485) [has the same last name as Misha] .

Because of the magical power of words, the actions of the secret police can be referred to only indirectly. Not only is the NKVD shifted out of its primary role as pure agent it is also shifted into other modes of reality in the text--a process which simultaneously lends it numinosity and avoids the taboo. The primary mode of reality into which the secret police is shifted is dream: the dream of Nikanor Ivanovich about the special prison, Margarita's dream about the Master. In the Moscow novel, then, both the secret police and the Devil are in part explained away as dreams.

In Jerusalem, however, this is not the case. Here we have a shift into another reality--the past and a novel--where perhaps the taboo is not so strong. And here there is no conflict between the Devilts band and the secret police--the two are combined in Afranii, who is thus both sinister and effective. Not only is Afranii's identity

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[26] Terc refers to this marketplace version of Pushkin in Прогулки сПушкиным (London: Overseas Publications Interchange,1975), 8-9:

Итак, что останется от расхожих анекдотов о Пушкине? Останутся вертлявость и какая-то все-проникаемость Пушкина, умение испаряться и возникать внезапно, застегиваясь на ходу, принимая на себя роль получателя и раздавателя пинков-экспромптов, миссию козла отпущения, всеобщего холопа и доброхота, всюду сующего нос, неуловимого и вездесущего, универсального человека Никто, которого каждый знает, который все стерпит, за всех расквитается.
--Кто заплатит?
--Пушкин!

masked by the instability of reference to him by the narrator, but his own dialog with Pilate also exhibits disorienting shifts in language .

Pilate puts the command to murder luda iz Kiriafa in a putative indicative instead of the imperative:

> Я получил сегодня сведения о том, что его зарежут этой ночью. (723)
> [Today I received information that he will be murdered tonight.]

Here the indefinite personal form of the verb and the shift of mood are motivated by avoidance of responsibility for the crime. After the murder, Afranii describes the scene as if he had not been involved ("-agens"). He also purposely distorts the details in his account to mask the true course of events. Another veiled command is given later, when Pilate suggests,

> Не покончил ли он сам с собой? (740)
> [might he not have killed himself?]

When Afranii says this is unlikely, Pilate responds,

> Я готов спорить, что через самое короткое время слухи об этом поползут по всему городу. (740)
> [I am ready to bet that in a very short time rumors of this will spread all over town.]

As it is the reader's knowledge of the actions of the secret police that renders the fantastic grotesque, so here it is the reader's recollection of the Biblical account that causes a shiver of recognition to run down his spine. But Pilate does not command; the imperative is shifted into other moods, other syntactic structures. Only when Levii Matvei asks him who committed the murder does Pilate finally answer,

> Это сделал я. (746)
> [I did it.]

This time the reader shivers at the abrupt transtion to direct, unmasked speech; until this point he is made to hesitate between various agents of the action.

Perhaps one of the clearest reflections of the grotesqueries of the Stalinist system in Bulgakov's novel comes in the epilog, in which the black cats become the victims:

> Штук сто примерно этих мирных, преданных человеку и полезных животных были застрелены или истреблены иными способами в разных местах страны. (801)
> [About a hundred of these peaceful animals, useful and devoted to man, were shot or destroyed by other means in various parts of the country.]

This is not only an intersection of the supernatural sphere with that of the secret police, it also reflects the situation in Russian, "когда по всей стране вдруг заползали какие-то... гады, змеи, скорпионы" [when the whole country was suddenly crawling with some kind of… monsters, snakes, and scorpions].

Both masking (emptying of semantically full nodes) and realization of metaphor (filling of conventionally empty nodes) serve to estrange the relationship between language and reality. In fiction the goal of such devices is to generate fantastic and grotesque effects. But in life the same devices are themselves generated by a reversal of the hierarchy between language and reality; what does or does not exist in language takes precedence over what does or does not exist in reality. If the use of these devices to estrange reality results in tht grotesque in Bulgakov's novel, then the grotesqueries of the Soviet system itself promote exactly the same devices in his society.