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Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*: Peace of Mind – Reward or Punishment?

> You uttered your words as if you don't acknowledge shadows, or evil either. Kindly consider the question: What would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it? Shadows are cast by objects and people. Here is the shadow of my sword. Trees and living beings also have shadows. Do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light? (Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 360)

The decline of the Whites, Bulgakov's destitution

Like some other writers of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Bulgakov belonged to the classical tradition of Pushkin and Tolstoy. His first novel *The White Guard* (1924) chronicles vicissitudes of the Turbin family decaying under the influence of war and later revolution. The action is set in Kiev in 1918 when German, Ukrainian nationalist, and Bolshevik troops in turn occupied the city. The disintegration of the characters drawn from the gentry intelligentsia symbolizes the national tragedy of Russia during the Civil War. White officers are shown as heroic and honourable, but because the split between them and the lower class, their cause is marked by hopelessness and, on the whole, "a sense of futility and doom pervades the novel"[1]. Thus the crux of the matter is the inherent weakness of the Whites, determining their future decline. As they do not have anything prospective and creative to offer, they are doomed to failure, not only in terms of symbolic representation, but in reality as well. Furthermore, their heroism at the front is contrasted with their conduct when they are far removed from the enemy, which situation likewise demands sacrifices. But there, at the rear,

[1] Vyacheslav Zavalishin, *Early Soviet Writers*, New York: Praeger, 1958, p. 329.

> the only thought of the upper classes was how to preserve a pleasant, easy life. Their hatred of Bolshevism was not open, fighting hatred; it was a cowardly hatred hissing from a dark corner. The White Guard is the story of the gradual transformation of heroes into frightened little people in the face of the terrible power of Bolshevism [2].

Understandably, because of profound psychological delineation of its upper class characters viewed by the author, all in all, with sympathy rather than severe criticism, the novel was not approved by censors and it was never published in the book format in the Soviet Union, however, it was issued outside Russia. On the other hand, Bulgakov was asked to conceive a play based on the novel. The resultant version for the stage was entitled *The Days of the Turbins*, and despite its severe criticism at the hands of the literary establishment, the play was granted permission to continue at the Moscow Art Theatre, as Stalin himself advocated the playwright. In consequence, Bulgakov was, strangely enough, never arrested, but he was vexed constantly by a policy of censorship that reduced him to poverty, preventing him from publishing his work. Admittedly, some rumours were spread about his compromises with the authorities, which were then repeated by some critics, but they have never been confirmed, and thus seem to be far-fetched [3]. Out of despair and impoverishment, Bulgakov in 1930 wrote an extended and daring letter to the central government, asking for permission to emigrate or, alternatively, to be given a job in the theatre.

From realism to fantasy and grotesque

Apparently, *The White Guard* is a novel written in a traditional, realistic convention, although the narrative flexibly shifts from the historical to the personal, from the objective and panoramic to the subjective and intimate. To make things more complex, Bulgakov conveys a large part of the story through dreams, which causes sufficient suffusion of ideas to prevent the reader from any obvious and translucent interpretation. This effect of opacity and of reality turned upside-down is intensified in his succeeding works of fiction, which can be considerably classified as fantasy. Thus in *Heart of a Dog*, "Diaboliad" and *The Fatal Eggs* are subordinated to the principle of the satiric and the grotesque.

Heart of a Dog (1925) is a satire of the transformist idea as well as of the Soviet proletariat, reflected in a story about the medical transformation of a dog into a man whose attention is mostly focused on desires to remove the world of cats. The transformist concept was in Stalinist culture was related both to the agronomist

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[2] Zavalishin, p. 331.

[3] Miklós Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003, p. 238.

Lysenko's statement that he was able to radically change one species of plant into another, and to the cell biologist Lepeshinskaia's claim that it was possible for her to grow cells from acellular material and in that way create life. More threateningly, however, the theory was likewise applied to the concept of the New Man whose energy might be conducive to the overall transformation of society, the citizens of which would spawn still new generations equipped with newly acquired features:

> In 1932 Stalin set up an Institute for the Study of Man in Pavlov's name and established his findings as orthodoxy. Like Michurin's work in agronomy and genetics, Pavlov's work in physiology was used to defend the position that a New Man could be created by behavior modification. The individual was significant not in himself, but as a malleable and improvable part of society, a hero of a new type [4].

A similar motif, likewise concerning the process of transformation is displayed in *The Fatal Eggs*, where a red ray, discovered by a scientist, is used for the increased reproduction and size of animals. But, by mistake, instead of being applied to chickens, the experiment involves snake eggs, and the country is over-run by giant reptiles which destroy everything on their way to Moscow. The resulting satire is said to be grounded on the Wellsian fantasy, particularly referring to *The Food of the Gods and How it Came to Earth*, where the 'food' is presented as the red ray, and to *The War of the Worlds* with its march of the aliens to London.

With its many references to Gogol and, to some extent, to Dostoevsky's novella *The Double*, *The Diaboliad* (1926) merges satire and fantasy in a different manner, where the farcical and grotesque are far more emphasized, and elements of science, pseudo-science or science fiction considerably reduced, if visible in the least. It is a story of Korotkov, a minor, unassuming and always frightened clerk of the Main Central Base for Match Materials. As one of innumerable victims of continuous political purges in the Soviet Union, he goes insane after his salaries are paid in matches and after a number of encounters with a man named Kalsoner (also translated duly into English as Panteleimon) and his bearded twin brother, the more so that that peculiar man has been appointed manager. Thus the satire on the inhuman institutional, bureaucratic life is not merely an attempt to render its absurdity, but it departs from the realm of the intelligible and familiar. The presented world is on the verge of surrealistic nightmare and phantasmagoria.

On the whole, in the three above stories, Bulgakov uses two forms of satirical fantasy subordinated to the principle of Enlightenment (*Heart of a Dog*, *The Fatal Eggs*) and Romanticism (*The Diaboliad*), respectively. Whereas the former is more related to an objective, or at least quasi-scientific, representation of reality,

[4] Robert C. Williams, *Russia Imagined: Art, Culture and National Identity, 1840-1995*, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p. 124.

the latter stands for the relativization of possible meanings. As Julius Kagarlitski has it:

> It [the principle of the Enlightenment] is based on the desire of the man of the Enlightenment to find a single sensual interpretation of the world. The need of many premises in fantasy was a reaction to the Enlightenment. Realistic fantasy explains the diversity of the forms of life which it exhibits with such pleasure in terms of the boundless riches of nature alone; romantic fantasy—by the fact that there are in operation in the world many conflicting laws and that the world lacks unity. This universe knows only one general law—lawlessness[5].

In other words, the Romantic satirical fantasy even more approximates grotesque with bizarre distortions and incongruous juxtapositions. As a matter of fact, the satiric perspective shown by Bulgakov is closer to grotesque rather than to fantasy, as it has a far stronger affinity with a realistic presentation of the external world. Contrasted in this respect with the fantastic, "it is precisely the conviction that the grotesque world, real or immediate, which makes the grotesque so powerful"[6]. Contrarily, if the author creates a fantasy land exclusively out of their imagination, the land that is not in the least related to the real world, we cannot speak of the outlandish distortion of this reality. According to Clute and Grant:

> A fantasy is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms[7].

This signifies that fantasy is attributed with an escapist connotation, which is most probably responsible for its growing popularity today. It contemporaneously generates an opportunity for readers to indulge in their dreams, as it frequently works as an imaginary remedy for the omnipresent cynicism of corrupted politics, corporations and mass media. In this way, paradoxically enough, the function of fantasy overlaps, at least partly, with that of grotesque, although the former symbolically neutralizes the forces of evil, whereas the latter actively counteracts the effects of the abuse of power. All the same, they both are applied by Bulgakov to denote the unrestrained excess of the Soviet exploitation of science.

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[5] Julius Kagarlitski, "Realism and Fantasy," [in:] Thomas D. Clareson, ed., *SF: the Other Side of Realism: Essays on Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1971, p. 46.

[6] Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972, p. 23.

[7] John Clute and John Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, London: Orbit Books, 1999, p. 338.

The Master and Margarita – the bizarre and the mystical

Unlike Bulgakov's former works of fiction, *The Master and Margarita* synthesizes the functions of satirical realism and Romantic grotesquery respectively[8]. As a result, the Welsian, quasi-scientific grotesque fantasy *Heart of a Dog* and *The Fatal Eggs* and the romantic grotesque of "The Diaboliad" converge to create an even more complex vision rooted in satire. There are works of art the appearance of which was on the verge of sheer improbability. Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, which was published in 1966, twenty six years after its author's death, is one of such masterpieces. By that year the slackening of tensions that had occurred after Stalin's death was followed by another period of severe political restrictions, of de-Stalinization. At the same time, the reading of the novel as a mere satire of Stalinist oppression is simplified and ill-conceived. It was rather the desire to awaken the freedom of intellect, vision and imagination, the dream of a new spirit and brighter future. Thus *Master and Margarita*, in contrast to Bulgakov's previous writings,

> was far more profound and even mystic, proclaiming as it did that man as a spiritual entity is an enigma, apparently not at all yielding to a facile key provided by Marxism. The new Soviet reader, barred by the Party from any indulgence in mysticism and metaphysics, hankered after Bulgakov's novel[9].

The complexity of its texture is largely due to its stratified story, the main two motifs of which are interwoven plots, one taking place in contemporary (i.e., the 1930s Moscow), and the other in ancient Jerusalem contemporary to Jesus (called here Yeshua). Whereas the former involves a great variety of events and minor episodes as well as a considerable group of characters, though focused on a few major ones – Woland (standing for Satan) with his demonic posse, Ivan Homeless, the writer referred to as the title "master" and his love Margarita; the latter is virtually confined to Pontius Pilat, Yeshua, Matthew Levi, Judas and Aphranius, the head of Pilate's secret police. Also the tone of the two motifs is distinctly different – the atmosphere of the ferocious Soviet terror and anti-religious propaganda is rendered by the effective contrast between the alleged normality of life in Moscow and the uncanny and bizarre exploits of Woland and his subsidiaries. Contrarily, the aura of the other motif receded to the time of Pilat and Yeshua is far more economical, austere and technically balanced, on the verge of being laconic, which suffuses it

[8] In view of the mentioned argumentation, we assume that the term "grotesque" is more pertinent to the literary convention employed by Bulgakov than "fantasy," though the latter is also (but to a lesser extent) applicable to it.

[9] Harry T. Moore, Albert Parry, *Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974, p. 113.

with the tinge of mystical indeterminacy. Interestingly, the two settings are thematically subordinated to, and controlled by, the substance of a moving love story, "a romance in the old sense – the celebration of a beautiful woman, of a true love, and of personal courage"[10].

However, the story's pivotal point is the confrontation between the forces of good and evil, as well as between the spiritual and the worldly. The concept of disharmony between the incompatible phenomena is shown in both the distant historical periods: "Jesus in Jerusalem, two thousand years ago, against Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea and the high priest Caiaphas; and the devil Woland in Bulgakov's Moscow of the thirties against Stalin's totalitarian regime"[11]. Appropriately, all these conflicts are underscored by the clash between the position of an individual, independent artist and a hardline policy of the oppressive, totalitarian system.

Nevertheless, the real terror of political repression and violence was only to occur a decade later. That is why, despite some resemblance of Bulgakov's fantasy to Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian political satire merged with science fiction, the latter appears to be much more intense and unrelenting. Admittedly, both writers did not survive until the 1940s, but whereas Bulgakov focuses his attention more on the existing condition of affairs, largely perceived from the perspective of the Menippean satire, partly embittered, partly benevolent in tone, as the case may be, Zamyatin's derision of the police state signifying the Soviet organizational form does not read like a raillery, but like contemptuous, prophetic vision, more related to the abominable potentialities of the present to be systematically deployed in the nearest future.

Paradoxically, despite Stalin's formidable means of intimidation against artists and intellectuals, particularly those independent-minded, strong-willed, uncompromising enough not to yield to external constraint, the rise and development of experimental tendencies in various faculties of art after the revolution was truly unprecedented:

> The Russian avant-garde, from the beginning of the twentieth century, had been active and pathbreaking in every artistic arena: photography, film, book design (including typography), architecture, painting, sculpture, literature, literary criticism, music, and theater. It was, moreover, a time of wonderful mingling of artistic genres. Poets no longer thought of themselves just as poets, but as poets-directors-artists-actors[12]

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[10] Richard Pevear, "Introduction," [in:] Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, London: Penguin Books, 1997, p. xiii.

[11] Constantin V. Ponomareff, *One Less Hope: Essays on Twentieth-Century Russian Poets*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, p. 185.

[12] Katherine Bliss Eaton, ed., *Enemies of the People: The Destruction of Soviet Literary, Theater, and Film Arts in the 1930s*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002, p. xxii.

At this point, to illustrate her thesis, Katherine Bliss Eaton gives the example "of such a hybrid was the poet-poster artist-playwright-actor Vladimir Mayakovsky, who, hounded by vicious and unrelenting official criticism of his work and haunted by a failed love affair, committed suicide in 1930"[13] Avowedly, Bulgakov was not politically persecuted, imprisoned or executed, nor even as vehemently attacked by his critics as Mayakovsky was. Still, it does not mean that he was left intact. On the contrary, although his early play *The Days of the Turbins* was permitted to be performed, all his successive dramatic works were banned, and his fiction prevented from publishing. Far as it was from fulfilling his creative aspirations, he was allowed to spend the last years of his life as a translator and transcriber of plays for the Moscow Art Theatre. Ironically, in analogy to a number of other Soviet writers,

> Bulgakov did not of course live to see the latterday resurrection of his work. Soon after his death in 1940, two of his plays had been staged (1941 and 1943), but none of his fiction was reprinted until 1955. Small editions of it were permitted by Khrushchev's government, for some ten years. Then, in 1965, with a spectacular rush, Bulgakov's name and work were made prominent, gaining reborn recognition both at home and in the West[14].

The dilemma of the artist

The aforementioned conflict between good and evil reflected in the fluid tone of the narrative – "moving freely from detached observation to ironic double voicing, to the most personal interjection"[15] – enhances the most personal motif of the novel, apart from the love story theme, i.e., the internal conflict of the unnamed Master. In this respect, he is foiled against the main miscreants of the novel: writers of imperfect learning who are thoughtless scribblers and imitators, devoid of honour and originality, and like their critics, judging literary works exclusively by the standards and criteria established by the leading and virtually only political party in the Soviet Union. It is them, even to a greater extent than a class of politicians, bureaucrats or police forces, who hold a true responsibility for the process of aesthetic regression and moral disintegration as a direct consequence of hierarchical dissolution within the Soviet society. Conversely, the Master with his detached stance is naturally shoved into the margin of fashionable literati's social life in Moscow. Thus far removed from the daily problems of the so-called intellectual and artistic elite, he is completely absorbed in his *opus magnum*, dedicated to the relationship between Pilat and Yeshua.

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[13] Eaton, p. xxii.

[14] Moore, Parry, p. 112.

[15] Pevear, p. xii.

In other words, the potential infinite malleability of the work's texture corresponds to the ideal of incantatory synthesis of good and evil, body and soul, mind and spirit. And these opposites are considerably incarnated by the Master's tormented psyche, his dichotomous sensing of reality, not merely external, but also, more importantly, spiritual. He is the figure of the archetypal, genuine artist, far more related to his creative power than to either outer circumstances or outward appearances. At the same time, he reflects the image of the individualized, independent Romantic creator, substantially different from the classicist supreme craftsman. As M. H. Abrams has it, the major criteria of this approach centre around sincerity, originality, intensity of emotion and a sense of alienation:

> To pose and answer aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the artist, rather than to external nature, or to the audience, or to the internal requirements of the work itself... This point of view is very young when measured against the twenty-five-hundred-year history of Western theory of art, for its emergence as a comprehensive approach to art shared by a large number of critics, dates back not much more than a century and a half[16]

In view of this, the Master's awareness of the miraculous power of his gift is inextricably connected with his natural inclination to venerate the truth of his art more than his own life. However, as mentioned before the theme of art's idealization is counterpointed, but also enriched and augmented by the motif of romantic (and thus likewise idealized) love story.

Curiously enough, Margarita's devotion to the Master is extended to her dedication to his masterpiece, and, as a result, it is not only the author's life, but also his lover's, that nurture his work and its sense of truth. Furthermore, it is largely due to Margarita that the Master's dichotomous nature and the consequent ambivalent perception of the world with its values are reinforced. He is thus linked to Sabbath with its witchcraft, when, to rescue him, his lover, invited to Woland's midnight ball, accepts the role of a witch with supernatural powers. Also, the Master's work, which refers to the events described in the Bible, is the account departing from the original source far enough to be called at least unorthodox and uncanonical, if not blasphemous.

Light and peace

Significantly, *The Master and Margarita* begins with an epigraph drawn from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*:

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[16] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953, p.3.

"...who are you then?"
"I am part of that power which eternally
Wills evil and eternally works good"[17].

The exchange between Faust and the devil is visibly reminiscent of the relation between the Master and Woland. Characteristically, Mephistopheles declares that, contrary to his will, he can be hardly called wrongdoer. Although his words are not meant to be taken seriously, nor even verbatim, as his major aim is to gain an advantage at Faust's expense, they appear to epitomize Woland's philosophy and attitude to mankind. On the one hand, controlling sinister Abaddon or Azazello, he brings about disaster, epitomizing destruction and thus evil forces himself. Conversely, he takes care of the Master and Margarita, showing appreciation of his intelligence and her courageous devotion to her beloved.

On the surface, there are also some parallels between the diabolical spirits created by Goethe and Bulgakov – they both limp, and despite their ominous nature, they turn out to be quite adept jesters if they happen to be in the right mood. At this point, Bulgakov remarkably departs from the main motif from *Faust*, grounded on the struggle between Faust and Mephisopheles. Contrariwise, the grand ball given by Woland, notwithstanding the baleful foreboding it is endowed with, does not ultimately aim at holding Margarita in bondage. Even though initially she appears to be eternally dependent on the devilish spirit and the portentous, awe-inspiring event she agrees to be involved in, she is then allowed to be released:

> Within the broad witches' domain that is Moscow lies the concentrated Sabbath proper, the ball of brawl given by Woland and attended by the semblances of the notorious dead, the luxuriously attired criminals. This affair is a combination of a Witches' Sabbath, a grand ball, and a scene from Hell. [...] When Margarita, queen of the evening, is bathed in blood, it is not an indication that she is a scarlet woman, still less that she is 'washed in the blood of the lamb.' For the moment she is playing the role of the Archisposa, the chief bride of Satan, but she manages to escape without perceptible damage[18].

The master is likewise set free in the end, both literally and in a spiritual manner. At the same time, it is decided that he will be taken care by the devil, not Jesus:

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[17] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor, The Pennsylvania State University, 2014, p. 47.

[18] Henry Hatfield, "The Walpurgis Nights of Goethe and Bulgakov," [in:] *Goethe in the Twentieth Century*, Alexej Ugrinsky, ed., New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 54.

> 'He has read the master's work,' said Matthew Levi, 'and asks you to take the master with you and reward him with peace. Is that hard for you to do, spirit of evil?'
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> 'Nothing is hard for me to do.' Answered Woland, ' you know that very well.' He paused and added: 'But why don't you take him with you into the light?'
>
> 'He does not deserve the light, he deserves peace,' Levi said in a sorrowful voice.
>
> 'Tell him it will be done,' Woland replied and added, his eye flashing: And leave me immediately.'
>
> 'He asks that she who loved him and suffered because of him also be taken with him,' Levi addressed Woland pleadingly for the first time[19].

Deserving peace, but not being worthy of as much as light, the Master and Margarita have to face the consequences of their deeds. The Master's claim to the only true interpretation, or even the ultimate cognizance, of the spiritual is dichotomously counterpointed with his passivity to upholding his stance against militant atheism and dialectical materialism devoid of spiritual enlightenment. Contrarily, Margarita's dedication to her beloved as well as his masterpiece is marked with courage, ironically, however, her strong pent-up emotion is given vent when she agrees to a covenant with Woland, thus nominally serving the forces of evil. Moreover, even if the Master's relation to diabolical spirits and the Sabbath world is indirect, as it has been initiated by Margarita, his work departs very far from Christian scholastic, fundamentalist doctrine of Biblical infallibility, which renders his illuminated interpretation highly controversial and partly profane.

In a due manner, what the Master is offered by Woland corresponds to the ambivalence of his attitude to the external world, to himself and, perhaps most importantly, to his masterpiece. Having sunk into despair after the vehement criticism to which his work was exposed, he destroys it with flames. Paradoxically, it is Woland, who recreates the book because, as he states, "manuscripts don't burn"[20]. Significantly, he is a diabolical spirit whose status is similarly dichotomous, and – as stated in the epigraph of *Master and Margarita* – he is halfway between the evil he represents and good for he is sometimes tempted to do good. In view of this, in the end, the Master is rewarded with peace he has been searching for, but also punished with forgetfulness, which is to be inextricably connected with serenity.

In consequence, the Master's personality is determined by Pontius Pilate whom he describes. The procurator of Judea through his pusillanimity loses the opportunity to be illuminated by the conversation with Christ. As it is pointed out in the novel, cowardice is the worst of human defects, and in this respect, the master becomes a figure akin to Pilate. In analogy to Pilate, the Master is overwhelmed by his fearfulness, and, in consequence, he suffers his great opportunity to escape.

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[19] Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, pp. 360-1.

[20] Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 287.

Unlike Pontius, however, he attempts to feel reconciled to his sense of loss and failure. Therefore, in the end, Pilate is bestowed an honour to converse with Jesus, the symbol of light, whereas the Master, due to his despair and resigned, unresisting attitude, is merely allowed peace.

On the other hand, in the internal world of Bulgakov's work, there is no clear-cut distinction between light and darkness (which Woland prefers to call 'shadow'), and thus the categories of 'good' and 'evil' partly overlap in a fashion considerably anticipating the Postmodern rejection of binary oppositions. Hence Margarita, epitomizing the corporeal and erotic attraction, does a good, heroic deed which, paradoxically, links her with the forces of darkness. At the same time, through her sacrificial act, she transcends the ordinary limits of her condition, opening her way to the light. As Emmanuel Levinas states, the concept of the infinite remains a mystery, "a paradoxical knot" tied in indeterminate sphere of human existence, but also in religious revelation which

> [...] bound from the start in its concreteness to commandments directed toward human beings, is knowledge of a God who, while offering himself within this openness, also remains absolutely other, or transcendent. Would religion not be the original juncture of circumstances in which the infinite comes to the mind in its ambiguity of truth and mystery?[21].

Seeing the spiritual, discerning the Other

Considering Muscovites' fundamental difficulty in perceiving the infinite, the mysterious, the characters of Margarita and Master appear magnified in their heroism. They counter the Soviet socio-political tendencies dialectically poised against the spiritual and the ineffable by augmenting their openness to transcendence by the power of their love. In truth, Bulgakov's genuine approach to religion is far from being orthodox, but it is aimed at refreshing the idea of the spiritual in the world where every traditional religion, particularly Christianity, has been incurring odium and vilification. Under these circumstances, any effort to catch a glimpse of the infinite is like a remarkable exploit because

> In the idea of the infinite, which as such is the idea of God, the *affection* of the finite by the infinite takes place, beyond the simple negation of the one by the other, beyond the pure contradiction which would oppose and separate them or which would expose the other to the hegemony of the One [...][22].

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[21] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, London: Continuum, 2006, p. 189.

[22] Levinas, p. 190.

In this way, the perception of the spiritual and the infinite is constituted by the revival of supreme love, love understood as originary and primordial, uniting the One, who stands for the self, with the Other signifying God.

As mentioned before, the motif of Master and Margarita and that of Jesus and Pilate, both momentous and lofty in tone, are interposed between much more extended passages concerning social scenes from Moscow of the 1930s. The imagery and style are predominantly vivid and colourful, adroitly fusing the intensely lifelike with the grotesquely fantastic. It is especially in these fragments that the enigmatic and intricate text is abundant in multifarious images and themes tinged with a sense of ambivalence and grounded on masquerade "of the kind that Bakhtin associates with carnivalesque literature-particularly with the tradition of Menippean satire "[23]. Incidentally, for Bakhtin the concept of the paramount dialogic faith is related to a conversation ("the ultimate threshold dialogue") with Christ, regarded as the epitome of truth[24]. But these sections of social satire featuring ordinary and petty-minded inhabitants of Moscow, entirely dedicated to their entertainments and distractions. In this context, Ivan Homeless, who embraces the whole story, forms a link between the mundane and the supernatural. This is a moot question, how radically he got transformed owing to his experiences. Symbolically, he might be treated as the Master's disciple, particularly sensitive to his memories during the spring full moon, which symbol is a conspicuous allusion to Pilate's mental torment. Conversely, he tries to adjust to everyday reality, trying to believe that "he fell victim to criminal hypnotists and was afterwards treated and cured"[25]. In this regard, he represents an average reader with their weaknesses, inhibitions and fears, whose hopes of something extraordinary, of encountering the other, or even the Other, gradually recede.

STRESZCZENIE

Mistrz i Małgorzata Michaiła Bułhakowa – czy spokój ducha jest nagrodą czy karą?

Autor analizuje powieść Michała Bułhakowa *Mistrz i Małgorzata* w aspekcie takich cech jak groteska, satyra, fantasy, quasi-naukowe opisy, realizm i mistycyzm. Większość z tych atrybutów była sprawnie wykorzystana przez rosyjskiego pisarza w jego wcześniejszych powieściach i opowiadaniach, jednak *Mistrz i Małgorzata* jest utworem znacznie

[23] M. Keith Booker; Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin, and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism, and History*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995, p. 39.

[24] Gary Saul Morson; Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 62.

[25] Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 393.

bardziej złożonym, którego struktura jest właściwie celową syntezą tych, wydawałoby się, przeciwstawnych sposobów prowadzenia narracji, jak i kontrastujących ze sobą technik. W rezultacie ta wielobarwna, mozaikowa kompozycja utworu staje się jednocześnie wyznacznikiem funkcji jego treści, opartej na kontrastach. W artykule uwypuklone są najistotniejsze, według autora, antagonizmy: groteska – fantasy, klasycyzm – romantyzm, realizm – mistycyzm, humor (w szczególności ironia) – podniosłość, światło – ciemność, Bóg – Szatan, co odzwierciedlone jest również w przewodniej idei powieści, uwarunkowanej relacją pomiędzy dobrem a złem. Związek ten może być rozpatrywany na zasadzie zwalczających się niezgodności, w świetle których zarówno utwór Mistrza, jak i samego Bułhakowa może być uznany za bluźnierstwo, ale może też być uznany jako teza o logicznie dopełniających się przeciwieństw, których integralna synteza jest podstawą postępu.