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'Unassimilable to Orthodoxy': Mapping Bulgakov's Anti-Soviet Allegory

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**'Unassimilable to Orthodoxy':
Mapping Bulgakov's Anti-Soviet Allegory**

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The Master and Margarita is a strange, dense work. Oddly enough, I first read it years ago in the seventh grade; I was the unwitting victim of a family friend who thought he'd quiet my clamor for a good book with Bulgakov's novel. I loved it. It was a much longer read then, and I remember a keen sense of wanting the novel to continue in perpetuity; it was so unlike anything I had ever read. At the time I was completely absorbed in fantasy literature of the knights-and-dragons type, and *The Master and Margarita* caught hold of my interest with particular force because it combined elements of fantasy with a real-world setting. I understood the novel on a superficial level (which is enough to justify reading it), and was completely unaware of anti-Soviet satire or other historical references. My knowledge of Soviet History was practically non-existent. Being raised outside of any organized religion, the chapters set in Old Jerusalem were a curiosity to me, and because Bulgakov purposefully employs alternate transliterations the names of Christ, Judas, etc., I was hardly aware that I was reading his rendering of the crucifixion, and even if I had been, I would not have been able to make a mental comparison with the biblical account. I had not the faintest idea who Pontius Pilate was. That the author was making a deeper, more serious point, escaped me, but I had an intense appreciation for the narrator's ironic and sarcastic tone, and even as a seventh-grader I could appreciate a band of characters wreaking havoc among bureaucrats.

For this project I have reread the novel twice, and on the first reading I was immediately impressed with Bulgakov's devilish skewering of the Soviet system. Rereading the second time, with the knowledge of my advisor and with my own research concurrently underway, I realized that what I had seen was only part of an elaborate

submerged structure. I glimpsed in part another, allegorical, dimension to the novel, and I wanted to illuminate the whole allegorical scheme. This scheme, for obvious historical reasons, is as deeply embedded and difficult to put together as any allegory could feasibly be in a work of fiction. It is not the only important element of the novel, nor perhaps is it the novel's primary feature, but it is the element at the greatest distance from most readers, and it adds a lot that is useful, entertaining, and enlightening to the reader's interpretation. The idea of an allegory in the novel is not new, but it remains undeveloped and is usually limited to the obvious association between Woland and Stalin. My aim here is to sketch the allegory contained in *The Master and Margarita* with specific regard to the Soviet government. Beyond this limit remains allegorical links with biblical and literary figures, not touched on here. Special attention is given to Woland's link with Stalin, since Lesley Milne, Bulgakov's major biographer in the west, specifically denies the link. I will refute Milne's arguments.

The fantastical romp presented in the first part of the novel contains a hidden but highly specified allegory to real events that either immediately preceded or were contemporary with the writing of the novel. The allegory can be broken down into three sets of personages that function as separate groups. I will establish the allegorical links between Bulgakov's characters and real historical figures in the following order: first, I will deal with apartment 302 bis and its previous and current tenants (prior to Woland's arrival); second, I will deal with the employees of the Moscow Variety Theater; and lastly I will discuss Woland and his retinue. Mapping Bulgakov's allegory in *The Master and Margarita* is a lot like setting up a chain of dominos; links that at first seem far

fetches are substantiated by the details to which they lend new emphasis, and in turn the significance of some of these details may not solidify until further on in the chain. I want to emphasize that I am not out to construct a preconceived scheme by forcing innocent elements of the novel to play along: each new discovery is tested by its accord with other related elements, and I would reject any link that did not hold up under scrutiny. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to give a brief rationale for why Bulgakov would have created such a deeply embedded allegory in the first place.

Today, with the Soviet Union a thing of the past, we know that from 1917 until the Bulgakov's death in 1940, Russia was ruled by a totalitarian regime fanatically committed to social engineering that expunged millions of lives – sometimes for “reasons” based in Marxist or Leninist theory, sometimes simply to inspire fear in the populace and encourage slavish loyalty and obedience. Publishing satire with an anti-Soviet theme was impossible; daring to write it all was extremely dangerous. Using comic absurdity in a novel serves to distance it from reality and shelter the author from an ideologically vigilant audience. That the allegory is interdependent makes it difficult to discern without access to the relevant historical facts, which partially explains the incredibly limited nature of much of the Western criticism written about the novel prior to 1991 (which unfortunately constitutes most of the Western criticism). Bulgakov's elusive tactics were certainly key to the novel's initial publication in the USSR in 1966. Portions of the novel were cut, but it was impossible to purge all of the offensive material since it is so pervasive and comes in so many shapes and sizes. Much of the novel's most scathing material was accidentally included in the first publication; the censors were simply unequipped to pin down the novel's criticism.

Perhaps the best key to the novel's anti-Soviet allegory is contained in the number of the apartment building taken over by Woland and his retinue: 302 bis. The Russian word "bis" ('once more,' 'encore') can be interpreted as Bulgakov's way of hinting at the number two, and 302 plus two equals 304, which is the exact number of years that the Romanov dynasty was in power prior the March revolution in 1917. Thus the apartment functions as a symbol for pre-Soviet Russia. This would be rather far-fetched were it not supported to some extent by the circumstances in which Bulgakov was writing and, more importantly, by substantial evidence in the novel itself. Both kinds of support are forthcoming upon close examination.

If we take apartment number 302 bis to be symbolic of Russia, a number of details begin to emerge from the narrative, the first of which is the apartment's tenant history: "Two years ago it had still belonged to the widow of the jeweler de Fougeray. Anna Frantsevna de Fourgeray, a respectable and very practical fifty-year-old woman, let out three of the five rooms to lodgers, one whose last name was apparently Belomut, and another with a lost last name" (Bulgakov, 75-76). The family of jewelers suggests the actual historical personage of Carl Faberge, who provided jewelry to the Tsar's family and to the Russian nobility. On a symbolic level, jewelry and the jeweler's profession encapsulate everything the Bolsheviks declared war on - wealth, decorative finery, private ownership - and stand in stark contrast with the party dogma of a utilitarian paradise. These associations are corroborated by the second part of the quoted passage. The Russian word "Belomut" means "trouble-maker" and here probably refers to Lenin, who led the Bolshevik revolution. Aside from the sarcasm it lends to the tone, the use of

the word “apparently” is also suggestive of Lenin because “Lenin,” as with many of the Old Bolsheviks, including Stalin and Kamenev, was an adopted name.

Even the smallest details of the passage are in harmony with historical events: we are told that the Jeweler’s family “let three out of five rooms to lodgers,” which is an accurate metaphor for the political toleration – if intermittent and somewhat unstable – given to political parties in 1905 following Russia’s loss in the Russo-Japanese War. If Russia, in particular the Russian government, is seen metaphorically as an apartment complex, then 1905 was indeed the first time that anyone besides the Tsar and the Nobility were let inside the building. Moreover, the image of a wealthy family that has seen better days and must let out a few rooms to sustain itself is in perfect keeping with the situation of the Tsar’s family after Russia’s military defeat in 1904-05. The political reforms made in 1905 – the legality of political parties and the establishment of the Duma – were made to avoid revolution, to avoid a complete loss of power. In the same way, the de Fourgeray family must reform its financial situation or lose the apartment altogether.

It seems very probable that the tenant whose name “got lost” is Alexander Kerensky, the head of the provisional government toppled by the Bolsheviks in October 1917. Kerensky fled to the west and eventually became a professor in the United States. The mere mention of Kerensky’s name would have been incriminating during the early Soviet years, and thus his name has been “lost.” If Kerensky and Lenin occupy two out of three rooms, who is in the third? It is reasonable to expect that the third figure will also be a prominent revolutionary, and since the allegory thus far maintains history’s chronology, Styopa Likhodeev is most probably connected with Leon Trotsky. Styopa is Belomut’s (Lenin’s) old roommate, and he is the only tenant left before Woland takes

over the apartment. Allegorically, he must be Trotsky, both because Trotsky is the only historical figure as prominent in the 1917 revolutions as Lenin and Kerensky, and because he survives Lenin only to lose a political struggle with Stalin (Woland). Certainly, the Likhodeev/Trotsky link fits with the novel's allegorical elements that correspond to events prior to 1925; we will see that it also fits with the allegory as it parallels specific historical events of the late 1920s and the 1930s.

Let us pause to recount what we have constructed. Apartment 302 bis is symbolic of pre-Soviet Russia; the family that used to live there symbolizes the Romanov family; Belomut suggests the real historical figure of Lenin; the nameless tenant similarly suggests Kerensky, and Likhodeev functions in this scheme as Leon Trotsky. These identifications are in perfect harmony with Woland's takeover of apartment 302 bis at the end of chapter seven. Certainly, Woland actually *is* the devil in many important ways (and all of the characters discussed above have a life in the novel separate from their place in Bulgakov's elaborate allegory), but it is impossible to avoid Woland's association with Josef Stalin. Stalin, temporarily allied with Zinoviev and Kamenev, deposed Trotsky in 1925. The Stalin/Woland link, which is the most obvious in the novel, will be developed in more detail below. For the moment I will proceed to the second allegorical group, the Variety Theater set of characters.

After taking over the apartment, Woland moves against various employees of the Moscow Variety Theater. The theater has no historical counterpart (as far as actual theaters are concerned) and seems to function as a metaphor for the Communist Party. Much of what I have already established supports such an interpretation. Apartment 302 bis symbolizes Russia, and its current resident at the start of the novel – Styopa

Likhodeev – is the director of the Variety Theater. Trotsky, Likhodeev’s allegorical counterpart, was the major figure in the Communist Party before suffering political defeat at the hands of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev. Furthermore, Woland targets important employees of the Variety Theater almost exclusively (with the exception of Berlioz and Homeless, both of whom are literary figures). Finally, the number of theater characters (with the addition of Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy) that fall victim to Woland is the same as the number of Old Bolsheviks who fell victim to Stalin in the struggle for power between 1924-1928. I will explain below why Bosoy can be regarded as part of the same set.

Replacing “the Communist Party” with “the Variety Theater” is duly unflattering in all sorts of deliciously ironic ways: it lambastes the party’s high-minded and self-enclosed theoretical outpourings as empty theatrics; it draws attention to the fact that one-party rule, regardless of the theory behind it, is always elitist and authoritarian, the very opposite of “variety.” The ridiculous performance put on at the Variety Theater at the beginning of chapter twelve is typical of the kind of entertainment that was often put on under Communist rule. Actors with abnormal physiognomies ride around in circles on oversized unicycles or undersized bicycles, wearing absurd costumes and with foxtrot music playing in the background. The comedy is purely physical and completely mindless; it is a production without plot or characters intended as a distraction rather than as a stimulus to relevant social thought (read: anti-Soviet agitation), or to thought of any kind. It also parodies the experimentations (“futurism,” “constructionism,” etc.) in art and style which characterize the 1920s and which Bulgakov deplored.

Before launching into an allegorical analysis of the Variety Theater characters, a quick overview of Stalin’s actual consolidation of power may be useful. After Lenin’s

death, Trotsky was the presumptive successor, which embittered his rivals and caused Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Stalin to unite against him. Once Trotsky was effectively neutralized (like other fallen Bolsheviks that followed, Trotsky was not completely expelled from the party for several years – his defeat was in effect a removal not from the party but from its uppermost circles), Zinoviev and Kamenev, whose alliance brought together considerable bases in St. Petersburg and Moscow, attempted to establish themselves as the preeminent party leaders. Stalin had already effectively co-opted the lower echelons of the party, and succeeded in getting Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov (who were also not fully aware of Stalin's growing control of much of the party's new personnel) to work with him in the party's top circles. Zinoviev and Kamenev were politically overpowered and then neutralized, and almost immediately afterward Bukharin realized the weakness of his position and acknowledged as much in a visit to the marginalized Kamenev. This visit would be used against both men during show trials ten years later. Trotsky was the only Old Bolshevik allowed to leave the country (Stalin had not power enough to prevent him, at the time); he was murdered by Stalinist Agents in Mexico City in 1940, the same year Bulgakov died. Tomsky committed suicide, and the remaining Old Bolsheviks were all implicated in fabricated conspiracies and then executed in the late 1930s, several years after they had been politically neutralized. It should be noted that Stalin was always regarded by the other Old Bolsheviks as a mediocre follower – in their eyes it was Stalin who added weight to their own alliances and not the other way around. None of them understood Stalin's genius for behind-the-scenes manipulation until it was too late to take action against him. In the same way,

Woland constantly does the impossible – much to the dismay of the Variety Theater characters.

The five characters who work for the Variety Theater all become victims of Woland's black magic. Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, the "chairman of the tenant's association of number 302 bis" is also dispatched by Woland's crew. Bosoy's title connects him with Likhodeev and also makes him an obstacle to Woland/Stalin's takeover. As mentioned previously, the number of Woland's victims, six, is probably not an accident, since Stalin's consolidation of power involved the political defeat of the six remaining members of Lenin's original politburo: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov. In the novel, Rimsky and Vareukha are the two characters who occupy positions in the Theater administration directly below Likhodeev. The way they are conspicuously paired is suggestive of Kamenev and Zinoviev, who almost always acted together and who other party members often saw as a single entity (Kamenev and Zinoviev jointly opposed the October revolution because they felt the time was not yet right for the Bolsheviks to seize power; this provoked Lenin's fury, mired both men in temporary disgrace following the revolution's success, and gave them permanent notoriety as a pair that always acted in unison). The physical descriptions of each character suffice to identify Rimsky as the allegorical Kamenev and Vareukha as the allegorical Zinoviev. Kamenev was known as an accomplished orator; he was pragmatic, solid, stout (his adopted name means "stone-like"). Zinoviev was a lanky weasel of a man; he was particularly untrustworthy but he had a sense of timing and opportunity, and established himself early as Lenin's chief lackey. Zinoviev and Kamenev, briefly Stalin's allies against Trotsky, were the next to fall into his web once

Trotsky had been removed. Just as Zinoviev and Kamenev came to regret Trotsky's removal (needing his help against Stalin once it was no longer available), Rimsky and Varenuvka switch from an initial glee at Likhodeev's disappearance to desperately wanting him back so that he can deal with the mysterious black magician.

Georges Bengalsky, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, and Vassily Stepanovich Laschotkin are the three remaining characters who complete Bulgakov's Old Bolshevik allegory. It is difficult to specify which of them is connected with Tomsy, which with Rykov, and which with Bukharin. The titles given to each in the novel are not a good gauge of their relative importance: "master of ceremonies," "chairman of the tenant's association," and "bookkeeper." In today's history books, Bukharin takes center stage as Stalin's last main rival and little is said about Tomsy and Rykov other than that they were allied with Bukharin in the final struggle. However, to Bulgakov they may have been interchangeable insofar as they fell from power at a single stroke, as the last barrier to Stalin's preeminence within the Communist Party. Then again, Bulgakov may have included hints in the novel that are beyond my power to detect – he may have intended specific links in his own mind between the fictional Bengalsky, Bosoy, and Laschotkin and the historical Bukharin, Tomsy, and Rykov. The only thing that I will insist on is that, having the studied text of the novel side by side with early Soviet history, I, for one, cannot tell. One of the dangers of interpreting *The Master and Margarita* is that the allegory it contains, which I hope at this point the reader will accept is quite extensive, gains momentum so that the reader wishes it to have a kind of total governance. This governance is not likely, since the novel is, after all, an exuberant work of fiction, and I think it is important to hold the allegorical line at what can be rigorously established,

without falling back on the much-too-easy stance that “it must be there, even if I cannot see it.” It seems clear to me that Bengalsky, Bosoy, and Laschotkin have an allegorical life as Old Bolsheviks, if not specific historical figures.

The third group of characters in Bulgakov’s allegory is Woland and his retinue. I have already mentioned that Woland is allegorically linked with Stalin, and now I will establish this connection in detail. Stalin was the one-man terror of the entire Soviet Union when Bulgakov was writing *The Master and Margarita*; in 1928 he was clearly in control of the country; by the mid-1930’s he was as absolutely powerful as only a few men have been throughout the course of history. Stalin was also a paranoid maniac whose determination to exterminate any *potential* threats to his unfettered and total control of the USSR multiplied the number of his victims to mind-numbingly huge sums. He was a man who in a single, colossal stroke, purposively starved ten million Ukrainians to death in a single year (1932).

Bulgakov cannot have been aware of the full extent of Stalin’s wrath; but many of his diary entries make it clear that he saw Russia in ruins as a direct result of Bolshevik, and subsequently Stalinist, control. The following entry from December 20-21, 1924, reprinted here in it’s entirety, captures the vehemence of Bulgakov’s observations:

“Moscow is filthy and yet there are more and more lights. Two phenomena, strangely, live side by side: life is getting back to normal and, at the same time, is rotting alive, it’s gangrenous. In the centre of Moscow, starting from Lubyanka Square, the Water and Canal company has begun test drilling for an underground train network. That is life. The Underground will not be built, however, because there is no money for it. That is the gangrene.

A scheme for road transport is being devised. That is life. There is no public transport, however, because there are not enough trams. It’s ludicrous: there are only 8 motorized buses for the whole of Moscow.

Flats, families, scholars, work, comfort and practical conveniences are all in a state of living decay. Nothing is moving at all. All has been devoured by the

hellish maw of Soviet red tape. Every step a Soviet citizen takes, every movement he makes, is a form of torture, that uses up hours, days and sometimes months.

The shops are open. That's a sign of life. But they don't stay in business. That's gangrene.

It's the same for everything.

The literature being published is abominable." (Shentalinsky, 78).

Though Stalin's association with the devil is clear to the modern-day student of history, many Russians were fooled throughout the duration of Stalin's reign. It is important to emphasize that Bulgakov was not one of them. As Soviet historian Robert Conquest puts it, Bulgakov was "quite unassimilable to orthodoxy" (Conquest, 209). His keenness of perception was rare among his peers, but not unique. In 1924, Boris Pilnyak wrote a story entitled "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon," which contained a thinly veiled account of one of Stalin's political murders. Ten years later, Osip Mandelstam wrote a poem explicitly attacking Stalin and was sent to the Gulag. He did not survive. Bulgakov was at least as aware of Stalin as were Pilnyak and Mandelstam: it cannot be claimed that the Woland-Stalin connection is a coincidence wrought by modern readers' superior access to historical facts.

Yet this is exactly what Bulgakov's biographer Lesley Milne claims: "the problem with the Woland-Stalin identification has always been that it leads nowhere in terms of understanding the novel and in fact impedes reception of every other aspect of the book" (Milne, 244). This is completely untrue; the Woland-Stalin identification leads to an understanding of a *significant part* of the novel which coexists with other elements and levels of meaning without contradicting them or precluding them. I must state again that the fictional Woland and the historical Stalin are not convertible figures; in mapping Bulgakov's allegory I am not arguing for one-to-one correspondences. Milne argues that

Stalin would not have been singled out on “Bulgakov’s mental map” until 1930 – two years after Bulgakov started writing *The Master and Margarita* – when Stalin personally responded to Bulgakov’s ‘letter to the Soviet Government.’ This is about as silly as saying that Marlowe was not aware of Queen Elizabeth until he went to work for her as a British spy. Bulgakov did not accept the fairy-tale ideology of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat;’ he knew the names of Lenin’s politburo (they all published articles in the Soviet press), and he could see them fall from power one by one, even if he was not privy to the details. 1928, in addition to being the year in which Bulgakov began writing, is the year that Stalin defeated the last of his old Bolshevik rivals; this seems to me to support the Stalin-Woland identification, not to refute it. Milne also argues that Bulgakov would not have noticed Stalin’s political power in 1928 because Stalin’s “political control was not absolute until after the murder of Kirov in 1934” (Milne, 245). This is not, strictly speaking, false, but it conceals the pertinent information that Kirov was the only significant rival who was able to *emerge* while Stalin was steadily consolidating political power in the years following his defeat of the Old Bolsheviks. While Stalin was tightening the reigns in Moscow, Kirov was gathering his own strength in St. Petersburg. But, whereas Stalin controlled the entire country and was solidifying that control, Kirov rose to power in a single city. Kirov was the last Soviet figure who could have challenged Stalin, but he could not have done so in 1928. After 1934, there was not even the possibility of a rival gathering power, as Kirov had done. It is absurd to suppose that Bulgakov could not have perceived Stalin’s political preeminence until this time.

Milne’s argument changes from flimsy to repugnant when she invokes Bulgakov’s own words, spoken to the few individuals who knew about the manuscript:

“bear in mind that Woland has no prototypes” (Milne, 245). This seems a requisite statement given the circumstances; Bulgakov was either a little smarter or a little less trusting (is there a difference, under the circumstances?) than Mandelstam, who might have been spared had he said “bear in mind that this is not about Stalin” when he read his poem to a handful of friends. The stakes were high and the fear was very real; the historical reality, along with Woland’s place in the allegorical scheme sketched here, must override the author’s own self-preserving comment. Milne also cites Bulgakov’s revision as support, claiming that as an accidental likeness between Stalin and Woland became apparent to the author, he removed a malformation of the foot, generally known to be one of Stalin’s physical attributes, from his fictional character. The likeness, I have shown, is not accidental, and it is hard to see this shared physical attribute as anything but evidence that Bulgakov had the Stalin-Woland connection in mind when he began the novel. Certainly, by the mid-thirties, Stalin was becoming more of a devil than Bulgakov could have anticipated, and it makes sense that he would have toned down the link between the two inside the text if it was growing more obvious outside the text.

Brief mention should be made of the fact that much of the writing on Bulgakov and his work dates before the fall of the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, the focus and content of pre-1990 biography and criticism on Bulgakov seem distorted, because the information available to biographers and critics was itself distorted. Milne’s critical biography, at least inasmuch as it addresses *The Master and Margarita*, is particularly unsatisfactory because it claims to be “the full post-*glasnost* critical biography of Mikhail Bulgakov” (Milne, title page). This is true – the biography was published “post-*glasnost*.” However, much of the information on Bulgakov contained in the KGB file on

him – his dairies and letters, for example – had not yet been published. Milne’s book, which certainly accomplishes a lot, also masquerades as the kind of unclouded, authoritative work that has yet to be done on Mikhail Bulgakov.

If the Woland-Stalin connection is the most obvious single piece in Bulgakov’s allegory, then, on balance, Woland’s retinue are among the more difficult characters to place. Somewhat amusingly, whereas I have argued against an accidental association between Woland and Stalin, my study of the novel has shown other initial associations to be accidental in exactly the sense Milne proposes, incorrectly, for Woland/Stalin. On my first reading of the novel, before I was better acquainted with the Soviet period coincident with the writing of the novel, Behemoth seemed to me suggestive of Lavrendy Beria, and Azazello seemed to me suggested of Zhdanov. To my chagrin, a pretty strong case could be made for these associations if Bulgakov had written the novel between 1938-1950, and not 1928-1940. Beria was a trickster and a joker, but ultimately a monster (he was the first among potential successors to be killed in the struggle after Stalin’s death – his fellows in the politburo were not eager to see one monster replaced by another). Zhdanov had red hair, was very short, stout, and gleefully murderous – he was known as the “bloody dwarf.” By sheer coincidence, Azazello has a similar physical description, and even a similar attitude: “ ‘you must also put yourself in my position. To give some administrator a pasting, or chuck an uncle out of my house, or gun somebody down, or any other trifle of that sort – that’s right in my line. But talking with a woman in love, no thanks!...” (228). Nevertheless, Behemoth cannot suggest Beria and Azazello cannot

suggest Zhdanov, for the very good reason that neither became Stalin's right hand men until after the novel was completed.

The resemblance is worth noting for reasons Bulgakov would have appreciated. Behemoth, Koroviev, and Azazello, probably modeled on specific individuals, are brilliant caricatures that function both as specific-satire and type-satire. What Bulgakov guessed and history proved is that the names and faces surrounding Stalin changed, but other more salient features did not. Behemoth was most likely modeled on Yagoda, head of the secret police during the writing of the novel until he was replaced by Yezhov in 1938 (Yezhov was replaced shortly thereafter by Beria). Yagoda and Beria were both known for gratuitous cruelty (Beria kidnapped teenage girls off the streets of Moscow in his spare time), and both had a kind of political ability which enabled them to rise to the head of the Secret Police. Azazello is probably modeled on Voroshilov, one of Stalin's cronies from the Russian Civil War who was close to him for more than 20 years. The character and the man share similar stature and marksmanship, as well as a blunt, uncouth quality that, prior to 1928 at any rate, seems to have gotten on everyone's nerves except Stalin's. Prior to 1928, Voroshilov was given leeway by other party members as Stalin's subordinate, and during later years Voroshilov seems to have been one of the only people that Stalin actually liked, or appeared to like. The only other man who was linked with Stalin for such a long period of time was Molotov, one of Stalin's cohorts from very early on who, amazingly, outlived him. Koroviev is probably modeled on Molotov, and could be appropriately described as Stalin's "choirmaster." It was Molotov who executed – by way of written signature – much of Stalin's verbal command. Stalin gave the word, and Molotov disposed of an enemy or obstacle, very much in parallel with "Koroviev's Stunts"

as narrated in the chapter of that title. Again, the physical description of the character also suggests the historical model – Koroviev’s pince-nez is a feature akin to Molotov’s monocle, and Molotov was tall and thin just as Koroviev is.

Mikhail Bulgakov first trained his considerable powers of satire on the Soviet system with his 1925 novel *Heart of a Dog*. Confiscated by the Secret Police shortly after its completion, *Heart of a Dog* was not published in the Soviet Union until 1987 (after the advent of glasnost) when it turned up in the KGB archives. The reason for such a delay is obvious; *Heart of a Dog* anticipates the force of the satire in Bulgakov’s later novel, but that force is not ingeniously distributed and carefully veiled. It is a blunt instrument, though well crafted and quite effective. By the time Bulgakov began writing *The Master and Margarita*, he had no illusions that another such book would be tolerated. He also knew he was incredibly lucky to have been spared supreme punishment for his first literary offense (like Pilnyak, he owed the reprieve to his early timing – Stalin was not yet in full control).

In 1928, Bulgakov saw that, for the foreseeable future, the Soviet regime was there to stay; the outlook was much the same when he completed the novel twelve years later. He had confidence, however, that it might be published one day, and he also knew that it might be prematurely “discovered” and perhaps destroyed after his death. The novel is deliberately constructed with both this hope and this fear in mind: Bulgakov set out to write a satire that would be an important corrective and affirmation to later generations, but also one that would be difficult to penetrate without a literary zest and spirit of learning that were all but dead during the period in which he wrote. Judging by

both measures, he scored a monumental victory. The novel did indeed 'get loose' during the "thaw" period of the mid-late sixties, and its escape was due primarily to the unmistakable stamp of literary merit that it bears, combined with the bungling of communist censors. The novel was a runaway success, often officially unavailable but selling for many times its official price on the black market. Today it has ascended into the realm of literary legend in Russia, and certain lines from the novel ("manuscripts don't burn") are almost proverbial. Now that the rigorous Soviet distortions of historical fact are fast fading away, it is possible for readers to approach Bulgakov's novel with just the zest and knowledge that are required to perceive its embedded anti-Soviet allegory. The experience of reading *The Master and Margarita* is all the richer for it.

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