Chapter-II

The Master and Margarita: Role of Magical Realism

Rediscovered

"Manuscripts don't burn" (Bulgakov 326) - Mikhail Bulgakov died believing in the stubborn, indestructible power of art, when all his major works remained unpublished inside his desk drawer and reached the reader only a quarter of a century later. The above quoted incantation by Bulgakov seems to work at last. His novel The Master and Margarita not only saw the light of day, but became a real masterpiece of modern Russian literature. It is one of the epoch making works of Russian literature that took Bulgakov roughly twelve years to complete it. The whole process of writing the novel witnessed many ups and downs. The pain as well as care he took in writing the novel made it clear that Bulgakov penned the novel as his last testament by which he would be immortalized in Russian literary history. He was successful in his adventure, because after the publication of the novel twenty six years after his death, Bulgakov was positioned as a writer with cult status in Russia. The book caught the attention of many thoughtful readers, as the people were fed up with the steady diet of social-realist novels and as critic David Bethea commented, "starved for myth and romance" (187). Many prominent Soviet writers appreciated the novel for its perfect blend of magic and reality in a truly postmodern fashion. Translations of the novel and comments on it have appeared in more than twenty nations: England, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Italy, the United States, France, Norway, to name a few. The newspaper Literaturnaia gazeta, Pod'em responded well to the appearance of the novel.
Bulgakov started writing a few chapters of *The Master and Margarita* in 1928 for which his father was the source of inspiration. The story proceeds like this... a poet and an editor meet at Patriarchs’ Ponds to discuss the former’s long antireligious narrative poem. They are joined by a mysterious stranger, who gives his own version of the Passion Story, after which the editor is beheaded by a tram. The poet later tries to warn his fellow poets that the devil has entered in Moscow, for which he is promptly transferred to a psychiatric clinic. The mysterious stranger proceeds to give a performance at the Variety Theatre and creates havoc among both audience and staff. At this point, the action of the novel is divided into two settings: Moscow and Yershalaim. These chapters comprise of the part I of the novel, which Bulgakov read out in front of a section of his acquaintance with much enthusiasm. However, the year of 1930 was the year of catastrophe for Bulgakov. Many of his plays were banned and the press venomously attacked him. In the spring of 1930, he took his notebooks containing the manuscripts of his unfinished novel and ripped them from top to bottom in a feat of extreme despair. He then fed those torn sheets to the woodstove and his initial attempt to write his best novel met a premature death. He then wrote a letter to the Soviet government seeking permission to emigrate. Stalin who himself telephoned Bulgakov advised him to apply for a job at the Moscow Art Theatre. Ultimately with Stalin’s intervention, Bulgakov got the job and remained in Russia. When the professional matters were restored, Bulgakov’s personal life suffered some setbacks. Bulgakov was in a full-fledged relationship with Elena Sergeevna Shilovskiaia, the wife of a military man. Though the relationship was strongly opposed by Elena’s husband, yet in October 4, 1932, she married Bulgakov, breaking off her earlier relationship with her former husband. In 1933, Bulgakov started rewriting his
novel with renewed vigour. After this, many revisions of the novel were made by him and ultimately in February, 1940, Bulgakov left for heavenly abode leaving behind rich legacy and the almost finished version of his novel *The Master and Margarita* in the safe custody of his wife Elena. Its publishing was stymied until 1967 in Russia. What prevented the novel’s publication were the brutal facts of Stalin’s tyranny. As Bulgakov was lying on his deathbed, suffering from acute Nephrosclerosis, his wife promised him that she would get his book published. The golden opportunity surfaced in 1966, when *The Master and Margarita* appeared in the literary journal *Moskva* in two installments. Part I appeared in the November issue of 1966; part II appeared in the January issue of 1967. *The Master and Margarita* gave the Russian readers an opportunity to look afresh at the realistic novel with a mythical and magical twist.

Before proceeding, the historical context behind writing the novel must get summarized. The period when Bulgakov worked on his novel was marked by Russia’s transition from the monarchic empire of Nicholas II who was overturned and dethroned by the revolutionaries in 1917 to the totalitarian communist government mainly under Lenin and Stalin’s leadership. Vladimir Lenin ruled Russia from 1918 till 1921 and kept the economy mixed, partially nationalized and partially privatized. In 1922, two years before Lenin’s death, Joseph Stalin rose to power. He became secretary general of the Communist Party and used his position to gain control over Soviet Union. He felt that the country was far behind the world’s more industrialized nations. He put forward programmes, all part of what he called his five years plan, with an intention to develop his country in all sectors within a short period of time. The thrust was primarily given on agriculture. Because, there were about twenty-five million farms in the Soviet Union in the mid 1920s, but few produced enough food to
feed anyone, but the families who lived on them. Successful farmers who made profit were called Kulaks. Stalin proposed state-run agricultural collectives, but the kulaks opposed. So, in 1929, he called for the liquidation of the kulaks and in turn, the kulaks also tried to keep their own farms. As a consequence, crops and livestock were destroyed, farming tools were damaged. Many kulaks were taken to prisons. Farmers who owned private lands were arrested. Thus, the number of peasants lived on collective farms skyrocketed by the end of 1930. Almost 97 percent of Soviet Union’s cultivable land was collective farms and many of the kulaks laboured in prison camps.

Stalin’s five year plan also gave an eye on Soviet industry. Stalin targeted fifty percent annual growth for which the major contributor was the industrial sector. Accordingly, the government organization Gosplan had the task of planning productivity goal. The factory managers and workers who were lagging behind were arrested and sent off to labour camps. Fearing punishment, many workers worked for twelve to fourteen hours a day. Some other factories with no hope of reaching their assigned production levels, took the chance of falsifying paperwork. As a result, Soviet Union developed tremendously in every sector, but that was at the cost of individual freedom in a closed, tightly controlled society with limited resources. The Soviet Union showed the world that it would go to any extent to defend Communism. Individual freedom was totally nipped in the bud to make room for Communist activities. The common people were denied every right to live of their own. The writers who used their mighty pen to spread anti-Soviet propaganda were sent to work in labour camps or to languish in mental asylum for paranoid schizophrenia. The writer could not afford to be directly critical of the existing political system of that period. Bulgakov began work on *The Master and Margarita* when Stalinist purges
began. Under these circumstances he also managed to complete his novel. In order to sneak his work out of the clutches of Soviet government, he gave an allegorical undertone to it. The magical realist narrative technique which mingles elements of both fact and fiction enhances this effect. It is said that Bulgakov was one of the first generation of Soviet writers who flourished in the 20s, during the short-lived Soviet Experimental movement, but suffered horribly during Stalin’s regime. He knew that he would never live to see his novel published. It is one of the most important works in the realm of protest literature which meticulously wrapped its anti-Stalinist message in a complex allegory of good and evil.

What first spurred Bulgakov to write his novel *The Master and Margarita* was his outrage at the portrayals of Christ in Soviet anti-religious propaganda. The Soviet authority even published a monthly magazine *The Godless* on the topic of atheism from 1922 to 1940. Written in 1930’s Soviet society, the novel clearly depicts the Soviet life in an age of Communism and Marxism. It does this so clearly that the novel could not even be published when it was first written. Mikhail Bulgakov might have been executed should the true content of his novel *The Master and Margarita* be revealed in the thirties. The satire in the novel is described to contain an extremely accurate depiction of Soviet life in the 1930s through the use of allegorical references with an underlying anti-Marxist sentiment. The novel is laced with many Marxist qualities including the dictatorship by one person of the entire country, social problems of the era, and the unimportance of religion.

In 1923, after the death of the Soviet Union’s first communist leader, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin took over the country with his harsh Marxist ideals. Stalin was the country’s reigning dictator during Bulgakov’s prime years of writing. Mikhail
Bulgakov clearly showed his distaste for such leadership through his novel. It is believed that the central character Woland is modelled on Stalin. Like Stalin, Woland spreads disaster and chaos all over the country. In the novel, he begins his series of events by predicting the future death of MASSOLIT's editor, Berlioz. This sequence of events continues as he begins to gain control over the actions and outcomes of all the other characters in the novel. As it continues, it is shown that Woland and his crew have complete control over the destiny of all of the inhabitants of Soviet Union. Specifically, Woland sends Stepa, the director of The Variety Theater, to Yalta, frames Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, the Chairman of the House Committee with fake foreign currency, and cuts off the head of the MC of the Variety, Bengalsky. Most definitely, his actions seem parallel to that of a dictator.

_The Master and Margarita_ is a fine blend of fantasy and realism. This story can be read at various levels. It can be allegorical, philosophical or symbolic. The novel is blasphemous, hilarious, challenging and devastating. It is the story of how the devil comes to the big city, Moscow, upsets the status quo and throws a fantastic party for the dead. The plot is highly innovative—every third chapter is part of a larger meta text, a story within the story, about the trial of Yeshua (Jesus) in Jerusalem. A third plot unites the other two, featuring an insane writer called Master and the bargain tried by his lady love Margarita to restore his lost novel as well as to achieve true happiness. In exchange, she is compelled to become a sexually liberated Faerie Queen and make a deal with Woland who is actually the manifestation of not vice but some godly virtues. The novel deals with the interplay of good and evil, innocence and guilt, courage and cowardice, explores such issues like the responsibility towards truth when authority would deny it and the freedom of the spirit in an untrue world.
Love and sensuality are also dominant themes in the novel. It is heavily influenced by Goethe's *Faust* and its themes of cowardice, trust, treachery are derived from the same work. It can be read as a hilarious slapstick, a deep philosophical allegory, a biting socio-political satire about the Soviet system and the superficiality and vanity of modern life in general. From another angle, the novel can be analyzed as a Bildungsroman with Ivan as its hero. There are also strong autobiographical elements in many passages of the novel. The ironies of the relationship between social power and art are essential to the dramatic tension in the book. Bulgakov’s brilliance lies not only in his plotting and themes, but in his ability to employ entirely different writing styles in the alternate sections. The Moscow chapters involve the more real and immediate world in Moscow and are written in a fast-paced, almost farcical tone, while the Jerusalem chapters, narrated in the Master’s fiction are written in a hyper-realistic style.

Goethe’s *Faust* finds echo in the novel. As is the case with many Bulgakov’s novels, Nikolai Gogol’s works are referred to. The dialogues between Pontius Pilate and Yeshua-Ha-Nostri are strongly influenced by Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s parable *The Grand Inquisitor* from *The Brothers Karamazov*. The novel references Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. The theme of the Devil exposing Moscow society has some precedents in the *Crippled Devil* by the Spaniard Luis Velez de Guevara.

*The Master and Margarita* is a complex allegory of good and evil that uses the story of Jesus, Pilate and the figure of the Devil in an entirely unorthodox way. Primarily a political satire and a fantasy, the novel blatantly attacks the totalitarian regime of Stalin. The story revolves around three different settings. The first setting is the real world of 1920-30’s Moscow under Stalin, which is visited by Satan in the
person of Woland, a Professor of Black Magic who arrives with his entourage that includes a grotesquely dressed ex-choirmaster Valet Faggott, a mischievous fast-talking black cat Behemoth, a fanged hit man Azazello, a pale-faced Abadonna with a death-inflicting stare and a witch named Gella. They castigate the literary elite along with its trade union MASSOLIT, its privileged Head Quarter Griboyedov’s House, the corrupt social-climbers and their women; the bureaucrats and profiteers. The opening of the novel presents an episode where the unbelieving head of a literary organization, Berlioz, and Woland argue about the existence of God. The whole scene is witnessed by Ivan Bezdomny, a modern poet. Interwoven with the tale of Woland is the love story of two Muscovites, a writer named Master and his beloved Margarita. Master is in an eerie mental asylum. His mind and heart have been destroyed by the demands of hypocritical literary criticism of that time. He is in a state of extreme despair and agony and turns his back on the real, earthly world, including his beloved Margarita, because his historical novel about Pontius Pilate and Yeshua-Ha-Nosti is rejected by a group of conspiring literary people. In part II of the novel, the readers are finally acquainted with Master’s beloved Margarita, who is represented as a strong embodiment of human will and power. She resolves to bring back Master from the realm of despair and agony. In her bid to rescue Master, she accepts an offer made by Woland and becomes a witch with supernatural power. She satisfies Woland by becoming a host to his Midnight’s Ball or Walpurgis Night, which coincides with the night of Good Friday. She takes great pains to satisfy Woland and becomes a perfect host to his Ball. For executing her responsibilities sincerely and dedicatedly, she is rewarded well. Her wish to liberate Master is granted readily by Woland and finally the couple leaves Moscow. So, by interacting with the supernatural characters of the
other two plots, she sets the story in motion and ultimately ties all the loose ends of the novel.

The third setting is in the form of a novel that the Master writes. It is a retelling of the story of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea and Yeshua-Ha-Nostri (Jesus) during the time of latter’s Crucifixion and is set in Jerusalem. Bulgakov believes that the gospel versions of Jesus’ life are heavily fictionalized and tendentious. So, he retells that story. That particular episode in the novel concerns Pontius Pilate’s meeting with Yeshua before the trial and focuses on the moral dilemma of Pontius Pilate in executing Yeshua who is accused of inciting people to burn down the temple and advocating the overthrow of Emperor Tiberius. It disputes the version of crucifixion proposed by organized religion and mostly concentrates on the figure of Pontius Pilate, an intelligent man yearning for good but bound by habit and cowardice to the evil. Cowardice is his ultimate vice. This is where the strongest political commentary lies as well. Though the characters in this plot and the characters on the streets of Moscow cast similar lights and shadows around them even as they live in separate worlds, yet the realities of a totalitarian regime are pictured more clearly in the Pilate’s story than in the Moscow narrative. Here though Stalin’s Russia is not referred to directly, yet the perennial menaces of human society like tyranny, forces of evil, and the destruction of innocents are brought under discussion. Moving away from the setting of Moscow reality, the theme of good vs. evil resurfaces in Pilate’s story, as tramp philosopher Yeshua is terribly executed by powerful Pilate. Through the interactions of Pilate and Yeshua, Bulgakov emphasizes that the godless Russian society during Stalin’s communism will soon degenerate into anarchic and
chaotic society. So, in the novel, the same problem gets transferred from the plane of everyday reality to the level of the historical and legendary.

Regardless of the presence of three different worlds, they merge together at the end. The scene at the end of the novel includes characters from all the three worlds: Pilate and Yeshua, the Master and Margarita, and Woland and his retinue. Everybody is given his or her due by Woland. The Master is allowed to finish his incomplete novel by freeing his protagonist Pilate. Pilate walks along the moonlight path, arguing with the philosopher Yeshua. Margarita is reunited with Master and both are at peace.

**Nature of Magical Realism**

Bulgakov’s novel can quite literally be characterized as a work of magical realism. Entering the novel from magical realist perspective, we are convinced that the author freely combines the opposites—everyday life and fantasy, history and myth etc. It engages in mock uncrowning of officially respected figures from the world of literature and theatre and makes fun of the mysterious disappearance of Moscow inhabitants which was a common phenomenon under Stalin’s dictatorship. The unreality of the totalitarian regime may be the reason why some artists responded to these times with the works of magical realism. Because, magical realism allowed them to express the undercurrents of reality in a symbolic and metaphorical way. Mikhail Bulgakov never talked openly about Stalinism, but referred to it as witchcraft for fear of retribution:

*Two years ago odd things began happening...people started to vanish from it without trace. One Monday afternoon a policeman...*
called, invited the second lodger (the one whose name is no longer known) into the hall and asked him to come along to the police station for a minute or two to sign a document. The lodger told Anfisa...he would be back in ten minutes...But he not only failed to come back in ten minutes; he never came back at all....

Witchcraft once started, as we all know, is virtually unstoppable.

(Bulgakov 92)

‘Witchcraft once started, as we all know, is virtually unstoppable’ -this is one of the most famous lines from the novel which expresses the terror of totalitarianism quite succinctly. Passages like this one are the marked moments in the text where, due to the conflation of reality with surrealism, the term ‘magical realism’ becomes justified to the highest degree. Evidently, at times of extreme censorship only metaphorical language can save the artist from persecution; hence the magical realist novel can be a tool to express and attack the politics of totalitarian regimes. What this novel describes as witchcraft and fantasy, is, however, a grim reality that has nothing to do with magic. Susanne Fusso said:

...The Master and Margarita is one of the brilliant examples in Russian literature of the use of the supernatural, introduced by romantic writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century under the influence of E. T. A. Hoffman, among others. In The Master and Margarita, the Gospel account of the crucifixion is retold in a way that downplays the supernatural, in the Master’s realistically textured novel about Pontius Pilate. The charged symbols of Biblical discourse
(the fig tree, Christ's garments at the foot of the Cross) are transformed into passing incidental details in a naturalistically observed scene. The Master has turned holy writ into a historical document reminiscent of the "historical Jesus" movement in Biblical scholarship. At the same time, the Moscow of the 1930s, in which materialism would seem to have triumphed, is invaded by supernatural forces, as conventional figures of speech ("The Devil take me," "off with his head") are instantly and magically realized by the Devil's henchmen. The Master's novel invests the narrative of an event long shrouded in legend with the detailed texture and believability of an eyewitness account; the magical and miraculous is transferred to the contemporary scene, forced upon homo Sovieticus through the agency of the quintessential Romantic hero, The Devil. (173-174)

Again, Sona Hoisington perceives the novel as miraculous fairy tale (44-45). Some of the common features of a fairy tale are: the characters are real but the actions are improbable and fantastic. The readers feel a willing suspension of disbelief and derive a sense of satisfaction. There is only one main hero or heroine and all the other characters follow him or her. The characters are either good or evil. The Master and Margarita is a meticulous blend of the real and the magical and is regarded as a fantastic fairy tale. A good number of major characters like Woland, Ivan, the Master, Margarita share space in the novel and all seem to possess the potentialities to be the main hero or heroine of the same.
The key word here is 'fantastic' and what is interesting is that it is the supposed real world of 1930s Moscow that contains all the fantastic elements, whereas the chapters set in Jerusalem in the first century are presented as cold, hard facts. Bulgakov's Yeshua Ha-Nostri is quite unlike the Jesus of the gospels, sometimes funny, sometimes cowardly, manipulative and even very human. The same can be said about Bulgakov's Woland. He's certainly not evil incarnate, in fact, he seems more interested in making the lives of the bad people more miserable rather than rewarding them for keeping the faith.

Bulgakov's preoccupation with dreams and dreamers in the novel intensifies the magical realist fervor of the novel. Dreams perform multiple tasks: they give the impression of other world which may not be real; they measure the spiritual and moral maturity of characters as in case of Ivan and Margarita; they give solace to those who are victims of totalitarian atrocity. Actually, through dreams the reality is made more transparent. The devil seems to be a manifestation of dream-like experience. Ivan's schizophrenic conditions denote a hallucinatory state or dream-like state. The Master's affinity with the world of dream is noteworthy. His each entry in the plot of the novel is associated with dreaming, sleep or night time. He very often appears in Margarita's premonition dreams or in the happy dreams of Professor Ivan.

Magical realist narrative technique is an important aspect of postmodern fiction. *The Master and Margarita* excellently blends elements of both magic and reality without arousing suspicion of the readers, regarding the veracity of the story. This aspect makes the novel a true precursor of postmodern magical realist novel. The novel is loaded with lots of postmodern novelistic conventions. Meticulous time
warps of fantasy and reality, allegorical undertones or several features of Menippean satire, are omnipresent in the novel and it is there that post modernity touches Russian ground. Another feature that leads us to postmodernism in the novel is the multiplicity of its genres. The novel transgresses genre boundaries. It can be analyzed as an allegory, a bildungsroman, a Faustian parody, a Roman-A-Clef and so on. T. R. N. Edwards perceives the elements of Manichaeism in the novel (173-180). Furthermore, magical realism is a genre that is so often adhered to Bulgakov's novel, along the lines of E. T. A. Hoffmann and its mixtures of dream and reality are undoubtedly markers of an international postmodern aesthetic. If the postmodern condition foregrounds ontological instability, then Bulgakov uses the subversive potential of irony, parody, and humour to reveal the psychosis in Russian society. Through the character of Woland, Bulgakov manages to enter in that condition. Bulgakov sees metaphysical elements in the devil. Thus the crossing of genre boundaries questions the conventions of literary realism and the reality becomes virtual and fragmented. All these give rise to a sense of indeterminacy or double-ending at the end of a novel and The Master and Margarita captures that sense well. According to Brian McHale, postmodern condition foregrounds, "ontological instability or indeterminacy, the loss of a world that could be accepted, "willy-nilly," as given of experience" (26). The Master and Margarita, according to him, depicts, "an anarchic landscape of worlds in plural" (43). So the novel enjoys its status as a postmodern fantastic fiction and also opens the gate of post modernity in Russian literature.
Parody in the Novel

Bulgakov’s episode of the arrest, the trial, the conviction and the crucifixion of Yeshua-Ha-Nostri is aimed at creating a parody of Jesus- not in the figure of Yeshua but rather in that of Woland. The conversation between Berlioz and Woland in the very first few pages of the novel itself hints at Bulgakov’s intention to make Woland the parodic manifestation of Christ. The first chapter of the novel, titled Never Talk to Strangers opens with the two Soviet atheists, Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, editor of a highbrow literary magazine and chairman of the management committee of one of the biggest Moscow literary clubs, known by its abbreviation as MASSOLIT and Ivan Nikolayich Poniryov, a poet discussing about a poem on Jesus Christ. Berlioz commissioned Ivan to write a long anti-religious poem for his magazine. Ivan wrote a poem but Berlioz is not satisfied with that. Because, contrary to what Berlioz wanted, the poem pictured Jesus completely alive and real. But Berlioz did not believe in God. His main motive was not to consider who Jesus was or whether he was good or bad, but he only wanted to prove that as a person Jesus never existed at all and all the stories about him were “mere invention, pure myth.” “There is not one oriental religion”, said Berlioz, “in which an immaculate virgin does not bring a god into the world. And the Christians, lacking any originality, invented their Jesus in exactly the same way. In fact he never lived at all...” At that moment, Satan in the guise of Woland, a Professor of Black Magic appeared in the scene. The immediate reaction of Berlioz and Ivan was, “It can’t be!” But Bulgakov intervened and whispered in propria persona, “But alas it was...” When the writers tried to persuade Woland that Jesus Christ never existed, the devil himself grandly announced, “Jesus did exist, you know.” “It’s not a question of having an attitude. He existed, that’s all there is to it”
Thus, Woland flatly refuted Berlioz's atheistic notions. So, Woland is there to prove God's existence. He has apparent Satanic qualities but with a heart of gold. This mood is set in the very first few pages of the novel itself. Woland is attributed divinity in *The Master and Margarita* and is presented as parody of Jesus. Throughout the novel, Woland maintains his god-like aura of character. He always stands in relation to God. Satanic existence also seems to be providentially willed, which is evident in the epigraph of the novel also. It is borrowed from Goethe's Faust:

> "Say at last—who are thou?"

> "That Power I serve

> Which wills forever evil

> Yet does forever good."

Satan does exactly what God's dealings with men are understood by Christian orthodoxy. That's why Woland punishes those who are reluctant to accept his reality. He is God's minister of justice, power and vengeance. He connects the question of mythological past to the present-day reality through the use of magical realism.

Parody is conspicuous at the end of the novel, when Yeshua asks Woland to set Ponius Pilate free and relieve him of his sufferings. If Yeshua was intended to represent the Man-God, then he could himself have granted that much desired freedom to Pilate. But it was Woland who performed this task. He gave respite to both Pilate as well as Moscow public. Woland asks Master to finish his incomplete novel and free Pilate, "Now is your chance to complete your novel with a single sentence."
Master forcefully shouts, "You are free! Free! He is waiting for you!" In the Epilogue also, Jesus clearly equates devil with lying. Because, while walking down the paths of moonlight with the now free Pilate, it is Yeshua who lies and tells the procurator that the execution never happened. It was mere imagination. "Ye gods! What a disgusting method of execution! But please, tell me, it did not take place, did it? I beg you—tell me that it never took place?" "No, of course it never took place. It was merely your imagination." "Can you swear to that?" "I swear it" (emphasis added) (Bulgakov 429, 429, 444).

Bulgakov's adjustment of time also signifies Woland's parodic incarnation of God. The following paragraph will testify that:

The setting in time corroborates the idea that Satan's incarnation in modern Moscow is a parody of Christ's crucifixion in ancient Jerusalem. In both cases the time is the second half of Holy Week, culminating on Easter Sunday. Bulgakov retains the biblical time table of events in his version of the passion of Christ. The story of Yeshua-Ha-Nostri (Jesus Christ) begins in sunlight on the morning of Good Friday. He is crucified at noon, at the sun's height (the crucifixion being a blessed event and not a calamity, since through it redemption is provided for man). There is a reference to Jesus' dinner with Judas on Thursday night, doubtless Bulgakov's truncated version of the Last Supper. Christ's resurrection occurs on Easter Sunday morning. Satan comes to Moscow on Wednesday—significantly, at sunset. His magic show at the Variety Theatre occurs on Thursday night. Satan's Rout is held on Friday night, the night when God, in the person of Jesus, died
and descended into hell. At sunset of Saturday, Satan and his retinue must leave: the Russian Orthodox ecclesiastical calendar retained the Jewish system of starting the new day at six o'clock p.m. and not midnight. The Master and Margarita were reunited on Good Friday night, the first fruits of Christ’s victory through his death and resurrection. The novel ends with the transfiguration of the Master and Margarita and the disappearance of Satan and his demons into the abyss at dawn of Sunday. No natural, earthly events take place on Sunday; it is a day of the supernatural, the eternal day. The Russian word for Sunday means Day of Resurrection. The Master and Margarita enter into their eternal refuge then. (Ericson 25)

Actually, following the tradition of magical realist genre, this novel efficiently blends both fact and fiction. The chapters which deal with the Christian tradition concerning Yeshua and Pontius Pilate are presented not as myth but as cold hard facts. On the other hand, the Soviet reality of 1930s Moscow becomes fantasy and reads as such. Thus, fact and legend change places in the novel and Woland is instrumental in making legend fact. The omnipotent Son of God seeks favour from the Prince of Darkness. To make facts fantastic or fantasy real, the legendary Christ is presented as less powerful than the adversary whom He overcomes in the Christian tradition. Thus Woland is very craftily presented as parody of Christ.

The close relationship between Yeshua and Woland is further supported by the imagery of sun and moon. As moon parodies the light of the sun, similarly Woland parodies Yeshua. Woland’s activities are seen through dim light of the moon. On the
other hand, Yeshua is associated with sun. But in his case the sun is merciless towards him.

**Targets of Satire**

In *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov practises the so-called Menippean satire. The novel is aptly labelled as Menippean satire by critics like Mikhail Bakhtin (Lakshin 15). Developed by Cynic philosopher Menippus, this genre of satire is "written in prose, usually with interpolations of verse and constitutes a miscellaneous form often held together by a loosely constructed narrative" (Abrams 277). They amalgamate elements of history and myth, serious and comic, high and low narrative levels etc. The concept of time and space are twisted, alternate states of reality like dreams are prominent and the narrative is replete with heavy irony. It also allows the writer to censure the social institutions and prominent figures of the society without any fear of retribution. This kind of satire turns the world completely around. Authorities are interchanged, fabrications become true, and the social order is mixed up. The motives are grotesque. They laugh about the socially legitimate cultural expressions and connect them to the absurd and the abnormal. It's a parody of the established power. They only denounce the ridiculous character of the official discourse. Here, the characters experience very different and extreme psychological situations and these vary from insanity, schizophrenia and interchange of identities to unrestrained daydreams and an excessive wish for scandals and eccentricity. The dominant cultural order is also questioned and that is expressed by wiping the floor with the morality, norms and etiquette of the higher class. In general the official representatives of power are challenged. According to Gilbert Highet, a Menippean
satirist "does not believe that the world is orderly and rational, and therefore gaps, interruptions, and inconsistencies in the story scarcely concern him" (206). While discussing The Master and Margarita as a satirical novel, J. A. E. Curtis said:

...the novel is certainly satirical in the sense that it is a comic work informed by a moral purpose that has topical relevance. The first of the various levels on which the novel's satire functions is that of universal satire, the mockery of perennial human failings as they manifest themselves in the Moscow of the 1920s and 1930s. The showing up of human weaknesses seems to be the primary purpose of Woland and his retinue in their visit to Moscow: they provoke and then punish the vices of vanity, greed, hypocrisy, and lying which characterize the Muscovites as they do humankind in general.... A second level of satire is directed at certain institutions. Woland and his retinue wreak particular havoc among the administrators of the theatrical world and the membership of MASSOLIT, the functional writers' organizations whose headquarters at Griboedov House are eventually destroyed by fire. Clearly Bulgakov had particular reasons for selecting these targets for Woland's wrath. Having savaged the overbearing, bureaucratic, and exploitative attitudes he encountered while working in the Moscow Art Theatre in his play The Crimson Island and his unfinished Theatrical Novel, in The Master and Margarita he aims his pen squarely at the groups that exercised control over literature-the Russian Association for Proletarian writers (RAPP), which hounded his friend Eugene Zamiatin out of the country,
and its successor, The Writers’ Union, which imposed monolithic controls after 1932-34 through its theory of socialist realism. Nothing could have been more abhorrent to Bulgakov than the rule of the philistines in literature...In addition to the universal and the institutional, The Master and Margarita offers varying levels of political satire...The text brims over with allusions to the police state-some discreet, others less so. References to the pervasive suspicion of foreigners, Bezdomny’s unthinking retort that Immanuel Kant should be dispatched to Solovki (a notorious labor camp in the White sea), the “Inexplicable” disappearances of people from Berlioz’s and Likhodeyev’s apartment, the latter’s anxiety about his “unnecessary” conversation and article, many actual arrests, and Bosoy’s “Show trial” dream all reveal that Moscow is obsessed with the threat of repressions. .... (121-122)

The novel is supersaturated with satire. Through his satire, Bulgakov targets society’s institutions and authority figures without fear of retribution and makes human vices seem less reproachable through humour. His satire is pointed not only at the Soviet regime, but he also aims at human nature. In Moscow, the targets worthy of satire were many, and he hit them all- the state-planned economy and its mania for foreign currency; the housing shortage that becomes a metaphor for lost freedom and people’s ingenious solutions to it; state-mandated literature and the trash it produced; Marxist-Leninist materialism and the self-satisfied philistines it bred (Weeks 19). Bulgakov achieves the comical effect through his use of language, for example mixing different registers, as well as through combining two worlds: the ‘real’ and the
‘supernatural’. By contorting reality in a magical way, Bulgakov makes his novel a perfect specimen of Menippean Satire and derides his targets in a satirical way to laugh people out of their vices and follies. In the Moscow section of the text, the images of reality and illusion are reversed. What at first appears as magic or unreal is actually just and what seems real is but the swindle, the demonic lie of an essentially organized social structure. Woland, along with his retinue is the unmasker of the vices of humanity. Russian literature has had an abiding interest in the irrational and the fantastic. Both are central to this novel. With the use of fantastic elements in his novel, Bulgakov aims to castigate and undermine the foundations of Soviet society.

During Stalin’s rule, religion was outlawed as an old-fashioned irrelevant practice. The advent of enforced atheism was followed by the rejection of notions related to afterlife, any spiritual tendency or need that were considered irrational. The people became self-centred, hypocritical and materialistic. Arson, abduction, counterfeiting of currency etc created an unsafe hell in Moscow. All arts including literature were suppressed greatly because they expressed man’s true nature and desire. That’s why, MASSOLIT, the literary institution is satirically attacked. Griboyedev House is razed to the ground. Woland and his party embark on a mission to make a dig at everything in Soviet society under Stalin. By employing Woland as an agent, it is Bulgakov who takes revenge on all those institutions, like The Writer’s Club which suppressed him and denied him recognition as a writer.

The first chapter of the novel, titled “Never Talk to Strangers” itself is a stinging satire, where poet Ivan, his editor Berlioz and Woland are engaged in serious conversation about the existence of God. The righteously materialistic Berlioz is ridiculed and an attitude of amusement is evoked in the reader. Berlioz declares
himself an atheist and denies the existence of both God and the Devil, right in front of the latter, i.e. Woland. Berlioz continues to argue, keeping well in line with the approved Marxist views of the state at that time. Woland asks them, "... if there is no God, then who, one wonders, rules the life of man and keeps the world in order?"

Bezdomny promptly replies, "Man rules himself" (Bulgakov 20, 20). But this comment is ridiculed and refuted when Berlioz is killed by a tram, driven by a woman, as predicted by Woland. This incident establishes the fact that man cannot rule himself and human life is totally unpredictable. The lives of the then Moscow citizens were increasingly controlled by the State under the rule of Stalin. Berlioz's death is also aimed at criticizing that rule, which denied every kind of independence to the citizens. The exchange of dialogues between Berlioz, Bezdomny and Woland, also indicates that there was widespread abuse of literature and religious beliefs. Woland does not spare Berlioz, even, in his ball also, which happens later in the novel. Woland makes fun of his materialistic views about life, when he tells Berlioz's decapitated, yet living head:

It all came true, didn't it? Your head was cut off by a woman, the meeting didn't take place and I am living in your flat. That is a fact. And a fact is the most obdurate thing in the world. But what interests us now is the future, not the facts of the past. You have always been a fervent proponent of the theory that when a man's head is cut off his life stops, he turns to dust and he ceases to exist. I am glad to be able to tell you in front of all my guests- despite the fact that their presence here is proof to the contrary- that your theory is intelligent and sound. Now- one theory deserves another. Among them there is one which
maintains that a man will receive his deserts in accordance with his beliefs. So be it! You shall depart into the void and from the goblet into which your skull is about to be transformed I shall have the pleasure of drinking to life eternal! (Bulgakov 311)

Bulgakov’s introduction of some implausible and incredible happenings to the otherwise realistic setting of the novel with an aim to undermine the certainties of the materialistic world is genuinely masterful. It portrays the result of ideological struggle between good and evil. The struggle for power has been won; Bulgakov depicts the lust for power and the oppression of people who live under complete control. Biblical Jerusalem and real Moscow seem to have much in common. Both are ruled by dictators. Jerusalem is under Caesar and Stalin rules Moscow. Both cities are permeated by an atmosphere of constant fear. In Jerusalem, the smallest crime is punishable with death. The people must follow Caesar’s order and the expression of any other opinion is considered treason. In such an atmosphere, gentle humanism of Yeshua cannot flourish and he is executed for his anti-authoritarian beliefs. Yeshua says, “... all power is a form of violence exercised over people and that the time will come when there will be no rule by Caesar nor any other form of rule. Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice where no sort of power will be needed” (Bulgakov 39). The conversation between Berlioz and Woland also targets the Communist philosophy. In the novel, the devil always does good and the communists are shown as susceptible to all the vices like the lure of money.

Woland’s reference is made in front of a few Moscow citizens in the chapter titled, “The Affairs at Griboyedov” when Ivan warns his fellow mates about that, “fellow artists!” (His squeaky voice grew stronger and more urgent.) “Listen to me,
all of you! He's come! *Catch him at once or he'll do untold harm* (Bulgakov 77-78)! Griboyedov House is the symbol of hell and it is the headquarter of MASSOLIT, that Bulgakov despises heartily. The whole chapter parodies the Last Supper. Twelve of Berlioz’s lieutenants wait for him in a room in the upper story of the house just like the Christ’s disciples. Later when they hear about their leader Berlioz’s death, their conversation centres around the topic about who will have a place in the summer resort near Kiyazma, their version of Paradise. This parallels the conversation of Christ’s disciples about who will have the place of prominence in the kingdom of Heaven.

Once again, in the chapter titled, “Black Magic Revealed”, Moscow’s best known compere George Bengalsky introduces Woland and his party to Moscow audience on the stage of the Variety Theatre. He says:

*And now, ladies and gentlemen, you are about to see...I see that our audience has increased in numbers since the interval. Half Moscow seems to be here tonight! D’you know, I met a friend of mine the other day...Well, as I was saying, you are about to see a very famous artiste from abroad, M’sieur Woland, with a session of black magic...since none of us can bear the suspense any longer, I give you...Monsieur Woland!...* (Bulgakov 142)

Woland, the magician enters with his tall assistant Faggot and his cat Behemoth, who trots on his hind legs. It pleases the audience greatly. Entering the stage, Woland first asks Faggot a very pertinent question, “...*do you find the people of Moscow much changed?*” Faggot replies, “*I do messire. You are right. The Muscovites have changed*
considerably...outwardly, I mean...as, too, has the city itself...Not just the clothes, but now they have all these...what d'you call 'em ...tramways, cars...” (Bulgakov 142, 143).

This piece of conversation acted as a prelude to what would follow thereafter. It hinted at all the negative changes that were rampant in the Moscow society. The people were no longer naive, simple. The deep-rooted corruption in every form was the norm of Moscow citizens. There was greed, hypocrisy, widespread corruption, which Woland exposed with the aid of black magic. Through his satire, Bulgakov targeted society’s institutions and authority figures without fear of retribution and made human vices seem less reproachable through humour.

Firstly, it is the game of card for the Moscow audience. On the stage, Faggot snaps his fingers and seizes a pack of cards out of the air, shuffles it and throws it in an unbroken stream to the cat. The cat catches it and throws it back in the same way to Faggot, who opens his mouth like a baby bird and swallows the whole pack of cards. The cat applauds this feat. Then suddenly Faggot points to the stalls and announces, “That pack of cards, ladies and gentlemen, is now to be found in the seventh row, in comrade Parchevsky’s wallet between a three-ruble note and a summons to appear in court for non-payment of alimony to his ex-wife.” There is really a man named Parchevsky sitting in the seventh row, who finds a pack of cards in his wallet. He is purple with embarrassment as his hypocrisy, disloyalty towards wife and greed for money is exposed by this simple game. However, this act of revelation fails to make the Moscow citizens suitably repentant about their own flaws of character like duality and superficiality. A man from the gallery shouts about Parchevsky, “That’s an old trick! The man in the stalls is a plant.” This greatly
displeases Faggot and he, in turn, establishes that particular man as plant. Faggot 
bawls, “...in that case you're a plant too, because there's a pack of cards in your 
pocket!” Actually there is a bundle of notes with the banker’s tape tied up in his 
pocket also. When he finds the notes, he begins to examine whether the money is real 
or not and soon he finds out that to be real money. “My God—it's real money!” comes 
a joyful shout from the gallery. Another fat man in the middle of the stalls begs, “I 
wish you'd play cards with me if you've any more packs like that one.” Hearing this, 
faggot invites everybody to take part in the play of cards that turns out to be real 
money. He showers notes and the audience begins to catch as much as they can. 
Hundreds of hands are raised as the audience holds the notes up to the light from the 
stage to check whether the watermarks are genuine or fake. They find the notes to be 
real money and their smell leaves no doubt. Those are newly-printed notes. First 
amusement and then wonder seize the entire theatre. The people turn mad hankering 
after money and are involved in scuffle with one another in their bid to catch the 
notes. A voice is heard shouting, “Let go! It's mine—I caught it first!” Another voice 
retorts, “Stop pushing and grabbing or I'll punch your face in” (Bulgakov 144, 144, 
144, 145, 145, 145, 145)! Suddenly the shower of money stops and the true nature of 
Moscow citizens is exposed. This scene aptly satirizes the vanity, greed and gullibility 
of the newly rich in Moscow. Woland represents the many absurdities of Soviet life as 
a factor catalyzing immoral deeds of the inhabitants of Moscow described by him. 
The interesting aspect of this representation is that Bulgakov does not condemn any of 
his background characters – their little sins are justifiable both in the eyes of the 
author as well as Woland. At the Variety Theatre, he says in front of the audience that
people love money no matter what it is made from and they cannot be blamed for it, because it just lies in their nature. He hopes for a change:

\[\ldots\text{they are people like any others. They're over-fond of money, but then they always were...}\]
\[\ldots\text{humankind loves money, no matter if it's made of leather, paper, bronze or gold. They're thoughtless, of course...but then they sometimes feel compassion too.... They're ordinary people, in fact they remind me very much of their predecessors, except that the housing shortage has soured them....}\] (Bulgakov 147)

Thus, Woland is not a cynic and is quite hopeful and optimistic about the Moscow people. By satirically criticizing the Soviet society, Bulgakov reaches more general conclusions about human behaviour and attitudes.

It seems that Woland and his retinue choose humiliation and making fun of the Muscovites as the best way of punishing them. They do it for their good, to teach them a moral lesson. It seems almost like a warning, as if they try to make those punished mend their ways on time, before something as terrible as Berlioz's accident happens to them. As already mentioned, Woland deals with most of the characters in a way that shows he only wants to draw them into a game unveiling their true instincts and mock them. All the ladies are punished for their vanity and love of the material by making their new ball gowns and shoes disappear in the middle of the street. By providing these women easy access to many designer accessories, Woland exposes their crave for every type of luxury and comfort in life. In the same way, the money conjures up by Koroviev and Behemoth turns into bottle labels. These deceptions appear mean-spirited and pointless, but the victims in each case are blinded by their interest in material goods. By demonstrating the evanescence of the earthly
possessions, Woland once again emphasizes the point that human beings are unable to plan anything, not to mention about securing their own future through amassing things.

With the help of supernatural, Woland and his party exposes the Moscow society to the core. Those who refuse to believe in the supernatural are heavily penalized. The best examples are George Bengalsky, the famous compere of the Variety Theatre and Arkady Apollonich Sempleyarov, the chairman of the Moscow Theatres' Acoustics Commission. Bengalsky says that Woland's tricks are purely scientific experiment and there is nothing supernatural about those. He tries to strip the show of all its mystery in order to rationalize it. He is punished by Behemoth, who twists his head clear off the neck in two turns and makes him headless instantly. When Bengalsky submits to the demand of Faggot to believe in the supernatural happenings, his head is put back. Faggot asks the severed head, "Will you go on talking so much rubbish?" The head croaks, "No, I promise I won't" (Bulgakov 147, 147). Similarly, when Sempleyarov demands an explanation for Woland's tricks, especially, the bank-notes trick, Woland exposes his adultery in front of his wife as well as the Moscow audience. Sempleyarov's cousin, who is also sitting by his side in the box of Variety Theatre, suddenly hits him on the head with a short, fat, mauve umbrella. There is a look of mingled embarrassment and amusement on the face of every spectator and all claims of Sempleyarov for fame and respect are razed to the ground.

In other chapters, many other Moscow citizens are targeted by Woland in order to expose them. In the chapter, "Koroviev's Tricks" Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, the chairman of the Tenants' Association discovers that it is inadvisable to take
bribes, even if they are not in a foreign currency. When a bribe is given to Bosoi, Woland tells Koroviev to "...fix it so that he doesn't come here again" (Bulgakov 118). Bosoi is then arrested, and punished for exploiting his position. Stepan Likhodeyev learns why he should not get drunk. Berlioz's uncle Maximilian Abdreyevich Poplavsky finds out, why one should not desire to take over flats of late nephews by acquiring a false passport.

Another suitable example of undermining through ridicule is the fantastical escapades of Behemoth and Koroviev, two of Woland's retinue. Bulgakov uses them to great effect in the chapter, "The Final Adventure of Koroviev and Behemoth." They reveal the absurdities of the Torgsin Store in Smolensk Market, a foreign currency only establishment, by stealing food and demolishing displays. A porter in the store croaks to them, "You can only buy with foreign currency here." Again, when Behemoth eats a whole tangerine with skin and all and takes another without paying anything, the salesgirl in the confectionery department shouts, "Where are your travellers' cheques or foreign currency?" When the manager of the store arrives, Koroviev gives an impassioned, rousing, ridiculous and politically dangerous speech, comparing poor and hungry Behemoth to a fat foreigner, bloated with good Russian Salmon, pockets bulging with currency and exposing the selfish rampant materialism of modern Moscow society. His speech ends in "a miracle" (Bulgakov 391, 393, 395). The customers present there eagerly support Koroviev and a little old man is so incensed with rage that he even attacks the foreigner. In this way both Behemoth and Koroviev undermine the validity of the Torgsin Store and finally set it alight.

Exactly a minute later, both of them are seen on the boulevard pavement just outside the Griboyedov House and they move to The Writers' Club, another
institution detested by Bulgakov himself. He uses them to launch a satirical attack on the literary institution that is MASSOLIT. Before entering, they compare the Writers' Club to a hothouse full of pineapples. Koroviev says, "Look, there's the writers' club. You know, Behemoth, that house has a great reputation. Look at it, my friend. How lovely to think of so much talent ripening under that roof." "Like pineapples in a hothouse", says Behemoth. Koroviev agrees, "Quite so" (Bulgakov 397, 397, 397). These imageries presented by Koroviev are very suitable here. Firstly, it suggests that the writings produced in that place are forced and under compulsion and are therefore devoid of any taste and quite unnatural. Secondly, any piece of work which is challenging or controversial will not be allowed to publish or flourish there. The writers are good only as gaudy pieces of fruit, mostly for show.

The pair continues their satirical underpinning with the door lady of the Griboyedov House. Before entering there, when she asks both of them for their membership cards as a proof of their status as writers, then Koroviev replies in astonishment, "A thousand apologies, madam, but what membership cards" (Bulgakov 398)? She once again demands their membership cards for being the writers. By citing Dostoyevsky's example, Koroviev now tries to justify his point for not having the membership cards. He argues:

...But look here-if you wanted to make sure that Dostoyevsky was a writer, would you really ask him for his membership card? Why, you only have to take any five pages of one of his novels and you won't need a membership card to convince you that the man's a writer. I don't suppose he ever had a membership card, anyway! What do you think? (Bulgakov 398)
The woman tells him that Dostoyevsky is dead, whereupon Koroviev explains that Dostoyevsky is immortal. This piece of conversation aptly highlights the ridiculous and superfluous nature of Soviet bureaucracy as well as the literary circle. Despite having talent, without a membership card, a person has no status in that club. If a person doesn’t have literary talent, but is willing to subscribe to the required Soviet view, then he or she can get a membership card as a writer and can enjoy all the added benefits too. The comments made by Roland D. Leblanc in this connection are apt quoting here:

...The main function of Griboyedov House as a motif in Bulgakov’s novel is to satirize the vulgar philistinism of the Soviet literati: their utterly bourgeois values and special economic privileges are implicitly condemned as they have transformed this writers’ club into a gastronomic temple. In addition to providing some of the funniest scenes in The Master and Margarita, the two episodes involving the Griboedovites allow the author to vent his anger against the literary establishment as he satirizes those “official” writers who are motivated primarily, if not exclusively, by aspirations of material gain. (183)

The language of The Master and Margarita is also witty and satirical. It is a contradiction of everything wooden, official, and imposed and is a joy to speak. One can argue that Bulgakov not only uses satirical language to criticize certain phenomena, but also presents language itself as something to parody and laugh at. Most obviously, he targets Soviet linguistic institutions. For example, he uses the acronym OBSCHPIIS for the Soviet Writers’ Union, which could be translated as
“Commurine” or “Masspiss”. He also plays around with surnames and pseudonyms: Ivan’s pen name Bezdomny echoes the tendency of socialist writers to adopt socially acceptable and praiseworthy surnames as a sign of sympathy for the working nation. The word Likhodeev means literally evildoer, Varenukha might have something to do with dumplings, Bosoi means barefooted, and Behemoth stands in Russian for hippopotamus. These are all amusing. Their meanings do not seem to have a great significance. Bulgakov might have chosen these at random to demonstrate his disregard of any form of official nomenclature.

The Epilogue of the novel is also loaded with satire. Everybody is sure that evil spirit has descended on Moscow. Investigation is being conducted into the case of Woland’s visit. Here, the narrator refers to himself as a character interacting with the citizens of Moscow: “On a train journey to Theodosia, the honest narrator himself heard a story of how in Moscow two thousand people had rushed literally naked out of a theatre and were driven home in taxis” (Bulgakov 433). There is an obvious irony to the phrase "the honest narrator" (Bulgakov 433). The use of third person in the narrative is also significant, as it implies that the narrator is only a character reporting events, rather than omniscient. Irony characterizes the tone in which the narrator describes the conclusions of the investigating commission. He reports:

> It cannot be said too often that the police did an admirable job, given the circumstances. Everything possible was done, not only to catch the criminal but to provide explanations for what they had done. A reason was found for everything and one must admit that the explanations were undeniably sensible. (Bulgakov 435-436)
It is true that the explanations must be recognized as true, but the narrator and the reader both know they are untrue. In an aside about the captured tomcat, the technique of direct address is used to humanize the narrator:

The man had ambushed the cat just as the animal, wearing a very furtive expression (how can cats help looking furtive? It is not because they are depraved but because they are afraid of being hurt by creatures stronger than they are, such as dogs and people. It is easy enough to hurt them but it is not something that anyone need be proud of)-well, with this furtive look the cat was just about to jump into some bushes. (Bulgakov 434)

The above mentioned paragraph is an analogy for the capturing of suspicious persons in Soviet Russia for no reason other than that they appear "criminals" (Bulgakov 435). It seems particularly ridiculous, since in this case the accused is a cat.

The narrator reports a discovery that Margarita has disappeared, and it is suspected that she and Natasha might have been abducted by a gang. The same is also suspected for the Master. However, at the end of chapter 30, titled “Time to Go”, the author already informs the reader that both Master and Margarita are dead.

Allegorical Undertones

Allegory is a narrative strategy which may be employed in any literary form or genre. An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the “literal”, or primary level of signification, and at the same time
to signify a second, correlated order of signification (Abrams 5). Along with satire, *The Master and Margarita* acquires an allegorical undertone and can be labelled as an elaborate allegory of Stalin’s Russia. This approach was adopted by Elena Mahlow, for whom the entire novel is an allegory of Russian intellectual history in this century, with Margarita representing the prerevolutionary intelligentsia, Pilate representing the dictatorship of the proletariat, Yeshua representing the true proletariat, and so on (63). Some other elaborate allegorical schemes can be deciphered in the novel, which suggest one-to-one correspondence between the novel’s characters and contemporary Russian reality. Woland stands for Stalin, and his suite represents Stalin’s famous henchmen-Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich. The murder of Yuda of Kerioth is the murder of Kirov. The removal of Stepa Likhodeev to Yalta is the removal of Trotsky to Alma Ata in January 1928 (Piper 147). Stalin was a great fan of Bulgakov and shared a peculiar relationship with him. This relationship of Stalin, Bulgakov and his wife Elena Sergeeva was reproduced in the Woland-Master-Margarita triangle. Critic Andrew Barratt pointed out that this approach enjoyed quite a vogue when the novel was first published, especially in the West, where readers knew of the appalling conditions under which the novel was written and delighted to find in it the author’s posthumous revenge (95).

Many of the novel’s characters have counterparts in the real world. Though, it is generally accepted that Woland represents Stalin. But this notion seems not so viable at the end of the novel. Because unlike Stalin, Woland is a just judge and punishes only the sinners. A more appropriate allegorical connection can be drawn between Stalin and Emperor Tiberius, a known tyrant who appears in the Master’s novel. Azazello is immediately recognizable as one of the chiefs of the secret police
(his parallel in the Master's book is Afranius); the Master is based on Bulgakov himself, although he really stands for all the disenfranchised writers of the time and Margarita is inspired by his third wife, Yelena Shilovskaya, who actually put the finishing touches to the novel after Bulgakov's death in 1940 although one or two minor inconsistencies still exist.

Other two allegorical figures of the novel are Berlioz and Ivan. In fact the book opens with these two key characters. Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz is an editor of a fat literary journal and chairman of one of the major Moscow literary associations, MASSOLIT, a fictitious organization that takes the place of the Union of Soviet Writers. After 1934, one effectively had to be a member of that union in order to gain recognition as a writer. Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyryov is a 23 year old poet who goes by the pseudonym 'Bezdomny', which means 'homeless' in Russian. Berlioz is the representative of that class of opportunistic pseudo-writers who exists only for the sake of fame and fortune. He favours literary bureaucracy to achieve instant popularity. Ivan belongs to another literary circle that unknowingly falls prey to that bureaucratic muddle and distances himself from his own self.

**Role of Art and Artist in Society**

Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* has a perennial concern: the role of art and artist in society. It is a novel about novels-an argument for the ability of literature to transcend both time and oppression, and for the heroic nature of the writer's struggle to create that literature. The story's hero, the Master, is an iconographic representation of such writers. Despite rejection, mockery and self-censorship, he creates a fictional world so powerful that it has the ability to invade
and restructure the reality of those surrounding him. Indeed, it has a life beyond authorial control. Despite his attempts to burn it, the story of Pontius Pilate refuses to die. As Woland remarks, "Manuscripts don't burn" (Bulgakov 326). This transcendence of message over physical form—the eternal power of narrative over the mundane reality of flammable paper—is in itself an idea that escapes from Bulgakov's novel and becomes a commentary on his contemporary Soviet society and the role of authors like him within it. The story he has created is presented throughout Bulgakov's novel as powerful, almost occult force that is greater than material reality, just as the infernal visitors are greater than the rationalist society upon which they wreak havoc. As the Master explains to his fellow inmates, it is the creation of his novel that causes his transcendence to the status of a writer. The act of writing forces a kind of personal transformation upon him. The novel enables the romance of Master and Margarita and at the same time, their romance enables the novel—it is Margarita who oversees its creation and keeps faith in it when the publishing world rejects it. When the Master burns his manuscripts and throws it in the wood stove, he is attempting to reverse the alchemical process of creation. The unclean text must be transformed into ashes in the purifying flames. But it survives till the end.

In The Master and Margarita, we can see a metaphorized version of the struggles of all the authors, the story of Master presenting a sort of extended meditation on the nature of being an author. The completion of the novel is the culmination of everything he is working toward. His rejection of writing thus becomes a rejection of his own mind, an act that is literalized by his self-committal to the asylum. He literally loses his mind. When Woland returns the manuscript to him, the Master rejects it. He mutters, "Even by moonlight there's no peace for me at
night...Why do they torment me? Oh, ye gods....” Woland’s reply encapsulates the crippling effects of such self-censorship. As he asks, "...How will you be able to write now? Where are your dreams, your inspiration?” The Master replies, "I have no more dreams and my inspiration is dead, nobody interests me any longer except her. I’m finished....” Of course, by the end of the novel, the Master resumes his novel and completes the final line “You are free! Free! He is waiting for you!” (Bulgakov, 326, 331, 331, 429), before flying off to his eternal cottage with Margarita. This pattern of creative struggle, rejection, self-doubt and transcendence represents a simultaneous exploration and rejection of glorification through pain. It is creation, not rejection that turns a simple author into a Master. In the same way, the Master’s version of the crucifixion stresses joy over suffering. It is forgiveness and not a prescribed period of torment that allows Pontius Pilate to ascend to Heaven, just as Margarita’s compassion frees Frieda, the infanticide from the eternal cycle of suffering. Both the literal purgatory of Catholic theology and the metaphoric purgatory of authorial trial are ultimately rejected in favour of grace and acceptance. This rejection of suffering is as pure as a nuanced critique of literary life in Soviet culture. The members of MASSOLIT are forgettable idiots, not worthy of serious critique. The authorial voice, represented by the all-powerful satanic gang, dismisses them with a capricious amusement exemplified by the fate of Berlioz, who simply has his head cut off to shut him up.

Similarly, the proprietors of the Variety Theater are subjected to various Byzantine tortures befitting their production of terrible art. In this way, The Master and Margarita presents not so much an indictment of Socialist Realism as a disgusted mockery of it. Instead, the more serious and sensitive exploration is reserved for the
real authors, who are outside state approval and whose works are marginalized and banned. The Master represents such authors. First subjected to dismissal and then to active persecution, he gradually surrenders under the pressure of MASSOLIT and burns his own book. However, later he wins the battle and is immortalized as a writer.

Soviet writers were silenced with a choice between writing what they were told to write, and never attempting to get their works published. They lived in a repressed environment. In *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov creates an artistic world that acknowledges these conditions, and negotiates a different intellectual and philosophical approach to them. The danger of accepting that struggle is presented by the fate of the Master. Struggle does not purify him—rather it represents an acceptance of the forces ranged against him; a voluntary erasure of self that serves the purposes of the state. But, when he embraces the power of his narrative, he embraces a form of resistance, which says that joy, creation and the telling of stories must not be an end in themselves. The role of literature within the culture that produces it is similarly configured: it literally has the power to change the past, present, and future. The interaction of the Yershalaim and the Moscow realities complicates the relationship of cause and effect through the manipulation of chronology, and in doing so suggests that art transcends time. The subsequent arguments will testify that. Chapter twenty-six of *The Master and Margarita*, titled “The Burial” marks the end of the Master's story about Pilate with the burial of Yeshua, but in the last chapter which is titled, “Absolution and Eternal Refuge”, Pilate reappears, and this time within the Moscow narrative. Woland tells the Master, “*We have read your novel, and we can only say that unfortunately it is not finished. I would like to show you your hero. He has been sitting here for nearly two thousand years*” (Bulgakov 428). Pilate says that there is no
peace for him. Woland asks the Master to relieve his hero of all pains and Master grants the same. The meeting of the Master and his hero Pilate in the afterlife completes the link between the past and present. The two concurrent story lines finally intersect physically, after they have touched upon each other throughout the novel. The Master frees Pilate from his eternal torment, and is himself granted peace by one of his own creations--his version of Matthew the Levite, who arrives as Yeshua's messenger to Woland. Thus art defies time.

In his novel, Bulgakov presents the rebellious, uncompromising figure of the artist, and criticizes the abuse of the masses for their thoughtless acceptance of one man’s, or one institution’s vision of the truth. The true artist offers a different truth, one that usually precipitates ridicule, abuse, and sometimes death, while providing an expression of heterodoxy. Bulgakov, therefore, admires the artist’s individual expression of truth, and criticizes thoughtless devotion to institutionalization of that truth by unthinking masses. Literature is eternal and owing to that the Master can finish his novel even after destroying it in the fireplace. Woland through supernatural power reproduces the burnt manuscripts and allows Master to finish his novel and that is quite magical in nature. The novel also has a liberating effect- both the Master and Pilate are set free from all kinds of sufferings. Finally, literature has the power over the material world and touches the metaphysical realm, accessible to those only who have abandoned the material world, like the Master and Margarita.

**Recreation of Goethe’s Faust**

A cursory glance at *The Master and Margarita* gives the impression that the novel is merely an imitation of Goethe’s *Faust*. The analogy between both the texts
was first drawn by Elizabeth Stenbock-Fermor (309). She gave a detailed account of the connections between the two texts, identifying different characters, key episodes and the moral issues common to both the works. The list of parallel is long enough. First of all the epigraph of *The Master and Margarita* is derived from *Faust*. The opening scene at Patriarchs’ Ponds revolves around Berlioz, Ivan and Woland and echoes Mephistopheles’ and Faust’s encounter with the drunkards in Auerbach’s Cellar. The incidents at the Variety Theatre may seem copy of the performance of Mephistopheles and Faust at the Emperor’s Court, which includes the production of fake money and distribution of gifts that later disappear. Satan’s Grand Ball gets inspiration from the Walpurgisnacht on the Brocken. The list of analogy goes on and *The Master and Margarita* seems a reproduction of *Faust*. But more recent and detailed analysis of both the texts proves the notion that the latter is a creative retelling of the former with many novel ideas, designs, themes and techniques in a befitting way. This notion was first propounded by critic Andrew Barratt in his book *Between two Worlds*. Some of Bulgakov’s characters represent blends of more than one Faustian character or lack significant features of the corresponding *Faust’s* characters. If we delve deeper into *The Master and Margarita*, it emerges that Woland’s character is not a mere copy of Mephistopheles. He is grand and does not cause the death of innocent like Gretchen and her family in *Faust*. His relationship with the Master and Margarita is not superfluous like the Mephistopheles-Faust-Gretchen triangle. Woland is a godly devil who executes God’s orders and sharply contrasts Mephistopheles role in Faust’s death, where he clearly feels cheated of his prey. Bulgakov’s Margarita is not innocent, but a perfect representative of Strong Woman, who is instrumental in saving Master from distress. Her character seems to
be a blend of several of Goethe’s female characters. Like Marguerite she is an epitome of beauty, like Gretchen she is the symbol of pure love for the Master. Frieda is also a version of Gretchen who killed her child with a handkerchief. Gella, Woland’s associate has a scar on her neck, reminding us again about Gretchen’s presence. On the other hand, the Master is not preoccupied with his role a crusader of virtue like Faust. He is a frustrated writer who wants only peace and nothing, but, unknowingly becomes a spokesman of goodness, morality and uprightness.

**Autobiographical Elements**

The line, "*Manuscripts don't burn*" (Bulgakov 326) is spoken by Woland to the Master, who burns his completed novel in a feat of acute depression when the Soviet authority denies its publication, blaming it to be blasphemous. Being one of Bulgakov’s main themes in the novel, it highlights the important role a writer or an artist can play amidst the threat of a repressive and controlling government. This theme is said to be based on Bulgakov’s personal experience of burning one of the early versions of *The Master and Margarita* in fear of punishment from Soviet authorities. In this connection, Laura D. Weeks writes in her book:

> In the spring of 1930 he took his notebooks containing the manuscript and ripped them diagonally from top right to bottom left. He fed the torn sheets to the woodstove, leaving the binding with its ragged remnants as proof that the novel had existed. (12)

Bulgakov terribly suffered from the stresses and strains of Stalin’s era. It is evident that many parts of the novel have autobiographical elements, deriving from the
author's life itself. It is what Bulgakov consciously created as the testament of his literary dedication. Bulgakov's Master is an autobiographical character. He is a persecuted writer like Bulgakov. Margarita is a thinly fictionalized portrayal of Bulgakov's own wife Elena Sergeevna, who was instrumental for the posthumous publication of *The Master and Margarita* after Bulgakov's death in 1940. Not only does the book make reference to his life; it also predicts his death. In the early February of 1940, on his deathbed, Bulgakov was listening to what his wife Elena was reading from his manuscript of the novel. When she reached the description of Berlioz's funeral in the chapter nineteen, titled "Margarita", he stopped her to finish there because that was the end for him too. Bulgakov died at that moment itself. Thus the author ends up like his character Berlioz. That part of the novel described about Berlioz's funeral and in reality, Bulgakov too silently left for heavenly abode. Perhaps, that was Bulgakov's final simulation.

**As Bildungsroman**

Bildungsroman is a German term. It is a genre of novel, which deals with the development of the protagonist's mind and character, through a spiritual crisis into maturity, which ultimately helps in recognizing his true self at the end. *The Master and Margarita* craftily reflects the features of a Bildungsroman, if poet Ivan's character portrayal is taken into consideration. Riitta Pittman said, "*Ivan Bezdomny emerges as the pivotal character and the lynch-pin of The Master and Margarita, since the novel's narrative structure revolves around him*" (97). The novel is a progressive development of Ivan towards masterful selfhood. He seems an archetypal hero of Russian Fairy tales with his disheveled appearance, his awkwardness and total
confusion. The novel opens as well as closes with Ivan and he occupies more narrative space than any other character in the novel. He is the touchstone character of the novel, who is there at the start, is radically changed by his encounters with Woland and the Master, becomes the latter's disciple and continues his work till the end. He is present at almost every turn of the novel's action, and appears finally in the epilogue. He remains an uneasy inhabitant of normal reality. As a historian who knows everything. But each year, with the coming of the spring full moon, he returns to the parable which for this world looks like folly. We can cite here Katerina Clark’s definition of, classical Social Realist novel as:

*a young man's quest for consciousness. It is a kind of politically oriented Bildungsroman in which the young hero sets out to fulfill a nearly impossible task. En route he overcomes various societal and natural obstacles and masters his own impulses, thereby rising to a new level of consciousness. The outcome is the resolution of the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" within himself and the forging of a new, collective identity.* (167)

Ivan is portrayed exactly like that. In the first chapter, the appearance of Woland estranges Ivan from his secured environment. For the first time his poetry and fame fail to please him and cause him embarrassment and subsequently he is sent to a new environment—the mental asylum. He is diagnosed as schizophrenic, and slowly develops a new personality. Upon his arrival in the new place, he sees that all is not well and devises a scheme for righting the wrong. In the chapter titled "Time to Go" he himself confesses before the Master, “...I shan’t write any stupid poetry.
Something else interests me now—I want to write something quite different. I have come to understand a lot of things since I've been lying here.” Thus a new consciousness dawns on him. So, before his death, the Master's entrusts the responsibility of writing the sequel of his novel to Ivan. He says, “...You must write the sequel to it” (Bulgakov 420, 421) and takes his leave from Ivan. In the Epilogue, Ivan is cured of schizophrenia. However, he wishes to believe that the execution in Jerusalem never really takes place. This is merely the product of imagination and Yeshua himself confesses that. Ivan later becomes a Professor in the Institute of History and Philosophy. But he is not completely relieved of the traumatic past. Woland, Pilate, Yeshua, Master remain deep in his consciousness and he suffers once in a year during full moon. The whole night he remains restless and only at dawn he wakes up with an agonized cry and then starts to weep and rave. He is injected with sedative by his wife and this only brings peaceful sleep to him. Thus it seems that though Ivan's development from immaturity to maturity is tremendous, yet not complete. Carol Avins remarks about Ivan in this connection:

Unable to meet the demands of a discipleship, he fails not only to carry on the work of the Master but even fully to grasp the lessons of his life and word and to transmit them to others. The influence of the Master and the Jerusalem text on Ivan—that is, the degree of success with which the text has reached an audience—soon diminishes. (281)

Though the genre of Bildungsroman fails to attain its maturity yet Bulgakov slightly hints at the prospect of creating a novel of formation in the shape of The Master and Margarita.
The Master and Margarita is a highly complex novel. In the chapter, titled “The Master is Released”, Woland passes a comment about the Master’s novel, “Your novel has some more surprises in store for you” (Bulgakov 332). This sets the mood perfectly. The Master and Margarita tests a reader’s patience. The more we analyze it, the more complicated it will get. It is a never ending process. This is not a novel for cursory, light reading. The psychological analysis which Bulgakov makes of people’s behaviour is so deep and fascinating that it compels the readers to stop and think. Andreev Andreevich is full of praise for Bulgakov. He comments about the novel:

By alternating descriptions of everyday life, naturalistically mundane more often than not, with scenes from the realm of the fantastic, by alternating satire with tender lyricism where he speaks of the Master and Margarita who are so infinitely dear to his heart, by using the techniques of allegorical writing, phantasmagoria at its most untramelled, and the principles of mythological statement of fact, Bulgakov created a novel whose significance, needless to say, is not limited to the representation of fictions happenings in Moscow at the end of the 1920s nor to the biblical events, veiled in the mist of time and legend. (380)
Works Cited


