

ELEMENTS OF SATIRE AND THE GROTESQUE

IN THE PROSE OF

MIKHAIL AFANASYEVICH BULGAKOV

Elements of Satire and the Grotesque in the Prose of M.A. Bulgakov

by

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prose works of Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov.

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## P R E F A C E

The purpose of this thesis is to throw some light upon the hitherto unexplored subject of satire and grotesque in Mikhail Bulgakov's prose. Since not all of Bulgakov's prose writing contains elements of satire or grotesque only the works that do have been considered, and so, for example, Notes of A Young Physician and The Days of the Turbins, both realistic and autobiographical accounts, have been left out of account.

For satire several short stories are analysed as well as the three novels: The Black Snow (or The Theatrical Novel), The Master and Margarita and The Heart of a Dog, and for the grotesque - the same stories, The Heart of a Dog and above all The Master and Margarita are discussed.

Bulgakov's fame rests primarily on his dramas. Only recently his prose, which undoubtedly deserves attention, has been given credit in numerous articles and reviews. However, no extensive and detailed study of his literary achievement has been published so far.

The present thesis sets out to deal with only two aspects of Bulgakov's talent, the gift of satire, which has been acknowledged, and the predilection for the grotesque,

which has been largely passed over. Since no books discussing Bulgakov or his works have been written so far, most of the secondary material had to be collected from articles and reviews; hence the partly journalistic character of the first chapter.

Chapters II and III are preceded by a brief discussion of the nature of satire and grotesque as viewed by various literary critics. Although critics differ in classifying the two, their descriptions of the characteristics of satire and grotesque largely concur. It is hoped that the following discussion will clarify the way in which the two concepts converge and diverge in the works of one modern author.

Most of the quotations are given in Russian, except for the few cases when they were not obtainable in the original. There are no abbreviations of titles and occasionally both the Russian and the English titles are given. Russian titles are transliterated. In formal arrangement and footnoting I have followed K. Turabian's Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations 3rd ed. revised (Chicago and London, 1967). Twice I allowed myself some freedom with footnotes, placing page references directly after the quotation when a series of

quotations come from the same source. This is indicated in appropriate places.

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## CHAPTER I

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

1. Zhdanov: "Our Soviet literature is not afraid of being called tendentious, because it is tendentious. In the age of the class struggle a non-class, non-tendentious, apolitical literature does not and cannot exist."  
(Speech at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.)
2. Lenin: "It is impossible to live in a society and be free from it."

The last few years have brought a wave of interest in a forgotten writer and one of the most outstanding dramatists of the 1920's in Russia, Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov. After a term of oblivion Bulgakov's works, the majority of which still remain in manuscripts, are beginning to be published and win acclaim both in Russia and in the West.

Bulgakov has been counted among the "strangled" writers<sup>1</sup>: his stories and novels and especially his plays although immensely popular with the Soviet public, were not so successful with the authorities, who accused the author of supporting the cause of the Whites and of malicious slandering

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<sup>1</sup>P. Ivanov-Razumnik, Pisatelskiye Sud'by (New York, 1951), p.28.



of the Soviet system. After the memorable staging of Dni Turbinykh in 1926, the play was withdrawn and Bulgakov forced into silence.

Although his works circulated in manuscripts, the name of the eminent "poputchik" is hardly ever mentioned in textbooks of Soviet literature, and the Literaturnaya entsiklopedia and Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopedia devoted to him barely half a column, placing the writer "on the extreme right wing of contemporary Russian literature" and accusing him of "expressing the views of the rightist bourgeois stratum of the Soviet society".

Until the sixties the reviews of Bulgakov's works were almost uniformly unfavourable. He did not praise the Soviet reality, did not glorify the system; on the contrary, he pointed out mistakes and showed the gap between the ideals preached and the harsh facts of everyday life. After the publication of Bulgakov's satirical short stories: Rokovye yaitsa and Diavoliada, the critic Ershov wrote:

как только здесь заходит речь об образе жизни советских людей, у М. Булгакова появляется мрачная ирония и издевка. Настоящее - безобразно, а будущее и того безотраднее...Фантасмагория М. Булгакова - памфлет на новую Россию. Характеры в этом произведении отсутствуют. Юмор заменяют глумление и угрюмая издевка (когда дело касается порядков в Советской России и жизни простых людей) или перелицованные профессорские анекдоты (для характеристики Персикова).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>L.F. Ershov, Sovetskaya satiricheskaya proza 20-kh godov (Moscow. 1960). p.213.

Even the red ray discovered by Professor Persikov aroused Ershov's suspicion: why red and not any other colour?

Нетрудно расшифровать несложную аллегория сатирика. Это злобный памфлет на революцию. Красный свет стимулирует рост и размножение лишь самых низших организмов. Воздействует он на них в определенном направлении: они становятся "злобными", "прожорливыми", жестоко борются за существование. В процессе этой борьбы одна половина "сереньких" существ поедает другую, устилая дорогу к своему процветанию трупами слабейших.<sup>3</sup>

Discussing the story Diavoliada, Ershov continues:

Да, в России многое обстоит не так, как было, утверждает писатель. Многое переменялось, но только не к лучшему, а к худшему. Так, посмеиваясь над скудными пайками эпохи военного коммунизма, М.Булгаков озлобленно - иронически обрисовывает продукты тогдашнего производства: негорящие спички, дурманящее вино, скверную пайковую колбасу. ...Положительный идеал писателя весь в прошлом....М.Булгаков делает попытку осмеять и дискредитировать современность, в которой ему видится одна бестолковщина, всеобщая путаница и бессмысленная суета.<sup>4</sup>

Ershov was not alone in voicing condemnation of the writer.

After the death of Stalin attempts have been made at rehabilitating Bulgakov. The article entitled "From 'The White Guard' to 'The Days of the Turbins'"<sup>5</sup> well illustrated the gradual change of tone and the shift in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.214.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.215.

<sup>5</sup> Y. Lurye, I. Serman, "Ot 'Beloi Gvardii' k 'Dnyam Turbinykh'", Russkaya Literatura, No.2 (Leningrad, 1965).

attitude towards the writer on the part of the critics.

They are willing to admit that the once condemned play has some indubitable merit and a permanent place in the Soviet repertoire. Venyamin Kaverin in his "Zametki o dramaturgii Bulgakova" refers to the writer as "замечательный русский прозаик и драматург..... произведения которого выдержали 'испытание времени' и не потеряли значения для нашей литературы."<sup>6</sup> He praises highly Bulgakov's dramatic gift, his original style and remarkable language.

This belated recognition is, however, by no means universal. For example Yuri Mann in his book About Grotesque in Literature<sup>7</sup> mentions the name of Bulgakov, but completely ignores the writer's outstanding contribution to the history of Russian grotesque. He does not discuss a single one of Bulgakov's works in detail while he dwells upon the classics and looks for sporadic grotesque elements in the works of lesser, but approved writers.

Recently Bulgakov's works have found able translators in the West and are now beginning to reach the western reader. They are also, if somewhat more hesitantly, being published in his native land, where the "saga" of Bulgakov is still alive. After years of silence, his books are now enjoying a popularity which testifies to a veritable "Bulgakov renaissance".

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V. Kaverin, "Zametki o dramaturgii Bulgakova", an introduction to M. Bulgakov: Dramy i komedii (Moscow, 1965), 5.

7

O groteske v literature (Moscow, 1966).

Personal charisma plays an important role in the case of an outstanding man, be he a politician, an eminent scientist or a writer, and to a large extent influences our perception of his achievement; all his contemporaries who had a chance of meeting Mikhail Afanasyevich were impressed by the strength of his personality.

We know a certain amount about the life of the writer but some facts remain obscure, and he wanted them to remain so, obviously enjoying the aura of mystery. But since Bulgakov's name is still relatively unknown in Canada, it might not be beside the point to present a profile of the author of one of the most puzzling and controversial novels in Soviet literature, The Master and Margarita.

Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov was born in Kiev, on 3 (15) May, 1891, the son of a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy. He was one of seven children and the oldest son. The Bulgakovs lived peacefully in a large, quiet house situated in a picturesque old quarter of Kiev; the atmosphere of harmony and security pervading their home was charmingly recreated in The White Guard, a largely autobiographical novel.

Young Mikhail attended the famous Kiev Gymnasium, which produced a whole breed of men of letters, and the

memories of his schooldays also became material for literature; one of the protagonists of *The White Guard* remembers his boyhood thus:

О, восемь лет учения! Сколько в них было нелепого и грустного и отчаянного для мальчишеской души, но сколько было радостного. Серый день, серый день, серый день, ут консекутивум, Кай Юлий Цезарь, кол по космографии и вечная ненависть к астрономии со дня этого кола. Но зато и весна, весна и грохот в залах, гимназистки в зеленых передниках на бульваре, каштаны и май, и, главное, вечный маяк впереди - университет.<sup>8</sup>

Konstantin Paustovsky, Bulgakov's schoolmate, remembers Mikhail as a leader in fights which were a regular feature of the gymnasium life:

Nearly always in the front rank of the victorious army was to be found a boy with a snub nose and a challenging expression - the future writer Mikhail Bulgakov. He cut into the battle wherever the danger was at its height, and victory followed him, crowning him with a shining wreath of his own dishevelled locks.<sup>9</sup>

Paustovsky also gives us a charactersketch of the young Bulgakov which indicates the qualities subsequently to be found in the mature writer:

He was older and left school before me, but I very well remember his extraordinary vitality, the ruthless tongue which made people afraid of him, and the sense he gave us of determination and strength - we felt it in everything he said, however trifling. He was full of imagined experiences and mystifying hoaxes and jokes. By the time he finished with it, the school in which we led our so familiar, prosy lives, became a world of incredible personages and events.

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V. Ya. Lakshin, "O proze Mikhaila Bulgakova i o nem samom" in Mikhail Bulgakov: Izbrannaya proza (Moscow, 1966), 4.

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K. Paustovsky, Story of a Life, transl. by Manya Harari and Michael Duncanson (London, 1964), p. 122.

Any colourless character, such as Twerp the Supervisor, once caught up in the circle of Bulgakov's inventiveness, developed a mysterious double life and grew to the stature of a Sobakevich or a Tartarin - no longer just the Twerp we knew with his puffy alcoholic nose but the hero of ludicrous or monstrous happenings. Whatever part his imagination touched, it shifted for us just over the edge of the real, actual world around us into the realm of phantasmagoria. <sup>10</sup>

Paustovsky recalls Bulgakov's naming the director "Masloboi" and the supervisor "Shpon'ka", the latter obviously evidence of young Mikhail's early encounter with Gogol. Reading was one of Bulgakov's favourite pastimes, and during his school years he was particularly impressed by Gogol and Fenimore Cooper; later he came across Shchedrin.

Already in his last years at the gymnasium he began to write satirical poems and humoresques - an indication of his future literary path. From this period of his life dates also his infatuation with the theatre:

Раз в неделю инспектор Бодянский выдавал гимназистам специальное разрешение на посещение театра. Надо ли говорить, что Булгаков не пропускал этих дней, но, кроме того, тайком ухитрился бывать на спектаклях и в другие, неположенные числа. <sup>11</sup>

Rather unexpectedly, in view of his literary interests, Bulgakov chose the career of a physician, and after a few years'

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<sup>10</sup>

Ibid., p.187.

<sup>11</sup>

Lakshin, op.cit., 5.

diligent study graduated from Kiev university with distinction. This happy event took place in 1916. In 1917 the young doctor began to practise medicine as a General Practitioner in the village of Nikolskoe in the Smolensk province. The literary product of his experiences at Nikolskoe was Notes of a Young Physician, in which Bulgakov describes the trials and tribulations of a young graduate who is faced with day-to-day emergencies and has to overcome his own feelings of inadequacy and shyness.

Bulgakov was not destined to follow his medical career for too long; in 1919 he returned to practise in Kiev, but in 1920 he gave it up altogether. Later on he said in an autobiographical fragment:

Fate willed that I was not to make use of my title of doctor or my honours degree for long. One night in 1919, in the depth of autumn, travelling in a decrepit old train, by the light of a little candle stuck in a bottle I wrote my first story. In the town to which that train had trundled me I took my story to the editor of a newspaper. He printed it. Later he published several feature articles. In early 1920 I abandoned my title and my degree and started writing. I lived in the remote provinces and three of my plays were staged at the local theatre. Subsequently, when I reread them in Moscow in 1923, I hastily destroyed them. I hope that not a single copy of them is left anywhere. <sup>12</sup>

The Civil War found Bulgakov in Kiev; the experiences of those days are reflected in The White Guard:

По счету киевлян у них было восемнадцать переломов.... некоторые из теплоушечных мемуаристов насчитывали их двенадцать. Я точно могу сообщить, что их было четырнадцать, причем десять из них я лично пережил.<sup>13</sup>

The years 1920 and 1921 in Bulgakov's biography are somewhat vague, and have been accounted for in various ways by scholars interested in the writer; the most probable and best testified version is that Bulgakov left Kiev for Vladikavkaz, where his first story was published and his first plays performed. According to Lakshin he came to Moscow by the end of 1921, and there he learned of the death of his mother; this news broke the last link binding the writer to his home town. From that time on he settled in Moscow, the city for which he developed a great love. In an article "Treatise about a Home" he describes his experiences in Moscow:

Не из прекрасного далека я изучал Москву 1921 - 1924 годов. О нет, я жил в ней, я истоптал её вдоль и поперек. Я поднимался почти вовсе шестые этажи, в каких только помещались учреждения, и так как не было положительно ни одного бго этажа, в котором не было бы учреждения, то этажи знакомы мне все решительно.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Moscow Bulgakov found a job in the literary section of Glavpolitprosvet (Glavnyi politiko-prosvetitelnyi komitet) at the Narkompros (Narodnyi komissariat prosveshcheniya). About his activities in that

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<sup>13</sup>

After Lakshin, op.cit., 6.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., 7-8.



institution he makes the following acerbic comment:

Историку литературы не забыть: в конце 21го года литературой в Республике занималось три человека: старик (примечание: он, конечно, оказался не Эмиль Золя, а незнакомый мне), молодой (помощник старика, тоже незнакомый - стихи) и я (ничего не писал). Историку же: в Лито не было ни стульев, ни столов, ни чернил, ни лампочек, ни книг, ни писателей, ни читателей.<sup>15</sup>

Коротко: ничего не было.

When, as a result of the financial difficulties of Narkompros, Lito closed down, Bulgakov began to work as a reporter for various publishing houses which flourished during the NEP period. Between 1922 and 1925 he wrote for: Rupor, Gudok, Krasnyi Zhurnal dlya Vsekh, Krasnaya Panorama, Krasnaya Gazeta, Meditinskiy Rabotnik, Na Vakhte, Petrogradskaya Pravda and many other journals. His articles and stories usually appeared unsigned or under a pseudonym: M. Bull, Tuskarora, G. P. Ukhov, F.S-ov, M. Neizvestnyi (Unknown), Mikhail, Emma B., and the majority of them have not yet been unearthed and collected.

In this period of his life Bulgakov wrote much, but most of his literary output would not qualify as good literature according to his own evaluation. Like Chekhov, whose fate bears more than one resemblance to his own, Bulgakov had to accept whatever commission came his way - literature was to him, after all, a way of earning a living:

Я писал торгово-промышленную хронику в газетку, а по ночам сочинял веселые фельетоны, которые мне самому казались не смешнее зубной боли, подавал прошение в Люттрест, а однажды ночью, остервенившись от постного масла, картошки, дырявых ботинок, сочинил ослепительный проект световой торговой рекламы.<sup>16</sup>

Of the host of magazines that published Bulgakov's stories and articles two deserve mention. These are: Nakanune with its weekly supplement Literaturnaya Nedelya and Gudok, edited by A.N. Tolstoi. The latter employed such young Soviet writers as Konstantin Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov, and Sergei Yesenin, and it published several of Bulgakov's sketches and articles and his Notes on the Cuffs (Napiski na Manzhetakh), a work of a new curious structure: a cross between the pages of a diary and a sketch of an autobiographical novel. In Gudok Bulgakov, together with Ilya Ilf and Yuri Olesha, produced the famous "fourth column", a section dealing with current problems in a humorous way.

Although some of the magazines that Bulgakov wrote for had a high literary standard, he was not happy in his job of reporter and feature writer. He wrote later: "I hated these jobs without exception. And I grew to hate editors to a man." While still working for Gudok he published in the magazine Nedra his two outstanding stories The Devilry (Diavoliada) and The Fatal Eggs (Rokovye yaitsa) in 1925. By 1926 he was already winning renown as the author of three slim volumes of short stories and becoming established in the literary field.

Real fame, however, came later, when the magazine Rossiya started publication of his first novel, The White Guard, based largely on Bulgakov's own experiences of the Civil War. Although Rossiya folded up after publishing only two instalments of the novel, the excerpts aroused the interest of the new literary editor of The Moscow Arts Theatre, Pavel Alexandrovich Markov, who asked the author to be allowed to read the rest of the manuscript and invited him to turn it into a play. After a year's hard work Bulgakov transformed The White Guard into the play The Days of the Turbins on which his literary reputation came to be largely based. The story tells of the defeat of the Whites: the abandonment of Kiev by Skoropadsky and the invasion of Petlura, and of how the best elements among the Whites accepted the revolution. The Days of the Turbins was produced for the stage by Stanislavsky himself. The success of the play was comparable to that of the Seagull;<sup>17</sup> it established Bulgakov as a major dramatist. The public loved it. Unfortunately the Party was rather less enthusiastic, and Lunacharsky openly called the play "a semi-apology for the White cause". RAPP critics: B. Blum, A. Orlinsky and others coined a new term "bulgakovshchina" and voiced their condemnation of The Days of the Turbins and its author. Their outcry was so powerful that the theatre did not dare invite Bulgakov to the first night performance.

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It is discussed at some length by Lurye and Serman, op.cit., 194.

One of the artists, V. Verbitsky, sent the author a little note composed on that occasion:

Тщетны выкрики: Автора! ... Браво! ...  
 Но Булгаков не выйдет, пока  
 Он как плащ матадора кровавый<sup>18</sup>  
 Для свирепого Блюма - быка.

With one intermission, a break of a few years, the play ran for 987 performances at the Moscow Arts Theatre until 1941. After that the MAT never put it on again, but in 1954 Mikhail Yanshin, who was in the original cast, staged it again at the Stanislavsky Theatre, and it is still in that theatre's repertoire.

Encouraged by the triumph of The Days of the Turbins Bulgakov wrote in quick succession two comedies: Zoyka's Apartment and The Crimson Island, which boldly satirized the morals and manners of Soviet Russia under the NEP, but the plays did not win the approval of the authorities and consequently were soon withdrawn from the stage.

By 1928 Bulgakov had finished another satirical play, The Flight (Beg) about the fates of Russian emigres. Written in eight scenes or "dreams" as Bulgakov called them, it possesses a dreamlike, nightmarish quality. The dreams have as their setting the Crimea, Constantinople and Paris. They reflect the fates of a couple of refugees from St. Petersburg

who, protected by the remnants of the White army, are trying to make their way to Constantinople. "The Flight" includes an attack on a monastery, a defense of the last White post in the Crimea by a deranged, cruel Khludov, and hopeless attempts by the refugees to find some means of supporting themselves in Constantinople. It is a story of "defeat, degradation and disorientation".<sup>19</sup> The Flight was accepted for production by the Moscow Arts Theatre, but the censorship had the play banned at the rehearsal stage for being "a requiem for the White movement". Twenty-seven years later it was first staged by the Gorky Theatre in Stalingrad, where it received very favourable reviews, and in Leningrad at the Pushkin Theatre.

By 1929 the Soviet censorship was becoming more rigid: Bulgakov's four plays were banned from the stage. This had an adverse financial effect on the writer who was forced to look for a job. Eventually he managed to secure himself a position as assistant producer and literary advisor to the MAT. His collaboration with that theatre lasted till 1936, when he broke with Stanislavsky, and his experiences of theatrical life served later as a basis for The Theatrical Novel, translated into English under the title The Black Snow and also known as Notes of the Dead Man.

During his work with MAT. Bulgakov's dramatization of

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Dead Souls enjoyed a great success, and it has been suggested that the Red Banner medal granted to Bulgakov for his services to the Soviet Theatre was the prize. While working as producer, Bulgakov also tried his talent as an actor, appearing on stage as the judge in the breach-of-promise case Bardell versus Pickwick in a dramatization of The Pickwick Papers.

Although he found the job of assistant producer interesting enough, the ban on his works embittered Bulgakov, and in 1932, following the example of Zamyatin, he formally appealed to Stalin for permission to emigrate. Stalin answered over the telephone: Bulgakov would not be permitted to leave the country, but lifting the ban on The Days of the Turbins might be considered. Within four hectic days the MAT put on a special performance for Stalin alone, and as a result the play was reintroduced into the theatre's repertoire. However, that was but a small concession. The writer had, long since realized that he would never be accepted by the system so long as he kept voicing his true opinions instead of just praising everything Soviet. Thwarted in his attempts to depict the present he turned his attention to the past. He had always been an admirer of Moliere, in whom he recognized a kindred spirit; the ultimate fate of the great Frenchman also resembled his own lot: both writers were victims of despotism and fanaticism, totally dependant on the whim of

the tyrant.

Bulgakov's "Molieriana" occupy a very prominent place among his writings; he is the author of a novel about Molière, The Life of M. Molière (Zhizn' gospodina de Moliera), and of the three plays: Kabala Svyatosh, Polounnyi Zhurden, and Molière. He also translated into Russian L'Avare. Molière, a biographical play about the life of the French dramatist, was completed in 1932 and accepted by MAT for production. Work on the play dragged on for four years. In the meantime relations between Bulgakov and MAT became strained; it was largely the fault of the producer, N.M. Gorchakov, who, in his attempt to conceal the controversial message of the play, tried to turn it into a conventional period melodrama. At long last, on February 15th, 1936, came the première. Shortly after that Pravda bitterly attacked Bulgakov's insolence in choosing a trivial plot at such a critical moment in history (Vneshniy blesk i falshivoe sodержanie", Pravda, March 9th, 1936, p.3).<sup>20</sup> Other newspapers followed suit, and the play was closed and banned for future production.

Looking for parallels to Molière in Russian literature, Bulgakov found the lonely figure of Pushkin, a genius hounded to death by a heartless sycophantic society and an autocratic tyrant. The result was the play The Last Days describing

the end of the great poet, a major dramatic achievement and a feat of technique: the main character never appears on stage. The Last Days was not staged till the war, when, with the MAT evacuated to Saratov, it received a brilliant production on the local scene. It was the last play to be personally supervised by Nemirovich-Danchenko before his death.

The untimely ban on Molière affected another outstanding play of Bulgakov, Ivan Vasilievich, a grotesque transfer of contemporary Russian types into the times of Ivan the Terrible. It was to be produced at the Theatre of Satire, but, as a result of an unfavourable review of Molière, in Pravda (March 9th, 1936), the play was withdrawn just before the première. Like Zoyka's Apartment and The Crimson Island, Ivan Vasilievich is a satire on Soviet morals and manners. In conception it resembles The Time Machine. A young-scientist discovers a mechanism that can transcend the limitations of time. As a result of his experiment the Superintendent of the house and a thief, caught in the act of robbing the neighbouring apartment, suddenly find themselves in the camp of Ivan the Terrible, while Ivan seeks refuge in the scientist's room. The absurdity of the ensuing situations which is emphasized by a linguistic mélange (as Ivan and his



courtiers speak Old Russian) makes the play a gem of humour.

Bulgakov's last dramatic effort was his dramatized version of Don Quixote, written in 1938 when the author was already a sick man. Like The Last Days it was produced after the writer's death by the Pushkin Theatre in Leningrad in March 1941, and since the première it has been a staggering success.

Altogether Bulgakov wrote 36 plays, of which thirteen are known, eight have been published and eight (not the same ones) performed, although of these only four reached the stage in his lifetime. To this number should be added three opera libretti" Rachel, Minin i Pozharsky and Ivan Susanin, a translation of L'Avare and an unknown quantity of works in manuscripts.

Nemirovich-Danchenko assessed Bulgakov as "probably the most brilliant of all exponents of dramatic technique" Writing about Bulgakov's art he said: "His talent - for sustaining a plot, for keeping an audience in suspense for the length of a play, for creating living images, and for conveying ideas in dramatic terms - is absolutely unique and I believe that the attacks on him are the result of a misunderstanding."<sup>21</sup> There was no misunderstanding: Bulgakov simply

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<sup>21</sup>

After M.V. Glenny, "Mikhail Bulgakov", Survey (October, 1967), 3.

did not conform to the required pattern - man of integrity and honesty, he had to remain faithful to what he saw as truth. That was also part of the reason for his break with the MAT.

From 1936 Bulgakov worked as literary consultant with the Bolshoi Theatre, the job he held till his death five years later. In 1938 he completed the novel The Master and Margarita which is regarded by some critics as his masterpiece; he had worked on it for several years. A strange and intriguing book, it deals with the eternal problem of good versus evil, of the existence or nonexistence of God and Satan, and poses a new interpretation of Christ and the Bible, at the same time directing lashing satire at the Moscow bureaucrats and swindlers, literati and upravdomy; the two apparently incompatible worlds are bound together by a pair of lovers the Master and Margarita (the name Margarita and the conception of the devil who unites the loving couple for a price is taken from Goethe's Faust) who participate in both.

In 1939 the writer went blind, and he had to dictate his last, unfinished work Theatrical Novel or Notes of the Dead Man to his wife. He died in March 1940, and, singularly, his death passed unnoticed; only in October 1940 did "Dom Aktëra" in Moscow organize an evening in remembrance of Bulgakov.

Soon after his death the process of slow rehabilitation

began. It was inaugurated by a letter of A.A. Fadeev, disarming in its tactlessness considering that it was meant as condolences to Bulgakov's wife:

И люди политики, и люди литературы знают, что он человек не обременивший себя ни в творчестве, ни в жизни полетической ложью, что путь его был искренен, ограничен, а если в начале своего пути (а иногда и потом ( ) он не всё видел так, как оно было в самом деле ( ), то в этом нет ничего удивительного, хуже было бы, если бы он фальшивил.<sup>22</sup>

Since the late 1950's several Soviet scholars, editors and critics have been working on the large and to a great extent still unpublished Bulgakov material. V.Y. Lakshin of Novyi Mir and E.E. Popovkin, editor of Moskva, have been most active in publishing his out of print or unpublished novels and stories while Rudnitsky, Polyakova, Lurye, Serman and Smirnova have devoted their attention to Bulgakov's dramatic works. Paustovsky and Konstantin Simonov, both ardent admirers of Bulgakov, have given a reappraisal of his talent, the latter ranking Bulgakov's mature works with the prose of Pushkin and Lermontov.

A real Bulgakov revival started in 1965 with the publication of his Theatrical Novel by Novyi Mir. At the same time a collection of Bulgakov's seven plays, entitled Dramy i Komedii appeared in print. In 1966 Moskva published The Master and Margarita and in the same year an edition of Bulgakov's Selected Prose came out in 50,000 copies. Both The Theatrical Novel and The Master and Margarita were

almost instantly translated into French and English, and there followed a wave of reviews. Bulgakov's short stories, which had been published in Russian in the West in 1952, have now also been translated into English, and so have some of his plays. The Days of the Turbins ran in London at the Phoenix Theatre as early as 1938, and more recently Rudolph Cartier produced it on B.B.C.T.V. in 1960. The above and several other plays by Bulgakov have been translated and staged in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, apparently with considerable success. As yet none have been staged in North America.

One should bear in mind, while assessing the literary merit of Bulgakov, that many of his works still remain in manuscript, totally unknown or seen by very few. Several were lost or destroyed by the author himself, who, displeased with the result (and his judgement was extremely harsh), disposed of them in a way that Master dealt with his manuscript, that is, simply burnt them. Quite recently a new book came to light: "Sobach'e serdtse" (The Heart of a Dog); and, after having been published in Italy, this has recently been translated into English. It is possible that more such discoveries have yet to be made.

Several scholars in Europe and America are currently working on Bulgakov and collecting the scanty biographical

material; however, the majority of his works still await evaluation and sensitive and impartial criticism.

After the stunning reception of Dni Turbinykh Bulgakov's reputation as a dramatist was made. But his novels and short stories, known to a limited number of readers (as they were not published or were published in small numbers in Russia) enjoyed less popularity. Consequently, justice has yet to be done to Bulgakov as a prose writer.

His prose, vivid and colourful, possesses a striking dramatic quality and the naturalness of an oral account. Bulgakov's friends have remarked on his innate brilliance as a raconteur. Toporkov, an actor at MAT, who knew the writer well, wrote of him:

Bulgakov wrote his stories just as he told them. And as raconteur he was truly masterly. With his innate sense of humour he used to set such cunning 'traps' to arouse his listeners' impatient curiosity that one could never guess whether his stories were going to end sadly or happily. <sup>23</sup>

Michael Glenny, who has made an extensive study of Bulgakov, has this to say about his technique:

"In addition to the built-in characteristics of the novel, which Bulgakov exploits to the uttermost limits, one of his strengths as a novelist is a gift 'borrowed', as it were, from his play-writing self: his quite extraordinary power of conveying intensely real, visual effects with an

unerring economy of means. The images leap instantly from the page, three-dimensional, true and alive. Such is Bulgakov's command of this rare ability that it is one of the greatest sources of pleasure to be gained from reading his novels. They are compulsively readable, because Bulgakov is one of nature's born story-tellers. He does not just string together a narrative sequence, dabbling in the colour and describing states of mind; he is primarily a creator of a teeming fantasy world of people who range from grotesque to the starkly realistic and who, as he describes them, begin to move and act with the often strange but inescapable logic of their natures.<sup>24</sup>

Another striking characteristic of Bulgakov's prose is the importance of detail, a feature he shares with Gogol: this results at times in a certain amount of artistic exuberance, and also creates in the reader a sensation of oppressiveness (for example, the 'overcrowding' of The Master and Margarita). The latter is not, however, a flaw, but a deliberate device applied in order to produce the effect of the grotesque; besides, it does not appear in all of Bulgakov's prose works.<sup>25</sup>

As a satirist Bulgakov ranks with his contemporaries, such as Zoshchenko, Zamyatin, Olesha and Ilf and Petrov, and continues the line started by Fonvizin and highlighted by such eminent writers as Gogol, Shchedrin and Goncharov. As an author of the grotesque he is almost unique in the

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<sup>24</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>

The importance of detail in the grotesque will be discussed in Chapter III.

Soviet literature of his period and inescapably reminds us of Gogol.

Looking for parallels with other writers, Glenn describes Bulgakov in the following way:

Allowing for the differences in culture climate, Bulgakov's nearest equivalent in Anglo-American literature would be an amalgam (if such can be imagined) of Edgar Allan Poe and Evelyn Waugh.

.....  
 ...Temperamentally and artistically Bulgakov is perhaps closest to Zamyatin whom he resembled in several ways: his lack of interest in realism for realism's sake; the primacy of his irrepressible fantasy, and above all his courage under the blows of fate and his faith in his own vision which he believed - with justification, as we now know - to be stronger than 'principalities and powers'.<sup>26</sup>

The hallmark of Bulgakov's writing is a special combination of trained observation, irrepressible humour, sensitivity to the human condition and an artistic detachment which prevents him from being partial. The writer himself considered the human element to be of the utmost importance; he voiced that opinion through his mouthpiece, Maksudov, the hero of The Theatrical Novel:

Героев своих надо любить. Если этого не будет, не советую никому братья за перо - вы получите крупнейшую неприятность, так и знайте.<sup>27</sup>

In this he resembles Chekhov, whose stories and plays reveal a

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<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., 9, 14.

<sup>27</sup>

After Lakshin, op.cit., 39.

unique blend of detachment and deeply human sympathy.

Although he is definitely not a follower of the Art for Art's sake trend, neither can Bulgakov be called a realist in the traditional sense: his own personal impressions and experiences are the fabric for his artistic creations, but they are coupled with a powerful and highly original imagination. Lakshin said about this quality of Bulgakov's writing:

Булгаков никогда не умел писать о том, чего не видел, и это не мешало ему прослыть писателем с дерзкой художественной фантазией. Картины, являвшиеся его воображению, как бы напоминали о том, что было, что сам он видел, но возникали они в очищенном и преображенном силой поэтического огня силой.<sup>28</sup>

Even if not the whole artistic output of Mikhail Bulgakov has been studied, we can state on the basis of those of his works which have been published so far that the writer deserves rather more than half a column in Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopedia. For a fairer evaluation of his talent let us turn again to Lakshin:

В том лучше, что создано Булгаковым, его можно считать наследником русской повествовательной традиции в самых высоких её образцах, и прежде всего Гоголя, Достоевского и Чехова. От Гоголя он унаследовал яркую живописность сатирического рассказа, умение передать фантазмагорию быта. От Достоевского - его напряженную гуманизм и немного лихорадочную, увлеченную, убедительно неправильную речь. От Чехова - лирическую интонацию и тонкий юмор, неразрывно слитые воедино. Но, впитавший эти разнородные стилевые традиции и влияния, Булгаков никому не покажется эклектичным или устарелым. Он наследует традицию не по - эпигонски, его стиль - современный, жизненный, принадлежит только ему одному.<sup>29</sup> отражает в себе обаятельную личность автора.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. same page



## CHAPTER I I

"Не нужно мне гремющей лиры  
вручи мне Ювеналов бич!"  
Пушкин.

### BULGAKOV'S SATIRE

Satire is not the greatest form of literature but it is one of the most energetic and memorable forms. It is free, easy and direct, topical, shocking, informal, funny and, on top of all that, it claims to be realistic.

According to Freud:

Wit permits us to make our enemy ridiculous through that which we could not utter loudly or consciously on account of existing hindrances; in other words, wit affords us the means of surmounting restrictions and of opening up otherwise inaccessible pleasure sources.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind that satire has to contain the element of humour and an object of attack, "the satirist secretly aims at exposing a discrepancy in reproducing the object in the strongest possible light. Once he has exposed it, the fewer words the better, for his insistence on pointing the moral will rob the reader of his share of the game... Far

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After R.C. Elliott, "The Satirist and Society", Modern Satire (New York, 1962), 152.

from using the good of invective, he lures his audience by posing as a passive agent, letting the condemnation come home to roost by analogy. Thus satire can justly be called the most openly rhetorical of all the literary genres."<sup>2</sup>

Dryden saw the true end of satire in the amendment of vices by correction, and that is how many satirists view their task; however, the motivation appears to be more complex: (for example Hight in his Anatomy of Satire<sup>3</sup> suggests four possible motives behind the writing of a satire. These are:

1. a personal hatred, scorn or condescending amusement;
2. a wish to stigmatize crime or ridicule folly and thus to aid in diminishing or removing it;
3. an aesthetic motive: pleasure which all artists and writers feel in making their own special pattern, manipulating their chosen material. Patterns of satire are specially interesting because they are so complicated;
4. an urge to give positive advice, state an ideal.

Obviously, almost any satire has as its basis an amalgam of the above, although any one of the elements may be dominant.

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David Worcester: "The Art of Satire", Modern Satire (New York, 1962) 179.

3

Princeton, N.J., 1962.

The power of satire was recognized long ago; in fact, as R.C. Elliott<sup>4</sup> assures us, in the past satire was thought to be magically efficacious and the title of satirist was synonymous with that of a magician. It is interesting to note that for a while it was forbidden to print satires in Elizabethan England, a state of affairs somewhat reminiscent of the totalitarian states today.

Explaining the ambivalent attitude of society towards the satirist, Elliott says:

Society has doubtless been wise, in its old pragmatic way, to suspect the satirist.. Whether he is an enchanter wielding the ambiguous power of magic, or whether he is a mere poet, his relation to society will necessarily be problematic. He is of society in the sense that his art must be grounded in his experience as a social man; but he must also be apart, as he struggles to achieve proper distance. His practice is often sanative, as he proclaims; but it may be revolutionary in ways that society cannot possibly approve, and in ways that may not be clear even to the satirist.<sup>5</sup>

Since an attack on a local phenomenon is capable of indefinite extension into an attack on the whole structure of which that phenomenon is part, a satirist presents a potential threat to the system. Many a satirist has had to suffer the ire of a threatened tyrant.

Whereas most critics regard satire as a genre, Northrop

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<sup>4</sup> "The Satirist and Society," op.cit., passim.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 154.

6

Frye in his important work Anatomy of Criticism regards irony and satire as a mythos, a pregeneric narrative element of literature (alongside with romance, tragedy and comedy). He views satire either as a literary structure describing unidealized human experience or as a parody of romance. (Bulgakov's satire is of the first type).

The satiric effect is a result of a clash between the two inherent elements of satire: a sense of the grotesque or absurd and a more desirable rational alternative. As Frye puts it:

Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience. <sup>7</sup>

Frye distinguishes six phases of satire and irony, of which the second, the third, and especially the sixth apply to Bulgakov's writings. The sixth phase corresponds roughly to what W. Kayser calls the "satiric grotesque".<sup>8</sup>

The present chapter will be concerned with satirical elements in Bulgakov's work and with grotesque elements insofar as they have a didactic purpose and may therefore be subsumed

<sup>6</sup> Princeton, N.J., 1957.

<sup>7</sup> op.cit., p.224.

<sup>8</sup> the second phase includes criticism of conventions, systems, ironic reversal of romance, the danse macabre; the third implies abandonment of common sense as a standard, a shift of perspective, chaos.

under the general heading of satire.

Discussing the nature of satire and irony Frye wrote:

Two things... are essential to satire, one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack.<sup>9</sup>

Satire demands an agreement between the writer and his audience as to the undesirability of an object of attack which means that satire founded on personal pique, prejudice or idiosyncrasy dates very quickly. This may account for the fact that, while the "objective" satire in The Fatal Eggs still evokes laughter, the humour of The Theatrical Novel, a personal and topical piece of invective, has largely faded away.

One of the essential requirements of satire from a purely formal point of view is that the story should be told by one single narrator: either the author or his mouthpiece. Another striking characteristic is the lack of development of characters, which results inevitably in fragmentation and stasis. According to Kernan: "the rythm of satire lacks the crucial act of perception which permits development and forward movement."<sup>10</sup>

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This condition to my mind, excludes from satire, the "pure" grotesque as represented in the end of The Master and Margarita. This type of grotesque is totally irrational, devoid of purpose, humourless, and in its amalgamation of absurd and frightening details presents us with a meaningless if interesting pattern.

10

A.B. Kernan, "A Theory of Satire:", Modern Satire, 178.

The scene of satire is always disorderly and crowded, packed to the point of bursting with people and things: the immediate effect is one of disorderly profusion, rather like the famous "Gin Lane" of Hogarth. The background is usually the metropolis.

To trace the development of satire throughout the ages here would be spurious; the long line of satirists starts with Aristophanes and Juvenal and continues through Dryden, Pope, Voltaire, Swift, LeSage, to Brecht. Hašek with his immortal *Shveik*, A. Huxley and Orwell. In Russian Literature satire had an impressive number of brilliant exponents, to mention only Saltykov-Shchedrin with his Gospoda Golovlevy, Smert' Pazukhina, Sovremennaya Idila and Pompaduri i Pompadurshi, Gogol's "Revizor" and Mertvye Dushi, Goncharov's Oblomov, Sukhovo-Kobylin with his Smert' Tarelkina, some stories of Chekhov, Mayakovsky's Banya and Blokha, Leonov's Vor, Olesha's Zavist', Zamyatin's My, Ilf and Petrov with their Zolotoi Telenok and Dvendadtsat' stul'ev, and the short stories of Zoshchenko and Panteleymon Romanov.

The period of the NEP with its paradoxes and innumerable contradictions provided Russian satirists with almost inexhaustible material, and the temporary relaxation of censorship enabled them to express their real feelings about the

inadequacies of the system, as well as to experiment with form. Consequently it produced several outstanding works, and a great number of lesser ones. Satires were printed in innumerable literary magazines which mushroomed under the NEP. It was at this time that Ostap Bender began his travels in search of a million, Leonid Leonov wrote a novel about a revolutionary turned thief, Mayakovsky ridiculed Soviet bureaucracy and Zoshchenko explored situational and linguistic absurdities of everyday life in his short stories.

Discussing the development of the satirical novel under the NEP Ershov writes:

Первоначальное развитие сатирического романа, а точнее романа сатиры, происходило в рамках авантюрно - фантастических фабул и сюжетов. Многим тогда казалось, что колоссальное убыстрение жизни, революция в области политики должна перевернуть все представления и о законах сюжета. Отсюда повышенный интерес к авантюрам, экспрессии и динамике внешнего действия, презрительно-снисходительное отношение к тихоходному и "устарелому" психологическому анализу. Только ленивый не писал в 1924-1927 годах авантюро-приключенических повестей и романов. Среди создателей такого рода произведений мы найдем имена А.Толстого, М. Шагинян, Вс.Иванова, Б.Лавренева, В.Катаева, Л. Никулина, М.Булгакова, Ю.Олеши и десятки других авторов.<sup>11</sup>

This interest in the fantastic brought about a rediscovery of Gogol, that master of the grotesque. Such writers as Sven and Smolin resurrected Khlestakov, M. Barkanov wrote Povest'

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L.F. Ershov, Sovetskaya satiricheskaya proza 20tykh godov (Moscow-Leningrad, 1960), p.205.

о том как помирilsya Ivan Ivanovich s Ivanom Nikiforovichem, the devil yet again became popular for (example Chort v sovete neporochnykh by S. Polotsky and A. Shmulyan, 1928).

A cursory survey of the literary scene of the time seems to indicate that Bulgakov's satire is in keeping with the general trend, although it may be argued that his approach to Gogol was more than a mere following of the current vogue, that it resulted from Bulgakov's deeply rooted admiration for his predecessor and, ultimately, from the fundamental congeniality of their natures. Bulgakov shares with Gogol a relish for the grotesque, love of mystery and a particular type of humour; his "uvlechenie Gogolem" started already in young Mikhail's school-days. (his calling the supervisor "Shpon'ka") and it continued throughout the life of the writer.

With a smile he refers to "Николай Васильевич, который не раз утешал меня в хмурые бессонные ночи."<sup>12</sup>

As an assistant producer at MAT Bulgakov wrote a highly successful adaption of Dead Souls, and one of his short stories bears the characteristic title: Pokhozhdeniya Chichikova. The latter contains an amusing scene where the author, having masterminded the downfall of the resurrected Chichikov, is to

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M. Bulgakov, Sbornik rasskazov (New York, 1952), p.198.



be rewarded by the grateful state officials: "Просите, чего хотите."  
His first thought, predictably, is: "Брюки... фунт сахара  
лампу в 25 свечей ..."

But he feels that an author should not be preoccupied with  
worldly possessions and finally settles for: "ничего, кроме  
сочинений Гоголя в переплете, каковые сочинения мной недавно  
проданы на толкучке." <sup>13</sup>

Bulgakov's career as a satirist started relatively  
late; after a few youthful attempts, including some humorous  
poetry and several articles with a satirical touch, which he  
published in various magazines, Bulgakov wrote Notes of a  
Young Physician and The White Guard - both realistic and, to  
a certain extent, autobiographical novels tinted with  
lyricism. He gained fame as a satirist in 1925 with Diavoliada  
and Rokovye yaitsa, two short stories about Soviet reality.

Diavoliada or Povest o tom kak bliznetsy pogubili  
deloproizvoditelya is a modern rendering of Dostoevsky's  
The Double, a story about a clerk not unlike Akakiy Akakievich  
from Gogol's The Overcoat. This insignificant and harmless  
young man, having successfully served "for a whole eleven  
months" in an institution bearing the impressive name of  
Glavtsentrabazspimat makes a strange and inexplicable mistake

in deciphering his new boss's instruction in the following way: " Всем машинисткам и женщинам вообще своевременно будут выданы солдатские кальсоны."

As it turns out his boss's name is Kalsonyer, and the unfortunate clerk loses his job. In order to explain his blunder he starts on a desperate pursuit of Kalsonyer, who has a disturbing habit of changing his appearance and walking through mirrors and glass doors. To make things even worse, Korotkov acquires a double, a certain Kolobkov, and the people he encounters during his interminable wanderings begin to confuse him with his double. The whole story is like a Kafkaesque nightmare and, inevitably, it ends with Korotkov's death.

Diavoliada or The Devilry, as it has been translated into English, is a satire on Soviet bureaucracy, with its endless codes of rules and regulations, avoidance of individual responsibility, lack of logic and planning. The employees of Spimat (for short), queuing to receive their overdue salaries, read the following notice: "Выдать продуктами производства.

За г. Богоявленского - Преображенский.

И я полагаю - Кшесинский."<sup>14</sup>

Presently they are paid off with innumerable boxes of non-inflammable matches (the event is based on Bulgakov's own experience), while a wine distillery rewards its employees with

a substantial number of bottles containing highly intoxicating sacramental wine. Instructions are as a rule signed not by the man in charge but by his assistant or substitute:

"Денег нет. За г. Иванова - Смирнов." Spimat occupies

a large building which had once housed a restaurant, "The Rose of the Alps", and its porter, Panteleymon, is an ex-waiter who remembers the old days. The head office has its quarters in a former private school for girls, and the old gilt signs have not been erased; consequently over the inscription "Spravochnoe" features "Dezhurnye Klassnye Damy", under "Dortuar Pepinyerok" - "Nachkantsurpravdelsnab". The old and the new existing together provide an inexhaustible source of comical situations. Korotkov is late for work by a whole fifty minutes because the tram instead of following its normal route N°6 made a detour following route N°7, finally ending in a remote street with tiny houses, where it broke down. Standing on the platform he is nearly crushed to death, and is robbed of his wallet. Trying to recover his lost possession he encounters the utter stupidity of petty officials who keep quoting regulations or repeating meaningless instructions. The following conversation illustrates their total lack of logic and abysmal narrowmindedness:

Я, товарищ, Коротков, Бэ Пэ, у которого только что украли документы.... Все до единого.... Меня забрать могут....

- И очень просто, - подтвердил человек на крыльце.
- Так вот позвольте....
- Пуцай Коротков самолично и придет.
- Так я же, товарищ, Коротков.

- Удостоверение дай.
- Украли его у меня только что.
- Удостоверение дай, что украли.
- От кого?
- От домового. (p.128)

Chichikov meets with similar requests but, being more experienced, he knows how to deal with the situation:

Двух часов не прошло, представил и ведомость.  
По всей форме. Печатей столько, как в небе звезд.  
И подписи налицо. (p.185)

After a hundred years he finds that very little has changed in Russia. A hotel he stays in looks exactly like the inn which he visited during his original journey:

Все решительно в ней было попрежнему: из щелей выглядывали тараканы и даже их как будто больше сделалось, но были и некоторые изменения. Так, например, вместо вывески "гостиница" висел плакат с надписью: "общезитие № такой-то" и, само собой, грязь и гадость была такая, о которой Гоголь даже понятия не имел. (p.179)

He thinks it strange that people should not recognize him; while applying for a job he is astounded by the fact that his application makes no impression on the personnel officer. After that he takes heart. His hopes increase as he begins to recognize familiar faces: "куда ни плюнь, свой сидит." (p.182) With characteristic ingenuity he begins to deal in internal trade, and having secured the required number of recommendations he obtains the money from the state to finance his large-scale plans.

Уму непостижимо, что он вытворял. Основал трест для выделки железа из деревянных опилок и тоже ссуду получил. Вошел пайщиком в огромный кооператив и всю Москву накормил колбасой издохлого мяса..... Взял подряд на электрификацию города, от которого в три года никуда не доскачешь, и, войдя в контакт с бывшим городничим, разметал какой-то забор, поставил вежи, чтобы было похоже на планировку, а насчет денег, отпущенных на электрификацию, написал, что их у него отняли банды капитана Копейкина. (p.187)

When Chichikov's machinations come to light havoc ensues:

Зазвенели телефоны, начались совещания..... Комиссия построения в комиссию наблюдения, комиссия наблюдения в Жилотдел, Жилотдел в Наркомздрав, Наркомздрав в Главкустпром, Главкустпром в Наркомпрос, Наркомпрос в Пролеткульт и т.д. .... дело запуталось до того, что и черт бы в нем никакого вкуса не отыскал. (p.188)

Finally Chichikov is caught and duly punished, but then the author tells us that the whole story was only a dream.

There is still a vast field of opportunity open to prospective Chichikovs, and general corruption combined with a huge amount of red tape will effectively protect them from exposure.

The House N° 13 tells the story of a private mansion, once occupied by wealthy owners which has been turned overnight into a "Rabkomuna". The basic theme here is the destruction of beauty, the misapplication of the idea of equality, crass ignorance: a palace is made into a communal dwelling regardless of the fact that the building is not fit for the purpose. The people who have been moved into the "Rabkomuna" are far from happy - there are no amenities, so they have to improvise:

Поперек гостиных протянулись веревки, а на них сырое белье. Примусы шипели по-змеиному, и днем и ночью плыл по лестницам щиплющий чад (p.165)

As they have no appreciation for art or beauty and are concerned primarily with their immediate needs, the house undergoes slow devastation:

Из всех кронштейнов лампы исчезли, и наступал ежевечерно мрак.... В квартире 50 в двух комнатах вытопили паркет. (p.165)

In spite of superhuman attempts on the part of the caretaker, Christi, to save the building from total destruction, the house N° 13 is doomed. With the coming of the frosts, the inhabitants begin to rebel: they are not allowed to install little stoves to keep themselves warm as the house has no ventilation shafts. One night the most belligerent of them, Annushka Pilyayeva, ignores the instructions and causes a fire which swiftly destroys the whole house.

Bulgakov's satire is not aimed at "the Soviet people"; he is far from condemning the inhabitants of the house N° 13: "Не осуждайте. Пытка мороз. Озвереет всякий...." (p.169)

But he does deplore the unnecessary waste and the ignorance which led to it; Annushka who miraculously saved her life in the conflagration says: "Люди мы тёмные. Темные люди.

Учить нас надо, дураков." (p.173)

Ignorance and inefficiency backed by unlimited power are the subject of Bulgakov's satire in another famous short story, The Fatal Eggs, written in 1925 and recently translated into English by Mirra Ginsburg. This is according to Ershov: "Памфлет на новую Россию."<sup>15</sup>

The Fatal Eggs is a fantastic tale rather in the manner of H.G. Wells' The Food of the Gods. It castigates the Soviet mania for launching projects without regard for their consequences and the practice of attaching the blame to some scapegoat when the results are an unpleasant surprise. Professor Persikov, a biologist of world renown, whose manner of life and idiosyncrasies remind us of the hero of Chekhov's A Dreary Story, discovers a "ray of life" which stimulates the procreative powers of frogs. As it happens a curious epidemic killing thousands of hens and chickens takes hold of the country. In order to rebuild the depleted poultry population the state authorities decide to use Persikov's ray, against the wishes of the professor who maintains that the ray has not yet been sufficiently tested. The job is assigned to a man of action, an old-time communist called Rokk, whose name accounts for a pun in the Russian title of the story: Rokovye yaitsa ("rok" means "fate"). Rokk is placed in charge of a specially allotted farm where he is to conduct his

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<sup>15</sup>  
Op.cit., p.213.

experiments. The whole venture ends in disaster; because of an error on the part of some Soviet institution Rokk receives, instead of hens' eggs, crates full of the eggs of anacondas, ostriches and crocodiles, ordered for Persikov. The latter discovers only too late that his delivery consists of hens' eggs and by then it is impossible to avert the calamity. Giant snakes, crocodiles and ostriches hatched at "The Red Ray Farm" multiply at a terrific pace and soon proceed to devour the inhabitants of the farm, among them Rokk's wife Manya. Within days they invade the whole region of Smolensk and begin to advance on Moscow. All the resources of the country are instantly mobilised to fight the reptiles, but in spite of that thousands of people perish. The situation is grave. The responsibility for the disaster is conveniently placed on Persikov, and the infuriated mob kills the professor and his faithful servant. The scapegoat has been found and the masses have had their revenge, but the government is still helpless in combatting the reptiles. In the traditional way nature comes to the rescue: a sudden frost in the middle of August kills the undesirable creatures and their eggs. As Struve put it:

"Nature intervenes to save the Soviet Union from complete destruction. This climax in itself  
 16  
 sounded a counter-revolutionary note."



During the attack on Persikov's quarters the instruments producing the red ray are destroyed, and so the great discovery is wiped out with the death of the scientist:

Луч этот получить не удалось, хоть изящный джентельмен, и ныне ординарный профессор Пётр Степанович Иванов и пытался. Первую камеру уничтожила разъяренная толпа в ночь убийства Персикова. Три камеры сгорели в Никольском совхозе "Красный Луч" при первом бое эскадрильи с гадами, а восстановить их не удалось.<sup>17</sup>

Discussing Bulgakov's satire in The Fatal Eggs Struve writes:

"Apart from the fantastic plot, in The Fatal Eggs, there is no such mingling of the real and the fantastic as in The Devilry. But the reality is portrayed from a satirical angle. Beginning with Rokk - an antiquated communist, in the past a flutist in a cinema orchestra, who in 1925 still wears the symbolical leather jacket of a hidebound communist - down to the episodic figures of several Soviet journalists, all the characters in the story are obviously satirized. Irony permeates the whole story, but Bulgakov's own attitude is difficult to make out: he uses this all-round irony as a sort of safety valve.<sup>18</sup>

The same type of poignant and yet not malicious satire pervades another work of Bulgakov - The Theatrical Novel. Here the writer deals with a very familiar milieu: the world of literature and the theatre. He assures us at the beginning

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M. Bulgakov, Sbornik rasskazov, p.104.

18

op.cit., p.156.

of the novel that "ни таких театров ни таких людей,  
 какие выведены в произведении покойного (Максудова)  
 нигде нет и не было."<sup>19</sup>

it is easy enough to recognize under the masks of the actors and directors of The Independent Theatre the faces of Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko and the whole MAT troupe. The theatrical world fascinates and dazzles the young writer Maksudov with its animation, infinite variety and mysteriousness, and the golden horse which he notices during his first visit to the theatre will forever symbolize this inexplicable fascination. People associated with the theatre partake of this strange aura, and the author forgives them their idiosyncrasies, petty envies, competitiveness and vanity. The great old man, Ivan Vasilyevich, says to Maksudov by way of introduction: "У нас в театре такие персонажи, что

только любуйтесь на них... сразу полторы пьесы готовы!"<sup>20</sup>

Bulgakov makes fun of the antiquated method of Stanislavsky in the famous bicycle scene where, in order to demonstrate his affection for his beloved, the poor actor has to ride a bicycle. In the scene of playreading Stanislavsky is shown as a doddering old fuss-pot and hypochondriac, expecting

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M. Bulgakov, Izbrannaya Proza (Moscow, 1966), p.508.

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Ibid., p.593.

unquestioning obedience. There is a cold war going on between "the old guard" or the founders of the theatre and the younger generation of actors. The old actors insist on being given parts in any new play which is going to be produced by their theatre, and, since septuagenarians are obviously not suited to play the parts of the twenty-year-old characters of Maksudov's play, the whole idea of staging the play is to be abandoned, and only the initiative and the iron will of Strizh, the young producer, finally puts the play on stage.

At the beginning of his theatrical experience Maksudov is completely flabbergasted by all that he sees around him and makes a series of blunders, but he soon learns how to deal with the theatre crowd. In this he is helped by an actor, Bombardov, who gives him useful hints about Ivan Vasilyevich's quirks - the scene takes place before the young writer's first and crucial interview with the sacred cow of the theatre:

Иван Васильевич в театр приезжает два раза в год на генеральные репетиции, и тогда ему нанимают извозчика Дыркина.....  
Мишу Панина вы не знаете, родились в Москве.....  
насчет Фомы скажите, что он вам не понравился.....  
Выстрела не читайте! И насморка у вас нет.<sup>21</sup>

Maksudov soon realizes that there is a rift in The Independent Theatre and a very precarious balance of power between the two

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Ibid., p.582.

directors, reflected in the attitude of their respective secretaries; and he has to learn how to act without antagonizing either. He also learns the secret of getting tickets "chornym khodom", and conceives a profound admiration for Filip Filippovich, who is in charge of the distribution of seats.

The unexpected publication of his novel opens to him the door of the literary world which he finds unbearably petty and boring. Izmail Aleksandrovich, a renowned novelist just come from Paris has no impressions to share with an avid crowd of his fellow literati apart from some unsavoury gossip, while another writer, Agapenov, is trying to impose upon Maksudov his troublesome cousin who had arrived unexpectedly in Moscow. Likospastov, who professes to be Maksudov's friend, is consumed with envy at his friend's success, and never misses an opportunity of deflating Maksudov's ego. The production of his play even further alienates the young writer from this sycophantic crowd.

A characteristic feature of Bulgakov's satire in The Theatrical Novel is the fact that it is applied to every protagonist without exception. Even Maksudov, who comes closest to what we might call "a positive hero" and often voices Bulgakov's own opinions, is treated with detached

amusement. The same can be said with regard to another outstanding work of Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita, where the author deals with abuses of power, widespread corruption and the curtailment of freedom.

The primary object of the writer's attack is again the literary milieu. They are the privileged elite, entitled to more living space, free trips to health resorts, and the use of the most exclusive restaurant in the whole of Moscow, which offers exquisite and moderately priced food, polite service (a rarity) and modern jazz. Ordinary citizens can only dream of such luxuries and the acme of their aspirations is "овладеть членским МАССОЛИТским билетом, коричневым, пахнущим дорогой кожей, с золотой каймой - известным всей Москве билетом."<sup>22</sup>

This cosy haven of bourgeois opulence is suddenly shaken by a whole chain of inexplicable happenings, the first of which is the death of the director of MASSOLIT, Berlioz, tragically killed by a tram through the intervention of the devil himself. The news about Berlioz' death, preceded by a strange encounter with the "chort" in the shape of an "inturist", who foretells Berlioz' decapitation, is brought by a poet, Ivan Bezdomnyi. After a mad and fruitless pursuit of the devil all round Moscow Bezdomnyi enters the MASSOLIT's centre - "Dom Griboedova"

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22

M. Bulgakov, Master i Margarita (Paris, 1967), p.42. In the following pages references to this work will be given in the text.

- in his underclothes (as his suit has been stolen when he took a plunge into the Moscow river) with a candle in his hand and a small paper icon round his neck. Bulgakov's ironic touch is apparent here: in the conversation with the devil both Berlioz and Bezdomnyi claimed to be avowed atheists. There is also a hint at what the acclaimed freedom of religion means in the Soviet Union: in answer to the devil's question whether they believe in the existence of God Berlioz says: "Да, мы не верим в Бога - но об этом можно говорить совершенно свободно." (p.14)

The devil's apparent aim is to prove his own existence which in a somewhat complex way proves the existence of Christ; he also appears as a punitive force - a kind of vice squad sent to purge Moscow. The disposal of Berlioz and the despatch of Bezdomnyi to a lunatic asylum initiate a veritable "pokhozhdeniye diavola", a fantastic journey of the devil round the capital.

This framework of a picaresque novel, reminiscent also of Sterne's Sentimental Journey, enables Bulgakov to present multifarious aspects of Soviet life, one standard feature of which is represented by shortages of all sorts. To illustrate this common object of Soviet satire, here is the opening scene of The Master and Margarita:

- Дайте нарзану, - попросил Берлиоз.  
 - Нарзану нету, - ответила женщина в будочке  
 и почему то обиделась.  
 - Пиво есть? - сиплым голосом осведомился Бездомный.  
 - Пиво привезут к вечеру, ответила женщина.  
 - А что есть? - спросил Берлиоз.  
 - Абрикосовая, только тёплая, - сказала женщина.  
 - Ну, давайте, давайте, давайте!....  
 Абрикосовая дала обильную желтую пену, и в воздухе  
 запахло парикмахерской. (p.12)

Annoyed by Bezdomnyi's affirmative answer to his question:

"А дьявола тоже нет?" Voland the devil bursts  
 out: "что же это у вас, чего не хватитсья, ничего нет!" (p.35)

Accommodation was another plague suffered by the inhabitants  
 of Moscow during the 1920's and 1930's. A newcomer to  
 "Dom Griboedova", the centre of MASSOLIT, would be taken aback  
 by the size of the line of people applying for living quarters:

прорезав длинейшую очередь, начинавшуюся уже  
 внизу в швейцарской, можно было видеть надпись  
 на двери, в которую ежеминутно ломился народ:  
 'квартирный вопрос'. (p.42)

Shortage of fuel was the direct cause of the fire which consumed  
 the house NO 13, and Annushka was by no means the only one  
 who used furniture and parquet floors for kindling the fire.  
 Gilt antique chairs had kept Professor Persikov warm and alive  
 throughout a whole frosty Moscow winter.

In spite of socialist equality some people enjoy excessive  
 luxury (for example Margarita and her scientist-husband, or the

members of the MASSOLIT) while others have hardly enough money to afford decent food. Korotkov's staple diet seems to consist of re-warmed potatoes and tea, Maksudov welcomes the death of an old cat which relieves him of considerable economic burden. The Master is permanently poor, although in a rather poetic way. Clothes and shoes are expensive: Maksudov only dreams of buying a new pair of trousers, and the devil's performance at the Variety Theatre - opening a boutique where the ladies from the audience can exchange their own dresses and shoes for brand-new Parisian models - enjoys a spectacular success.

The motto of the day is "catch as catch can". Life is brutal and every sensible man attempts to extract as much as possible from the common share. Weak individuals such as Korotkov simply perish. Intellectuals - Persikov, Maksudov and the Master - are pushed aside: there is no place for them in this acquisitive society. The key to success is adaptation: Archibald Archibaldovich, an ex-corsair, becomes the catering director of the "Dom Griboedova", while Nastasya Lukinishna Nepremenova, a merchant's orphan, writes stories about maritime exploits under the pseudonym "Shturman Zhorzh".

After learning about the tragic fate of Berlioz, the MASSOLIT circle is a little shattered but soon gets over the



shock: "да, погиб, погиб... но мы-то ведь живы !" (p.45)

This smug, self-contented attitude is a primary object of Bulgakov's satire. He does not stigmatize individuals but deals with the whole class, the thriving intelligentsia, with its mediocrity, sycophantism, petty aspirations and snobbery.

Like Chekhov he deplores the waste of talent (Maksudov commits suicide, Ivan Bezdomnyi and the Master end in a mental hospital, Persikov is killed by the mob and his invention is wasted), the stifling atmosphere in which no real art can flourish. Like Gogol and Dostoevsky he shows the fate of a little man caught in the wheels of modern bureaucracy. He ridicules senseless regulations, servile attitudes, the blind carrying out of regulations regardless of common sense:

Ты видел, что он в подштаниках?...  
-Да ведь, Арчибальд Арчибальдович,...  
как же я не могу их не допустить,  
если они- член МАССОЛИТа? (p.47)

In this chaos and confusion new Chichikovs are on the prowl looking for gain. Nothing has changed - and this is the most depressing conclusion drawn by Bulgakov - the old Sobakevichs and Manilovs have been replaced by Rimsky's and Likhodeevs and "all is the same only a little bit worse".

As for Gogol, Bulgakov's aim is to expose "тину мелочей опутавших нашу жизнь".

He sees the world as a "Putanitsa", a vast madhouse. The only saving grace is that of love, and the only people who are in a way "absolved" by the Satan are those who feel strongly (Margarita and the Master and Ivan Bezdomnyi).

The scene of Bulgakov's novels and short stories is the metropolis. The picture is overcrowded to the point of bursting with personages whose only purpose is to allow their author to make a humorous comment - a technique developed by Gogol:

неизвестный в белых рогожих брюках, молодые люди в стрижке боксом с подбитыми ватой плечами, какой-то очень пожилой с бородой, в которой застряло перышко зеленого лука. (p.45)

We meet a series of puppet-like characters with ridiculous names that help to define them (another Gogolian trait): Bogokhulskiy, Sladkiy, Pavianov, Adelfina Buzdyak, Zagrivov, Poprikhin, Cherdakchi, Tamara Polumesyats, Kvant and several others. In this human menagerie there are but few people who evoke our sympathy, and they all inevitably suffer.

The most recently published novel of Bulgakov, The Heart of a Dog, is an even more bitter satire on the communist system. It deals with the adventures of a stray Moscow dog, Sharik, spotted by an eminent surgeon. The professor who had

been experimenting with transplants decided to use Sharik for one of his experiments. He removed the dog's pituitary gland and testes and replaced them with those of a man killed in an accident. On recovery Sharik develops strangely human characteristics and a very unlovable personality. In collaboration with the house committee who had been trying unsuccessfully to deprive the professor of a few of his rooms Sharikov pays back his creator by provoking scandals, behaving outrageously and finally denouncing him. With the help of Shvonder, the committee's chairman, who supplies Sharikov with Marxist literature (Engels), the dog-turned-man obtains a job in a cat-purging squadron. He even contemplates marriage with his secretary. Fortunately for himself and his assistant, the professor finally puts an end to Sharikov's machinations by performing yet another operation which reverses the process and transforms the brute Sharikov into the endearing dog Sharik.

The message of the story is clear. It can be argued that Bulgakov intended to criticise irresponsible operations and the medical profession in general, but his main target was again bureaucracy, red-tape, the appalling ignorance of the people in power and their total lack of common sense. Once again he took the opportunity to ridicule that inexhaustible source of comedy "communist jargon" with all its absurdities.

Bulgakov is very careful about drawing overall conclusions and making sweeping generalizations, yet the satirical message of his works is obvious: the fault lies not with the people but with the situations into which they have been pushed. His satire is bitter and pungent; its effect would be entirely depressing if the tone of "скучно на этом свете, господа" were not relieved by numerous gems of true humour. Bulgakov strings his witticisms and piles them up to such fantastic dimensions that they reach the absurd, and the result is utterly preposterous. His satire has often been compared to Zoshchenko's, but the latter is definitely mellow and milder. Bulgakov's satire is personal (e.g. his feud with Stanislavsky reflected in The Theatrical Novel) and therefore less general than Zoshchenko's. It is closer in vein to Ilf and Petrov's and Leonov's.

And yet Bulgakov's aim as a satirist is not only to take revenge on his personal adversaries or the critics (the infamous Latunsky in The Master and Margarita) but to pillory vice in the tradition of Dryden. He cannot escape being personally involved and yet manages to preserve objectivity: he is the narrator who never identifies himself with his protagonists. We could apply to Bulgakov what Anatole France once said about his own work:

The irony which I acknowledge is not cruel,  
it does not make fun of love nor of beauty, but

it teaches us to laugh at those who are mean and stupid, and without this laughter we might allow ourselves the weakness of hating them. <sup>23</sup>

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GROTESQUE

While much has been written about satire in all its various aspects, the grotesque has received relatively little attention. Usually it is regarded as a subdivision of satire. This view is upheld by Northrop Frye and Alvin Kernan. Frye considers the grotesque to be the content of satire, and includes it in the sixth phase of satire:

The sixth phase presents human life in terms of largely unrelieved bondage. Its settings feature prisons, madhouses, lynching mobs, and places of execution, and it differs from a pure inferno mainly in the fact that in human experience suffering has an end in death.<sup>1</sup>

Kernan, basically agreeing with Frye (except for his retaining the term "genre" when Frye talks about mythos), discusses the grotesque as "the mob tendency" of the satire.

Some scholars, however, maintain that the grotesque has the makings of a basic aesthetic category. Among these are Wolfgang Kayser, whose definition I have adopted, and

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<sup>1</sup> Anatomy of Criticism, p.238.

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Whereas a considerable portion of Bulgakov's grotesque (Kayser's "satiric" grotesque) fits into Frye's definition of satire, certain aspects of the grotesque ("fantastic" grotesque) are left outside that definition. I have touched upon the subject while discussing satire.

William Van O'Connor. The latter argues that, while other genres insist on rationality or a moral order, the grotesque is preoccupied with the irrational, the unpredictable, the bizarre. He writes:

The grotesque, as a genre or a form of modern literature, simultaneously confronts the antipoetic and the ugly and presents them, when viewed out of the side of the eye, as the closest we can come to the sublime. The grotesque affronts our sense of established order and satisfies, or partly satisfies, our need for at least a tentative, a more flexible ordering.<sup>3</sup>

According to Wolfgang Kayser, the grotesque is a play with the absurd, an attempt to "invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world".<sup>4</sup> Yuri Mann defines it as: "художественный приём, заключающийся в предельном заострении, преувеличении." <sup>5</sup>

The essence of the grotesque lies in the presence of abnormality, the strangeness of a phenomenon: things acquire a life of their own, objects become transformed, reality is distorted. The result is a dream or a nightmare, hence the original name given to the grotesque, sogni dei pittori or "painters' dreams". A fine example of this aspect of the grotesque is the once popular theme of the temptation of St. Anthony with its abundance of monsters, nocturnal or creeping animals and nude females.

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W.V. O'Connor, The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), p.19.

4

W. Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature (Bloomington, Indiana, 1963), pp.187-188.

5

Yu. Mann, O groteske v literature (Moscow, 1966), p.13.

Animals are in fact an inherent part of the grotesque scene, to mention only the little green snakes in Hoffman's The Golden Pot, the beetle in The Metamorphosis by Kafka or the traditional object of superstition - the black cat in The Master and Margarita. Plants, especially strange and twisted (the jungle), and occasionally inanimate objects, such as the tools in Salvador Dali's "The Burning Giraffe", are also a part of the grotesque. Whereas objects are given life, human beings are deprived of it and become puppets (The Nutcracker), their faces frozen into masks.

One of the essential experiences of the grotesque is madness: it is as if an impersonal force, an alien and in-human spirit, had entered the soul. Madness is characteristically connected with the notion of creativity; hence the painter in Gogol's The Portrait and Bulgakov's Master. Another feature of the grotesque is that it is essentially static. There is no proper plot, no development - it appears in a scene or in an animated tableau, such as the final scene of The Inspector General. It presents life as an empty, meaningless puppet-play or a caricatural marionette theatre caught in a "pregnant moment".

Kayser sees the grotesque as the estranged world:



The grotesque is the estranged world - we are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. Thus the grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death.<sup>6</sup>

Hieronymus Bosch's visions fill us with awe - they are incomprehensible because they are absurd, and we fail to orient ourselves in the physical universe. According to Kayser, the creator of the grotesque must not and cannot suggest a meaning, must not distract our attention from the absurd.

Grotesque implies the fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the laws of statics, the loss of identity (Goliadkin and Korotkov), the distortion of natural size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order.

In the history of art and literature there were epochs when the grotesque became specially prominent. In these periods the belief of the preceding ages in a perfect and protective natural order ceased to exist. It happened with the Renaissance in the sixteenth century, during the "Sturm and Drang" period and is happening in the modern age. Kayser claims that the art of our own day shows a greater affinity to the grotesque than that of any other epoch, and Friedrich

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<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., pp.184-185.

Durrenmatt, an outstanding representative of the grotesque in drama, regards the tragic comedy or the tragicomedy, that is the grotesque, as the only legitimate contemporary genre. Works of such writers as Schnitzler, Meyrink, Pirandello, Kafka, Becket, Brecht and Mrozek, as well as Durrenmatt himself, bear the brand of the grotesque. In the field of pictorial arts the grotesque acquires an even greater impact and prominence, as testified by the paintings of Picasso, Marc Chagall, Ensor, Klee, Salvador Dali and Chirico.

Although the art of the grotesque is primarily ascribed to the Spaniards (Goya's nightmares) and the Teutonic race, the Russians have made a fine contribution in this field. In Russian literature Gogol is traditionally considered to be the father of the grotesque. V. Kaverin, quoting Dostoyevsky's famous statement:

"Все мы вышли из-за гоголевской 'Шинели'"

adds: "теперь, в середине XX века, следовало бы добавить: и из гоголевского 'Носа'."<sup>7</sup>

Gogol's vision of the world is a distorted mirror reflecting "всеобщую глупость и целый мир бессмыслицы"<sup>8</sup> (tolle Welt). This comprehensiveness has been regarded as an indispensable attribute of Gogol's humour: the author

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<sup>7</sup> "Zametki o dramaturgii Bulgakova", p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. to "Vorschule der Ästhetik (Jean Paul's Works, Berlin, 1841, XVIII, p.142). After A. Slonimsky, Tekhnika Komicheskogo u Gogolya (Petersburg, 1925), p.7.

does not poke fun at individual characters but rises above the personal level, and so his humour acquires a philosophical character. Belinsky, writing in 1835, concluded that the peculiarity of Gogol's art lay in "комическое одушевление всегда побеждаемое глубоким чувством грусти и уныния"<sup>9</sup>

as expressed by the writer himself: "Скучно на этом свете, господа!"<sup>10</sup>

Gogol's artistic development consists in a transition from the careless merriment of his earlier stories to the phase of 'intensified comism', represented by "The Petersburg Stories" and The Inspector General. There the laughter takes on a sinister tone, and the satire is more bitter:

найдется шелкопер, бумагомарка, в комедию тебя вставит... и будут все скалить зубы и бить в ладоши. Чему смеётесь? Над собою смеётесь!...<sup>11</sup>

The development of Gogol's art tends towards the grotesque: Sobakevich's furniture becomes an integral part of its owner, Korobochka's carriage turns into a pumpkin, dogs talk and write letters to each other, Major Kovalyov's nose assumes a personality of its own. A young artist "sells his

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"O russkoi povesti i povestyakh g. Gogolya", after Slonimsky, op.cit., p.9.

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N.Gogol' Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh. Ed, S.I. Mashinsky, N.L. Stepanov, M.B. Krapchenko, II (Moscow, 1966), p.265.

11

Ibid., IV, p.103.

talent" to an evil power to discover that prosperity does not mean happiness (The Portrait). Everywhere we can discern the influence of the most popular grotesque writer - Hoffman. Strangely enough, possibly due to a misinterpretation of Gogol's art by the celebrated critic Belinsky, the grotesque, aspect of his oeuvre was not perceived by his contemporaries, and found but few imitators and followers. One of them was Mikhail Bulgakov.

Bulgakov's debt to Gogol is great as he inherited from the master most of his grotesque techniques. We shall find in both Gogol and Bulgakov such figures of the grotesque as devils, witches, monsters, corpses and animals, people become puppets, their faces turn into masks. They are subject to insanity and black magic. The city overflowing with people serves as a background to the mad flights of the protagonists. There is an abundance of gruesome and gory scenes (e.g. The Fearful Revenge and the frequent decapitations in Master and Margarita), nudity (the ball in Master and Margarita), the transformation of people into objects.

From Gogol Bulgakov took the whole concept of the world as an infernal "putanitsa", a veritable madhouse as described by Sheviryov in his article about Dead Souls:

как будто сам демон путаницы и глупости носится над всем городом и всех сливает в одно; здесь, говоря словами Жан-Поля, не один какой-нибудь дурак, не одна какая-нибудь отдельная глупость, но целый мир бессмыслицы, воплощенный в полную городскую массу.<sup>12</sup>

Further points in common with Gogol are Bulgakov's specific humour where laughter suddenly acquires a tragic tinge (for example the end of The Fatal Eggs) and what might be called lyrical digressions: the author's comments inserted into the narration or interspersed over a piece of dialogue.

However, regardless of the numerous parallels, Bulgakov's grotesque differs considerably from Gogol's. Gogol's emphasis is on alogism and the pure absurd while Bulgakov relies more on the external attributes of the grotesque with all the infernal paraphernalia. In this he resembles the Gogol of Evenings on a farm near Dikanka. The general impression seems to be that the art of the grotesque inherent in Gogol is only one of the several techniques used by Bulgakov, although it cannot be denied that in using that art he displayed a genuine talent.

Bulgakov's gift for the grotesque can already be seen in his stories The Fatal Eggs, where the gigantic anacondas and crocodiles hatched by Rokk devour human beings, and The House

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12

Moskvityanin, IV, 1842, N°8 p.351.

Nº13 (fatal number) with grandmother Pavlovna flying out of the window:

ВЗВЫВ ПРЕДСМЕРТНО, ВЫЛЕТЕЛА БАБКА ИЗ ОКНА,  
СВЕРКНУВ ЖЕЛТЫМИ ГОЛЫМИ НОГАМИ.<sup>13</sup>

Chichikov's speculations in the Soviet Union definitely belong to the realm of the grotesque - they involve 50,000 people. So do the adventures of the dog Sharik in The Heart of a Dog.

However, Bulgakov makes full use of his imagination only in The Devilry, a story in which the absurd reigns supreme and which echoes both Gogol and Dostoevsky. The Devilry is yet another variation on the theme of a double: a meek and insignificant petty official Korotkov suddenly realizes that he possesses a double, a certain Kolobkov, and that people confuse him with the latter. Kolobkov is persecuted by his new boss Kalsonyer, who reveals the attributes of a devil, and a strange ability to change his appearance: he suddenly goes bald, grows a moustache within seconds, wears a long Assyrian beard and changes his voice. He also tends to walk out of mirrors and glass doors. Kalsonyer seems to be always on the move, and Korobkov tries in vain to get hold of him and present his plea. Consequently he engages in a

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M. Bulgakov, Sbornik rasskazov, p.171. In the following pages references to the above collection will be given in the text.

series of mad flights:

по огромной, изгрызенной лестнице побежали в таком порядке: первым, черный цилиндр толстяка, за ним - белый исходящий петух, за петухом - канделябр, пролетевший в вершке над острой головкой, затем Коротков, шестнадцатилетний с револьвером в руке и еще какие -то люди: топчущие подкованными сапогами. Лестница застонала бронзовым звоном и тревожно захлопали двери на площадках. (p.155)

The whole story is utterly incredible, full of inexplicable happenings, lacking sense and cohesion. The cashier comes into the office with a dead white hen with its neck twisted; this he places on his attache-case as he announces to the employees that there will be no pay in money; instead they are to be paid in kind with boxes of matches (their colleagues from another institution are paid off with bottles of sacramental wine). Korotkov has a grotesque dream:

будто бы на зеленом лугу очутился перед ним огромный, живой бильярдный шар на ножках. (p.123)

The instruction he gets from Kalsonyer is also grotesque and absurd.

Objects seem to be endowed with human properties. They behave like living creatures: run, sing, speak, thus increasing the sinister mood of the story:

тридцать машин на столах, звякнув звоночками заиграли фокс-трот. (p.150)

.....  
дверь в кабинет взвыла и проглотила неизвестного. (p.114)

An open door of a lift appears to Korotkov as an open mouth of

a huge animal, the columns in a marble hall are "plump", typewriters let out paper kites which in a typically grotesque fashion turn into a pair of trousers:

белые змеи бумаги ползли в пасти машин, стали свиваться, раскраиваться, сшиваться. Вылезли белые брюки с фиолетовыми лампасами. (p.150)

The absurd reaches its height in a scene where Korotkov is being sent to Poltava:

Ку-ку! радостно крикнула лесная кукушка и выскочила из нюрнберского разрисованного домика на стене; - Ку-клукс-клн! - закричала она и превратилась в лысую голову, - запишем, как вы работников луните! (p.154)

The transformation of one object into another or into a living thing is a standard feature. People also undergo transformations. A beautiful maiden suddenly becomes an ugly snotty urchin, a gentleman who introduced himself to Korobkov as Jan Sobieski turns into a marble statue:

хозяин стоял без уха и носа, и левая рука у него была отломана. (p.140)

Kalsonyer becomes in turn a black cat with phosphorescent eyes and a white cockerel. When antagonized, the quiet Korotkov reacts with unsuspected violence, his second ego coming to the fore:



Коротков, косо и застенчиво улыбнулся, взял канделябр за ножку и с хрустом ударил Дыркина по голове свечами. (p.153)

Like Gogol's Shpon'ka, he has a hidden dread of marriage and women which he expresses with a typically Gogolian alogism:

Меня нельзя арестовать - ответил Коротков и засмеялся сатаническим смехом - потому что я неизвестно кто, конечно. Ни арестовать ни женить меня нельзя. А в Полтаву я не поеду. (p.151)

Alogism - the humour of the absurd - has a wide application in The Devilry. A young typist fancies Korotkov and makes plans to entice him:

Брюнеткина голова вынырнула из двери и крикнула возбужденно и радостно: - Я уже заслала его документы в Полтаву. И я еду с ним. У меня тетка в Полтаве под 43 градусом широты и 5-м долготы. (p.148)

Trying to recover his lost documents and escape the snares of the brunette, Korotkov begs a clerk:

Товарищ? умоляю тебя, дай документы. Будь другом. Будь, прошу тебя всеми фибрами души, и я уйду в монастырь. (p.149)

Absurd situations are regarded by the spectators as perfectly normal. Korotkov seems to be the only one who sees their

abnormality, but then he doubts his own judgement. With awe he watches a clerk emerge from his desk:

Коротков отшатнулся, протянул руку и жалобно сказал синему: - Смотрите, смотрите, он вылез из стола. Что же это такое?  
- Естественно вылез - ответил синий, не лежать же ему весь день. Пора. Время. Хронометраж. (p.148)

Typical attributes of the grotesque such as incongruousness, suddenness and contrast are visible everywhere. An old peasant woman with two empty buckets on a yoke comes out of an office:

Дверь напротив открылась, и из нее вышла сморщенная коричневая баба с пустыми ведрами на коромысле. (p.141)

Side by side with volumes of literature lies foul-smelling dried fish:

Во втором отделении на столе было полное собрание сочинений Шеллера-Михайлова, а возле собрания неизвестная пожилая женщина в платке взвешивала на весах сушеную и дурно пахнущую рыбу. (p.123)

Glass and mirrors play a significant part in the story, as they produce doubles, often multiple ones; to poor Korotkov the world around him seems to consist of a throng of identical individuals:

за шестью машинками писали и смеялись шесть свет-  
 лых, мелкозубых женщин. (p.123)  
 три совершенно одинаковых бритых блондина в свет-  
 ло-серых клетчатых костюмах : (p.131)

Offices are like glass-cases containing a multitude of unidenti-  
 fiable stereotypes:

Коротков увидел стеклянные огромные клетки и  
 много белокурых женщин бегавших между ними. (p.123)

Korotkov is always surrounded by a crowd, overcome by a wave  
 of people:

из всех дверей побежали люди с портфелями покрыва-  
 яя полы мокрыми пятнами, десятки людей шли нав-  
 стречу Короткову или обгоняли его. (p.128)

Like the heroes of Dostoevsky he is a human worm caught in  
 the wheels of fate. His hopeless pursuit of Kalsonyer, during  
 which he is constantly handicapped and distracted by strange  
 individuals and beautiful alluring women (another feature of  
 the grotesque), is an effect a fruitless search for his own  
 lost identity.

Whereas Bulgakov's grotesque in The Devilry and his  
 other stories is reminiscent of Hoffman and Dostoevsky, his  
 technique in The Master and Margarita resembles somewhat Gogol's  
Evenings on a farm near Dikanka as well as his Petersburg stories.  
 It relies more heavily on external effects. This type of  
 the grotesque is more in the style of Hieronymus Bosch and  
 "Hell" Brueghel.

The scene is again the metropolis: Moscow, and it is overcrowded with personages to such an extent that one finally loses count of them, and perceives only the overall mosaic-like pattern. Details are drawn in with minute precision and yet the overwhelming impression is that of chaos. Hundreds of characters who enter the scene evoked by the whim of the author have but a vague relevance to the plot, insofar as we can talk about the plot in The Master and Margarita.

Although the novel is highly complex and multi-levelled, we have to leave out several aspects such as the philosophical, the religious, and the romance ones and concentrate on the satire and grotesque, which constitute well over a half of the work. The Master and Margarita can be regarded as a distillate on the life of Moscow, especially literary Moscow. The whole somewhat amorphous and disjointed novel is enclosed in a frame of the devil's ramblings round Moscow and is in the tradition of Le Sage, Swift, Sterne and the picaresque novel. The devil who appears to be the prime mover of the action performs the function traditionally ascribed to angels: the execution of punishment upon the sinners. The sinners are the literati, administrators of a theatre, literary critics, the upravdomy, petty thieves and swindlers in general.

Bulgakov's treatment of the devil is extremely interesting:

he is neither the chort of the Dikanka stories nor the demon of Lermontov, although in a way he is a combination of the two. When he first appears to Berlioz and Bezdomnyi, he is definitely a figure of the grotesque:

Росту был не маленького и не громадного, а просто высокого. Что касается зубов, то с левой стороны у него были платиновые коронки, а с правой - золотые. Он был в дорогом сером сером костюме, в заграничных, в цвет костюма, туфлях. Серый берет он лихо заломил на ухо, под мышкой нес трость с черным набалдашником в виде головы пуделя. По виду - лет сорока с лишним. Рот какой-то кривой. Выбрит гладко. Брюнет. Правый глаз - черный, левый - почему-то зеленый. Брови черные, но одна выше другой. Словом - иностранец. (p.13)

He introduces himself as a specialist in black magic, Professor Voland. Voland is accompanied by three lesser devils:

"vitrusha-regent" emerging from the evening mist, Azazello, the demon of the waterless desert, and the black cat with a moustache like a cavalry officer's. The devils are helped in their machinations by a corpse - a redhaired maiden with green eyes.

The mission of the devil is to convince the people of his existence by retelling the story of the crucifixion of which he was a witness. His other assignment involves administering punishment to the transgressors, and there are plenty of those. Moscow is a scene of NEP-ist speculations and gross abuse of the law, and life here abounds in contradictions and incongruities. Archibald Archibaldovich, an ex-corsair

runs a highly efficient restaurant for the writers' centre, and, as it operates on capitalist principles, the enterprise is very successful. The superintendent of the house once occupied by Berlioz takes bribes and deals in the black market. The administrators of the Variete exploit their position for their own private purposes.

Voland starts his tour of Moscow with the beheading of the chairman of the writer's union, Berlioz. His next victim is the poet Ivan Bezdomnyi who goes mad and is promptly dispatched to a lunatic asylum. After that comes the transfer of Likhodeev to the Crimea (within seconds he finds himself on the beach at Yalta), the mysterious decapitation of the vice-director of the Variete, Varenukha, whose trunk goes on signing documents, the haunting of the financial director Rimsky, the strange incidents that take place during the black magic spectacle at the theatre. The hellish team acts with remarkable promptness and efficiency. Having disposed of Berlioz and Likhodeev, as well as of Berlioz' uncle, they install themselves in the fatal apartment and the militia have to engage in a proper battle trying to evict them.

Fantastic events follow one another: telephones are inexplicably disconnected, messages are confused, and the eye-witnesses tell incredible and contradictory stories. Writers

and administrators are sent to the same mental institution where Bezdomnyi and the Master are undergoing a cure. The gang pay a visit to the Griboedov restaurant and are instantly recognized by Archibald Archibaldovich, who gives them a royal reception in the meantime telephoning the police. A minor squabble ensues but nobody is hurt and the devils leave the battlefield unscathed.

In all these pranks the black cat plays an important part. It is not only a figure of the grotesque but it also contributes greatly to the humor of the situations, as it behaves like a human being:

Иван сосредоточил свое внимание на коте и видел, как этот огромный кот подошел к подножке моторного вагона 'А', стоящего на остановке, нагло отсадил взвизгнувшую женщину, уцепился за поручень и даже сделал попытку всучить кондукторше гривеник через открытое по случаю духоты окно. (p. 39)

на ювелиршином пуфе, в развязной позе развалился некто третий, именно - жутких размеров черный кот со стопкой водки в одной лапе и вилкой, на которую он успел поддеть маринованный гриб, - в другой.... (p. 58)

On occasions the cat can be very eloquent: he addresses the militia who have entered the Berlioz-Likhodeev apartment:

не шалю, никого не трогаю, починяю примус, - недружелюбно насупившись, проговорил кот, - и еще считаю долгом предупредить, что кот - древнее и неприкосновенное животное. (p. 195)

The cat also possesses an uncanny talent for suddenly changing into an object (for example a hat).

Their mission completed, the team leave the apartment and set it on fire; but before they depart from Moscow they want to give a ball. At this point the romantic plot of the novel blends with the fantastic and grotesque. The Master, the author of the novel about Pontius Pilate, goes mad and ends up in the lunatic asylum after his book has been rejected by the publishers and mercilessly criticized by the reviewers. The devil decides to help the Master's beloved, Margarita, who is determined to find her mysteriously vanished lover at any price. Agreeing to the devil's terms she becomes a witch (after the application of a cream given her by Azazello - a passing comment on the modern cosmetics industry), and having attended a gory initiation rite she acts as hostess at the great ball given by Voland. In return she is granted the privilege of seeing the Master. The devil, touched by their love, removes them both from the world of the living and places them in a peaceful nirvana where they shall stay together forever.

Margarita's adventures belong totally to the world of fable and of the grotesque. After her sudden transformation into a beauty and a witch (which is followed by a similar transformation of Margarita's servant Natasha) our heroine performs a spectacular flight on a broomstick. Flying over Moscow she notices an impressive apartment block owned by the writers' union. She finds the apartment of the most vicious



of the literary critics, Latunsky, and in the absence of the owner, demolishes it. The same fate meets the apartment of another critic who had condemned the Master's book. Out of sheer mischievousness she changes her elderly prude of a neighbour into a wild boar and makes Natasha ride on him. The chauffeur who drives Margarita to the party is a thrush, and Volland's quarters are full of strange nocturnal animals: birds, reptiles, butterflies. There are also monkeys, parrots, and flowers which make the heroine think that she is in a tropical forest (rather like that painted by Rousseau le Douanier of Tanguy), skeletons, corpses and nude women. In the course of the ball Margarita has to watch cut-off heads turn into skulls:

Тут же покровы головы потемнели и съежились, потом отвалились кусками, глаза исчезли, и вскоре Маргарита увидела на блюде желтоватый, с изумрудными глазами и жемчужными губами на золотой ножке череп. (p. 159)

The place is furnished with glass and mirrors, and there is a sound of tinkling water resembling the interior of the Archivist's house in Hoffman's The Golden Pot. Mirrors fulfill here the same function as they do in The Devilry: they serve as doors through which characters enter.

Прямо из трюмо вышел маленький, но необыкновенно широкоплечий, в котелке на голове и с торчащим из рта клыком, безобразящим и без того невиданно мерзкую физиономию и при этом еще огненно рыжий. (p. 58)

On his waking up from a drinking bout Likhodeev sees Korov'ev and the cat first in the mirror. During the battle with the militia Begemot shoots into the mirror.

Voland's guests are the corpses of murderers, and the party is a veritable dance macabre. Music produced by several orchestras seems to enliven not only the corpses but even inanimate objects:

Марионетке казалась, что даже массовые мраморные,  
мозаичные и хрыстальные помы в этом Ликованиином  
зале ритмично пыхтоснырыют. (p.157)

This again is reminiscent of The Devil, where nearly every object either danced or sang.

As it turns out, all these strange and inexplicable happenings were caused by the full midnight moon. In its light Margarita watches the transformation of the grotesque devils into sad and beautiful demons. When the moon is full, the poet Ivan Bezdomnyi, now released from the mental home, feels irresistibly drawn to that place on Patriarskoe Prudy where he and his deceased friend Berlioz first met the devil. Nikolai Ivanovich, whom Margarita has mercifully made human again, sits in his garden contemplating the moon, and dreaming about his beloved Natasha whom he has lost through cowardice

- Natasha decided to remain a witch. Finally the silvery moon-  
beam makes a path on which go Christ, Pontius Pilate and the  
Master.

No other explanation is given and there is no need for an explanation, as the grotesque is by nature inexplicable. Logic can hardly be applied here. The total effect is a curious and highly original mixture of the comic and the sinister. In spite of several hilariously funny moments, usually connected with the pranks of the devils and the behaviour of the cat, the prevalent mood is one of sadness. The grotesque is never pure and hearty laughter but always contains an element of bitterness - in Bulgakov's grotesque the bitterness prevails.

Bulgakov's technique of the absurd is brought to perfection, and in this exacting discipline he unquestionably deserves the title of a master. He exploits to the full all grotesque devices to create his own inextricable, mosaic-like pattern. He may resemble Gogol, Dostoevsky and Hoffman and yet he maintains originality, as the grotesque seems to be one of the peculiarities of his talent. Stanislavsky might have had Bulgakov in his mind when he wrote the following:

Гротеск - это внешнее, наиболее яркое, смелое оправдание огромного, всеисчерпывающего до преувеличенности внутреннего содержания. Надо не только почувствовать и пережить человеческие страсти во всех их составных всеисчерпывающих элементах - надо еще сгустить их и сделать выявление их наиболее наглядным, неотразимым по выразительности, дерзким и селым, граничащим с шаржем. <sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

A brief survey of Bulgakov's prose, selected with regard to its satirical and grotesque content, is by its nature insufficient to enable one to draw profound conclusions about the whole of Bulgakov's literary output. The picture obtained would inevitably be distorted and incomplete. Satire and the grotesque are only two of the many aspects of Bulgakov's writing which, being multi-faceted, would demand a longer and more exhaustive study.

Bulgakov was immensely versatile and he experimented with a wide variety of genres. In the sphere of drama he was considered the most outstanding innovator on the Soviet stage. He had a remarkable dramatic gift and a perfect knowledge of dramatic techniques, which allowed him to present with equal convincingness the aristocratic society in the times of Alexander I and contemporary Soviet life. A most impressive example of Bulgakov's technical brilliance is The Last Days, a play in which the main character, Pushkin, is never seen on stage except as a dim silhouette in the distance. The dramatic events of the last days of his life are

narrated by other characters, such as: Pushkin's wife, his sister-in-law, his servant Nikita, various members of the Petersburg aristocracy and, finally by an ingenious touch: the spy Biterov, who, in the guise of a watchmender, carries out his assignment of watching the poet in his own house. Ironically and poignantly, this nonentity is the final commentator on the greatness of Pushkin.

Bulgakov's inventiveness in the domain of prose is exemplified in The Master and Margarita, which, with its multi-levelled structure and its merging of the real and the fantastic reminds us of Bely's Peterburg. The novel seems in fact to belong more to the modernistic tradition than to the realistic one. It shows preoccupation with the problem of christianity, which was one of the underlying themes of the work of such writers as Merzhkovsky and Sologub, and an interest in demonology, also a feature of modernism.

Among the methods that Bulgakov uses two especially should be mentioned. He is a master of the cinematic technique with its close-ups and an almost superceptible transition from one scene to another. For example, in Act IV of The Last Days a funeral dirge gradually becomes the howl of a snow-storm. In the first dream of The Flight the singing of monks alternates with shouting of military commanders. This brings us to the peculiar musicality of Bulgakov's writing. He often

intersperses narration with bits of popular songs, rhythms beaten out by horses' hooves, tunes hummed by his protagonists. Not only people make music. For Bulgakov inanimate objects such as doors, lifts and typewriters produce a harmony of their own. Korotkov is surrounded by a pandemonium of sound, the characters of The Last Days go round repeating lines of poetry, Timofeev, the inventor in Ivan Vasilyevich is driven to distraction by "Pskovityanka". The Master and Margarita contains frighteningly accurate descriptions of a jazz performance. The White Guard includes fragments of arias, contemporary songs and popular poems, as well as the old Russian anthem: "God Save the Tsar". These musical interpolations add variety and charm to Bulgakov's works.

His style is versatile and colourful, ranging from Church Slavonic to modern slang. It can be humorous, ironic, lyrical and poetic, and often is a blend of all these; it is always in keeping with the character or the speaker. Like Gogol, Bulgakov makes frequent lyrical digressions, which are especially abundant in The Days of the Turbins, the most poetic of all his works.

His humour is largely a function of his style, although Bulgakov consciously applies other humorous techniques such as alogism, situational humour, humour of names. He is a

straight-faced narrator of funny stories and his gift of seemingly impersonal, objective and detached narration enhances the comedy. While relating a story he keeps making marginal and supposedly insignificant comments and remarks which under careful observation turn out to be real pearls of humour. These remarks are aimed at the careful and intelligent reader: one thoroughly familiar with the contemporary scene and capable of drawing his own conclusions. They resemble a mischievous wink of secret understanding between the author and the reader and, like most Soviet literature, require the art of reading between the lines.

Bulgakov's humour, like Gogol's, suddenly turns into sadness:

не то на свете дивно устроено: веселое мигом  
обратится в печальное, если только долго за-  
стоишься перед ним.<sup>1</sup>

A lyrical digression is followed by an unexpected outburst of laughter, a comical scene suddenly acquires a serious character:

резко - комический тон неожиданно приводит к  
обнажению серьезного смысла событий, высокий  
эмоциональный и идейный подъем кончается вне-  
запным комическим срывом.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N. Gogol', op.cit., p.108.

<sup>2</sup> Slonimsky, op.cit., p.17.

The difference between the two writers lies in the fact that while Gogol's late work became elevated to a moral-religious platform, Bulgakov's prose remained safely on the ground. In spite of all his humanism Bulgakov never became a moralist or a preacher: he always left the drawing of conclusions to his readers. Although it is not difficult to deduce his views from his writings Bulgakov never expresses his opinions explicitly, thus avoiding both partiality harmful to art and possible accusations on the part of Soviet authorities.

This apparent cautiousness does not contradict Bulgakov's courage and integrity. He continued to say what he thought at the time when any anti-Soviet tendencies were branded out by the party and critics of the existing order were thrown into prisons or deported to labour camps. Unlike several other writers (among them Sholokhov, Fadeev, Paustovsky) Bulgakov would never yield under pressure and write "commissioned" pieces glorifying socialist achievement or cut his work to suit the censor's taste.

Bulgakov's artistic development shows escalation towards the grotesque. This trend is especially apparent in his prose, although elements of the grotesque can also be seen in his dramas. In The Flight it is apparent in the horrifying visions of Khludov, the spectre of a line of bags covering corpses of men who have been hung, the absurd spectacle of a



race-course for cockroaches in Constantinople and the transfiguration of Barabanchikova, the pregnant woman, into general Charnota. In Ivan Vasilyevich there is a grotesque mixture of epochs resulting in incongruous situations. A tendency to caricature, inherent in Bulgakov, can be traced already in his first novel The Days of the Turbins in the characters of Elena's husband and the Lisoviches. This tendency increases in subsequent works. Making a generalization one can say that the intensity of the grotesque element in Bulgakov's prose is in an inverse relationship to its autobiographical contents. Since the grotesque requires a maximum of detachment and gives a free rein to imagination whereas autobiography is bound by realism, exclusion of the grotesque is inherent in the nature of autobiography. Bulgakov began with autobiography and, with the exception of The Theatrical Novel, ended with the grotesque. The Days of the Turbins and The Theatrical Novel as well as Notes on the Cuffs and Notes of a Young Physician are relatively free from the grotesque although they contain a fair amount of satire, whereas in The House No 13, The Devilry, The Fatal Eggs, and The Heart of a Dog the grotesque becomes more dominant.

Although Bulgakov borrowed grotesque techniques from his great predecessors, Gogol, Dostoevsky and Hoffman, he must not be accused of plagiarism or epigonism. Making full

use of their achievement he succeeded in creating his own brand of the grotesque. Drawing another comparison with Gogol, one could say that whereas Gogol's grotesque is only semi-conscious Bulgakov's is the result of a deliberate choice, even if the choice is also prompted by inclination. Gogol was, as it were, forced into the grotesque by political circumstances. Bulgakov seems to have chosen the grotesque as a means of reflecting the absurdities of Soviet life which reminded him of the times of Chichikov. Furthermore, the grotesque was the genre of Gogol, and his attempts at eliminating it from his works (the second part of Dead Souls) ended in a failure. Bulgakov was successful at several genres simultaneously, grotesque being only one of them. In character Bulgakov's grotesque is closer to Hieronymus Bosch or "Hell" Brueghel and it resembles the grotesque of Edgar Allan Poe.

If we accept Wilhelm Kayser's definition of the grotesque, Bulgakov's grotesque satisfies all requirements - there is hardly a device or technique that Bulgakov does not employ. His works contain such grotesque notions as madness combined with creativity and among the devices there are: the blazing fire, corpses, doubles (also multiple doubles), mirrors, transformations, devils, witches, incredible situations, talking animals, reptiles, nocturnal birds, animated objects,

the primeval forest, beheading and decay. The devil's ball in "The Master and Margarita:" is a pretext for gruesome and sinister descriptions of crimes, a display of nudity and repulsive sights.

Bulgakov's irrepressible imagination enables him to fuse the real with the fantastic and to people this estranged world with a multitude of frightening creatures. Portraits of the majority of his protagonists turn out to be caricatures. Characters are lifeless, "dead" like the dead souls of Chichikov, usually briefly sketched. They are static, showing no development or growth. The psychological approach demonstrated in *The Days of the Turbins* has been replaced by sheer pattern-making where individual characters are but elements of a whole. The plot in the traditional sense is totally absent. The author sets out to create an aura of strangeness, improbability and the absurd (compare Gogol's adjectives: "неправдоподобный", "несообразный", "чепуха", "странный", "несбыточный").

Giving free reign to his imagination Bulgakov reaches the realm of the pure absurd. In his wild flights of fancy and piling up of grotesque effects Bulgakov surpasses even Gogol. The latter technique, however, has its drawbacks; the accumulation of too many devices creates the potential danger of ennui - a piece of music played fortissimo throughout

becomes tedious. That is why Gogol's sudden twists of madness prove to be more effective: they strike the reader by the sheer force of contrast and provide the necessary variation in rhythm and pitch. The Master and Margarita can be quoted as an example of this unavoidable pitfall of the grotesque; whereas the first part where realism blends with the grotesque is a minor masterpiece, in the second this balance is upset. The escalation of the grotesque with its lack of casual connections represents the typical estrangement of our world.

The nature of the grotesque lies in fragmentation and confusion, so that the genre yields itself better to a short medium: a short story rather than a full-length novel. That is why, taken from a purely artistic point of view, The Fatal Eggs, appears to be a more perfect and balanced work than The Master and Margarita, even if the latter is more complex and original.

Another characteristic of the grotesque which Bulgakov possesses to a high degree and shares with Gogol is concentration upon detail. While situations and characters are incredible and absurd the particulars of their appearance, manner, abode are supplied with minute precision. Major Kovalev of Gogol's The Nose lives in the Sadovaya Street; Koroviev - one of the devils in The Master and Margarita - has golden caps on one side of his mouth and silver on the other, the cat Begemot holds in his paws a pickled cucumber on

a silver fork and a glass of vodka. The original purpose of these over-detailed accounts was to bridge the credibility gap: precision should create a factual aura and thus mask the absurdity of a situation. A final result, however, was the enhancing of the visual quality of a scene - the reader can see the character exactly the way the author intended it and the whole picture becomes more graphic. Although it is impossible to retain in one's memory the full contents of such a novel as The Master and Margarita one easily recalls individual characters and situations. In this respect the grotesque deserves the title of the most graphic among literary genres.

The grotesque, extremely popular in the West has enjoyed only a moderate degree of popularity in Soviet literature. Sporadic grotesque elements do appear in the works of Olesha, Ehrenburg, Zamyatin, Ilf and Petrov but not a single Soviet author apart from Bulgakov has produced a novel almost totally in the grotesque vein. If there was any hope for the grotesque under the NEP, the oncoming of socialist realism eliminated it completely. Bulgakov as a writer of the grotesque is a lonely figure in Soviet literature. At the time when the grotesque was definitely unpopular with the party he continued to cultivate and develop this difficult and dangerous genre.

His merit and achievement in the field of the Russian

his range and in that he resembles the great realist writers. <sup>2</sup>

Bulgakov's satire, although considered less bilious than Saltykov-Shchedrin's, stands out as forceful and outspoken against the background of Soviet literature. Writers such as Zoshchenko and Romanov stigmatize human weaknesses and vices, which, combined with skaz technique, mitigates the political edge to their stories, making their satire less vehement and more universal. Bulgakov abandons the skaz for direct narration interspersed with authorial commentary. He does not deal with people's shortcomings unless they are a direct result of the situation in which they find themselves. Not the people but the system is to blame. Communism, which promised to bring a panacea for all the deficiencies of other systems, has not changed the unsatisfactory state of affairs. On the other hand it has provided the right atmosphere for individuals like Likhodeev, Latunsky and Sharikov to thrive and stifle people infinitely more worthy than themselves. Bulgakov sees no solution to the impossible situation and that is why his satire is so depressing and his humour so black.

Like Chekhov he presents the eternal problem of the

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Thomas Hardy wrote: "As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour another. So in life the seer should watch the pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone". Flaubert and Jane Austen made a point of shutting themselves in their respective 'ivory towers'; so did Virginia Woolf. The problem of the novelist's range is discussed at length by Robert Liddell in A Treatise on the Novel, London, 1958.

easily perceive the disparity between communist slogans and stark reality. As a social critic he branded lies and speculation, inequality existing in a supposedly classless society, lack of organisation and planning, ignorance backed by absolute power, the curtailment of freedom and linguistic absurdities thriving under the Soviets.

He soon realized that there was no place for genuine talent, integrity and originality in Russia. He voiced his plea as an artist through his mouthpieces: the Master and Maksudov. Both gifted writers, they lead a life of deprivation and failure, and end in despair. Their fate resembles that of their illustrious predecessors: Molière and Pushkin, who were also hounded to death by an unsympathetic society, suppressed and misunderstood. To Bulgakov the notions of creativity and freedom, both individual and artistic, were inherently connected. His works persistently defended the right of an individual to free, unhampered development.

Unlike Zoshchenko and Romanov, who draw their subjects from the lives of men-in-the-street, Bulgakov concentrates primarily on his own milieu: writers and, to a lesser degree, doctors. It is curious to note that the owner of the most powerful imagination in the Soviet Union should choose to write only about the subject he knew intimately. He knew

grotesque can only be compared with Gogol's. His boldness in applying the grotesque to contemporary life and his writing techniques make Bulgakov a wholly modern writer in the best sense of the word.

While Bulgakov can be considered an almost unique phenomenon in the sphere of the grotesque, as a satirist he is a child of his times. His satire grew out of the relaxed climate of the NEP. Like Zoshchenko, Panteleymon, Romanov, Olesha, Ilf and Petrov, Bulgakov cultivated "yumoristicheskoe bytopisanie" which reflected contradictions and incongruities in contemporary life. He exposed corruption, bureaucracy, abuses of power and the so-called "reminders of capitalism" in a socialist society.

Politically Bulgakov was not against the revolution which, like his protagonists in The Days of the Turbins, he accepted as a historical inevitability. By his origin, upbringing and education he belonged to the Russian intelligentsia, the class that suffered a great deal during the revolution and under Soviet rule, so that he could hardly be expected to extol the blessings of the new regime. However he was not what some of the critics implied: an exponent of the White cause and a counterrevolutionary trying to reverse the course of history. An intelligent and sensitive man, Bulgakov could



waste of genius, human potential and resources through thoughtlessness, prejudice and ignorance. Persikov's invention is lost for posterity and the great scientist is made into a scapegoat for the authorities' mistakes, the palatial house N°13 vanishes in flames, the genuine talents of the Master and Maksudov find little recognition. At the same time Chichikov successfully exploits the loopholes in a seemingly watertight system. He is so well adapted to the "new" conditions that he manages to swindle the authorities and make them feel grateful to him at the same time. The bulk of Bulgakov's satire could justly be entitled "The Triumph of Chichikov" or "The Swindler's Progress".

In the field of social satire Bulgakov is a follower of the great Russian tradition of Gogol and Shchedrin; he shares this honour with many of his outstanding contemporaries. In writing satires he had to compete with an unusually large number of brilliant writers - men whose talent was by no means inferior to his. Consequently he was overshadowed by Zoshchenko, Zamyatin, Ilf and Petrov who made satire their speciality. Remarkable as it is, Bulgakov's satire would not justify his claim to greatness were it not combined with a unique grasp of the grotesque. While his satire ranks among the best, his grotesque is unsurpassed.

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