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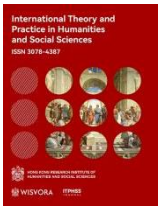

The Officiality of The Master and Margarita: A Study of the Relationship Between Bulgakov and Soviet Authorities

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Abstract

The study of the creative process behind The Master and Margarita is inseparable from an examination of Bulgakov's literary career—particularly his relationship with Soviet authorities. Stringent literary censorship undoubtedly profoundly influenced Bulgakov's character creation and plot construction in The Master and Margarita. The novel, which originated in the late 1920s, was the result of an arduous creative process spanning over a decade, during which the narrative underwent numerous transformations. Thanks to the relatively well-preserved archives and materials related to Bulgakov, the creative journey of this masterpiece by one of the 20th century's most enigmatic Russian writers can be almost fully reconstructed. Through the novel's tumultuous publication history, we can glimpse, from various deleted fragments, the concessions the work had to make to align with official ideology. The interplay between internal literary development and external censorship mechanisms is directly reflected in the literary work itself.

1. Introduction

The tension between the Soviet literary censorship mechanism and Mikhail Bulgakov's creative resistance constitutes the core context for the study of The Master and Margarita. Early scholars (e.g., Proffer, 1973; Weeks, 1991) focused on the internal resistance strategies within the text, arguing that Bulgakov employed metaphors, symbolism, and "Gothic satire" to circumvent censorship and expose the moral absurdity of Stalinist society. Historical research (e.g., Curtis, 1991; Chudakova, 1984) further revealed the author's persistence in creating under high-pressure conditions, as well as the complex journey of the novel from its completion in 1940 to the publication of its censored version in 1966, highlighting the political relaxation during

Khrushchev's "Thaw" period and the role of reformist factions in the literary world. Subsequent scholars (e.g., Smeliansky, 1995; Dobrenko, 1997) proposed theories of "negotiated resistance" and "structural self-censorship," emphasizing Bulgakov's adaptive shift from explicit critique to allegorical expression, while Carleton's (2006) archival research empirically demonstrated the systematic suppression of dissenting texts by censorship institutions.

Existing research demonstrates a multidimensional methodological integration, with conclusions gradually moving beyond the binary narrative of "resistance/submission" and instead defining The Master and Margarita as a "paradoxical monument" in Soviet literary history—both a product of censorship and its most incisive satirist (e.g., Smith, 2000; Milne, 1989). However, current scholarship faces three major controversies: first, the ambiguity of Bulgakov's political stance and creative intent, particularly whether magical realism served merely as a self-preservation strategy rather than a tool of resistance; second, the underlying motivations behind the Soviet government's shifting attitude toward the novel, especially the true intentions behind the official acceptance of the censored version in 1966; and third, the predominant focus on the individual's struggle against the system, with little analysis of the work within the framework of the Soviet official literary system.

Although scholars have thoroughly dissected the textual strategies and historical context, the phenomenon of The Master and Margarita's acceptance by Soviet authorities remains an underexplored cultural-political enigma. This work, born under a totalitarian regime, combines sharp satire with a unique artistic form that passed censorship, reflecting the complex symbiotic relationship between literature and power. Previous research has failed to answer: why could a critical text gain "legitimacy" under a high-pressure system? How did official logic interact with artistic expression during its publication process? How does this "accepted heresy" redefine the boundaries of Soviet official literature?

This study focuses on the issue of "officiality" in The Master and Margarita, seeking to address the following questions:

(1) How did Soviet official ideology influence the author's creative process?

(2) How did the logic of editorial revisions by publishing houses under Soviet censorship reflect officiality?

(3) How did the text and artistic expression of the work embody officiality under the censorship system?

Through systematic research on archival materials such as Bulgakov's private correspondence, manuscript revision records, and publishing censorship documents, combined with close textual analysis and historical contextualization, this study aims to reconstruct the complete journey of the work from creation to publication, revealing the interactive mechanisms between literary creation and political power.

This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of The Master and Margarita but also provides a new case study and perspective for examining the literary censorship system of the Soviet era. By analyzing how Bulgakov persisted in his creative work under political pressure and how he employed artistic techniques to circumvent censorship, this study will illuminate the survival strategies and creative ingenuity of intellectuals under a totalitarian regime. Simultaneously, the process of the work's transition from being banned to its eventual publication reflects the evolution of Soviet cultural policies, offering significant insights into 20th-century Russian literary history.

This study will first review the current state of research and clarify the methodological framework employed. It will then examine the work's creative history in detail, analyzing the evolution of different manuscript versions. Building on this, it will explore the publication history,

with a focus on the content and criteria of censorship edits. Finally, it will discuss the implications of this case study for understanding the Soviet literary censorship system and its significance for contemporary literary research.

2. Literature Review

The tension between the literary censorship mechanism of the Soviet era and Mikhail Bulgakov's creative resistance constitutes a significant dimension in the study of The Master and Margarita. Early scholars such as Ellendea Proffer (1973) and Laura D. Weeks (1991) focused on the internal resistance strategies within the text. Proffer argued that Bulgakov constructed a "textual code" through metaphors, symbolism, and multiple perspectives to evade censors' direct accusations of religious and political satire in the novel. Weeks further defined this strategy as "Gothic satire," suggesting that its surreal narrative exposed the moral absurdity of Stalinist society, which explains why the novel could not be published during the author's lifetime. J.A.E. Curtis (1991) and Marietta Chudakova (1984) supplemented this analysis from a historical perspective. Curtis, through Bulgakov's private letters and diaries, revealed how the author persisted in his creative work under the high-pressure environment of the 1930s, while Chudakova meticulously documented the complex journey of the novel from its completion in 1940 to the publication of its censored version in 1966, emphasizing the political relaxation during Khrushchev's "Thaw" period and the impetus from reformist factions within the literary world. However, there exists a subtle tension between the conclusions of these two types of research (textual analysis and historical investigation): Proffer and others tended to portray Bulgakov as a "covert resister," whereas Chudakova pointed out that the 1966 version was still censored by approximately 12%, highlighting the limitations of textual strategies.

Regarding Bulgakov's interactions with Soviet authorities, Anatoly Smeliansky (1995) and Evgeny Dobrenko (1997) offered complementary perspectives. Smeliansky, by analyzing Bulgakov's letters to Stalin, proposed that the author adopted a strategy of "negotiated resistance"—critiquing systemic injustices while attempting to leverage personal connections (such as Stalin's ambivalent attitude toward his plays) to secure survival space. Dobrenko situated this strategy within the broader censorship mechanism, arguing that Bulgakov was forced into "structural self-censorship": for instance, in the evolution from The White Guard to The Master and Margarita (Haber, 1975), his critique shifted from explicit social commentary to allegorical expression, reflecting both artistic maturation and adaptive choices under external pressure. Gregory Carleton's (2006) archival research further empirically substantiated this mechanism, revealing how censorship institutions systematically suppressed dissenting texts through labels such as "ideological deviation" and "religious mysticism," while Bulgakov's manuscript revisions (e.g., toning down Woland's direct accusations) corroborated Dobrenko's theory of "self-censorship."

These studies collectively demonstrate that the genesis and dissemination history of The Master and Margarita essentially reflect the complex interplay between individual creativity and institutional power within the Soviet literary control system. Subsequent research by Alexandra Smith (2000) and Lesley Milne (1989) expanded this framework: Smith focused on how the novel's "belated publication" in the 1960s triggered conflicting interpretations between official discourse and popular readings, while Milne, through Bulgakov's theatrical career, demonstrated that censorship not only influenced textual content but also reshaped the author's choice of creative mediums (e.g., shifting from novels to more censor-friendly scripts).

Overall, existing research has analyzed the relationship between Bulgakov and Soviet authorities from multiple perspectives, yet it continues to face challenges and controversies.

These include debates over Bulgakov's political stance, the shifting attitudes of the Soviet government toward Bulgakov, and the contested role of magical realism. While the changes in the Soviet government's attitude toward Bulgakov across different historical periods have been partially uncovered, the true motives behind the official acceptance of The Master and Margarita remain a focal point of academic debate. Additionally, there is disagreement over whether Bulgakov employed magical realism as a tool for political resistance, with some scholars arguing that it served more as a means of self-preservation rather than genuine defiance. In response, existing research has methodologically evolved from close textual readings to multidimensional integration of historical archives, while its conclusions have gradually moved beyond the binary narrative of "resistance/submission." Instead, scholars now emphasize Bulgakov's dynamic process of seeking artistic truth within the cracks of the system—a process that ultimately rendered The Master and Margarita a unique "paradoxical monument" in Soviet literary history: it is both a product of censorship and its most incisive satirist.

However, previous studies have rarely centered their analysis on interpreting the work through the lens of Soviet official literature. The phenomenon of The Master and Margarita becoming part of Soviet official literature presents a culturally and politically charged enigma. This work, born under a totalitarian regime, combines sharp satire against the system with a unique artistic form that was officially accepted, reflecting the complex symbiotic relationship between literature and power. Research into this issue not only re-examines Bulgakov's creative intentions but also deciphers the deeper mechanisms of Soviet cultural governance.

Therefore, this study will ground itself in historical evidence such as letters and archival materials, contextualized within the evolving logic of Soviet cultural policies, to explore the relationship between Soviet authorities and the publication of The Master and Margarita. It will further analyze the manifestations of "officiality" embedded in the work's journey from censorship to approval, thereby refining our understanding of the scope of Soviet official literature.

3. Methodology

This study primarily employs two methodological approaches: Literature Review and Archival Research, complemented by Textual Analysis and Historical Context Analysis, to explore the issue of "officiality" in The Master and Margarita.

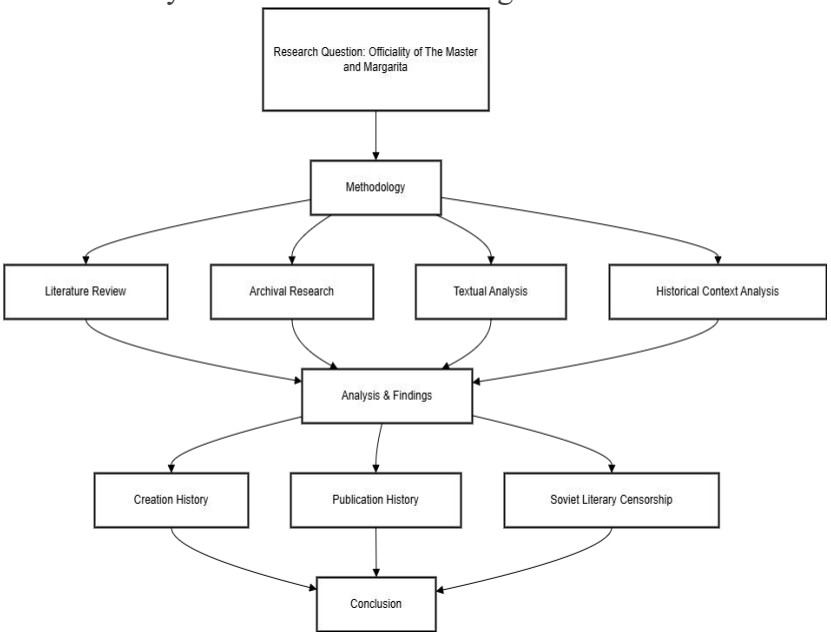

Figure 1: The overall framework diagram of the article's research

This study centers on Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita, employing a literature review methodology to systematically synthesize relevant academic research. It categorizes scholarly works on The Master and Margarita, Soviet censorship of Bulgakov, the novel's publication history, Bulgakov's relationship with Soviet authorities, his letters to the government, and the Soviet literary censorship mechanism across multiple dimensions, constructing a clear research framework. By contrasting the perspectives of different scholars, it highlights controversies and gaps in the existing research, laying a solid academic foundation for subsequent studies.

In the archival research phase, this study delves into the stories behind the novel's creation and publication, drawing on primary sources such as Bulgakov's private correspondence, Soviet government archives, and manuscript revision records. Specifically, in the sections on the novel's creative and publication history, it analyzes the revisions Bulgakov made to The Master and Margarita under government pressure by examining eight manuscript versions from 1928 to 1940. Additionally, it references official Soviet documents on literary censorship to explore the cuts made in the 1966 magazine edition and the publication journey of the 1973 complete edition. These firsthand historical materials not only enhance the credibility of the research but also meticulously illustrate the novel's evolution, vividly demonstrating the direct impact of censorship on literary creation. Through an analysis of Bulgakov's private letters, we gain insight into the details of his correspondence with Stalin and the author's survival strategies under official suppression. Meanwhile, the examination of manuscript revisions reveals which sections were altered or removed due to political pressure, further contextualized by Soviet government documents on literary policy, explaining why the authorities ultimately permitted the novel's publication in the 1960s.

In the textual analysis phase, this study explores the characters, symbols, and narrative structure of The Master and Margarita, examining how they reflect the political environment of the Soviet Union. For instance, Woland is interpreted as a metaphor for Stalin, symbolizing the "higher power" of the Soviet system; Margarita's transformation represents the pursuit of individual freedom in a totalitarian society; and the motif of "manuscripts that do not burn" serves as a metaphor for the survival of literary works under censorship. This approach, which tightly integrates theoretical analysis with textual details, significantly deepens the literary critique, supporting political interpretations with internal textual evidence and making the research more persuasive.

Furthermore, this study combines Soviet cultural policies with Bulgakov's writing environment to comprehensively analyze the influence of political context on literary creation. It investigates the Soviet literary censorship system of the 1920s–1940s, exploring how Bulgakov skillfully navigated censorship, while also analyzing Khrushchev's Thaw policies of the 1960s to explain why the novel was published during this period. This methodology situates the novel within a broader political context, providing a more holistic analytical framework. By comparing government attitudes across different historical periods, it clearly reveals shifts in Soviet literary policy. In the publication history section, the study closely links the novel's fate to the policies of different Soviet government phases; in the analysis of the Soviet censorship system, it delves into how censorship influenced the novel's cuts and revisions.

Through these multidimensional analyses, this study successfully addresses the three previously posed questions: How did Soviet official ideology influence the author's creative process? How did the logic of editorial revisions under Soviet censorship reflect officiality? How did the text and artistic expression of the work embody officiality under the censorship system? Ultimately, it draws conclusions of significant academic value, offering new perspectives and

insights for the study of The Master and Margarita and Soviet official literature.

4. Analysis of Censorship and Officiality

4.1 History of Creation

4.1.1 The Creative Background of The Master and Margarita

The study of the creative process behind The Master and Margarita is inseparable from an examination of Bulgakov's literary career—particularly his relationship with Soviet authorities, which is prominently exemplified by his interactions with Stalin. On this topic, both domestic and international scholars have conducted extensive research. Tang Yihong, in Bulgakov and Stalin (Russian Literature and Art, No. 3, 1999), notes that Bulgakov remained forever loyal to his creative individuality and principles, which was precisely why he garnered Stalin's attention. Bulgakov's decision to write a play with Stalin as the protagonist was logical, as Stalin played a pivotal role in both his life and creative work, while also being a source of fear due to the realities of the political environment. [Tang Yihong. Bulgakov and Stalin. Russian Literature and Art, 1999, (03): 09-10.]

After 1926, following extensive official censorship and persecution as a "counter-revolutionary" writer, Bulgakov's life became exceedingly difficult. In 1927, Lebedev-Polyansky, the head of the Literary Administration, wrote in his report: "Highly suspicious works like Bulgakov's The Fatal Eggs were published in Glubina, and the same publisher attempted to release Bulgakov's Notes on Cuffs and Heart of a Dog, but these were banned by the Literary Administration, as they clearly exhibited counter-revolutionary tendencies..." In 1928, Stalin personally responded to Bulgakov's work—this time regarding his play Flight. Stalin stated: "Flight attempts to evoke pity, if not sympathy, for certain anti-Soviet émigré circles—thus, it seeks to justify or semi-justify the White Army cause. Flight is, in itself, an anti-Soviet phenomenon." Bulgakov's theatrical works were banned—along with all his literary creations. After several arduous years, Bulgakov wrote a letter to Stalin. In the letter, Bulgakov mentioned: "I personally threw the draft of a novel about the devil, the draft of a comedy, and the beginning of a second novel, Theatre, into the stove. Everything I have is hopeless... Then I took out the thick list of novels and rough notebooks from my desk drawer and tried to burn them. It was very difficult, as paper filled with writing does not burn easily. I tore apart the notebooks, breaking my nails. I stuffed them into the cracks of the burning wood and used a poker to scatter the pages. The ashes of the paper sometimes overwhelmed me, and the flames choked me, but I fought against this feeling, and the novels in the fire, despite their stubborn resistance, eventually perished..." [Chudakova, M. O. Zhizneopisanie Mikhaila Bulgakova. 2nd ed. Moscow: Kniga, 1988. - 405 p.]

Regarding his real-life circumstances, Bulgakov stated that he either needed permission to emigrate with his wife or a job at the Moscow Art Theatre. The family had neither money nor the strength to continue living, as none of the writer's works were being published, and each one faced harsh criticism. He was willing to accept any position at the theatre, even as a stagehand. [Why Did Stalin Hate Bulgakov? 09.11.2023. HISTORY. LITERATURE. https://artforintrovert.ru/magazine/tpost/mecsv9n5c1-za-chto-stalin-nenavidel-bulgakova]

Subsequently, on April 18, Stalin called Bulgakov, politely informing him that his letter had been read and that the response would be "positive." Stalin mentioned that he and Bulgakov needed to meet in person, and the writer expressed his willingness without reservation. However, the meeting never took place. The Soviet government granted the writer's request, even demonstrating exemplary benevolence: Bulgakov was appointed as an assistant director at the Moscow Art Theatre. This outcome undoubtedly significantly influenced Bulgakov's perception

of Soviet authorities and Stalin—yet the strict literary censorship that followed did not improve his creative environment. This profoundly impacted Bulgakov's character creation and plot construction in The Master and Margarita.

4.1.2 The Novel's Creative Journey

The novel The Master and Margarita began in the late 1920s and was the result of a long and arduous creative process spanning over a decade. During this period, the novel underwent numerous transformations in its content and form. Thanks to the relatively well-preserved archives and materials related to Bulgakov, the creative journey of this masterpiece by one of the 20th century's most enigmatic Russian writers can be almost fully reconstructed. The archive consists of two notebooks containing materials on The Master and Margarita, 20 notebooks with handwritten text, three printed copies of different versions of the work, and a separate notebook. This separate notebook includes corrections and additions to the main text and chapters of The Master and Margarita, dictated by Bulgakov with the assistance of his wife, Elena Bulgakova, during his illness (1939–1940). [Chudakova, M. O. Zhizneopisanie Mikhaila Bulgakova. 2nd ed. Moscow: Kniga, 1988. - 219 p.]

Research into these materials reveals that the first version of The Master and Margarita (referred to as "The Black Magician") from 1928–1929 was never completed, with parts of it destroyed by Bulgakov himself. Similarly, the second version ("The Engineer's Hoof") from the same period was also partially destroyed by the author.

By 1932–1934, the third version of The Master and Margarita began to approach the final form of the novel in terms of content and structure. This version was praised by contemporary literary critics as a "great achievement."

From the autumn of 1934 to the summer of 1936, Bulgakov entered a new creative phase, extensively revising the text for the fourth version. During this period, many chapters were added or rewritten, and the author compiled a new chapter outline, bringing the total to 37 chapters. Notably, the scene of Yeshua's trial was moved back to the beginning of the novel, while Chapter 13 became a retelling of this scene. This version marked the first time the biblical historical continuum was integrated into the novel's artistic reality. Many chapters from the third version were included in the fourth, allowing scholars to consider this the first complete manuscript of The Master and Margarita. [S. O. Dracheva. Temporal Organization of M. A. Bulgakov's Novel 'The Master and Margarita': A Linguistic Perspective. Content.]

In 1937, two versions of Bulgakov's manuscript emerged simultaneously: The Prince of Darkness (fifth version) and The Master and Margarita (sixth version). The former ended with Chapter 13, while the latter began with it. These versions finalized the main plot, established the character system, and defined the novel's compositional principle—the "novel within a novel," featuring parallel developments in two temporal spaces: Moscow and Jerusalem. The biblical chapters were structured so that "the story of Pilate and Yeshua is interwoven into the main narrative, no longer appearing as a separate inserted novella." Additionally, within the framework of Moscow's reality, a third continuum emerged—a mystical one with specific temporal and spatial parameters. In the Jerusalem timeline, "all power is violence against people, and one day there will be no more power," as Yeshua tells Pilate. This statement appears in the novel's "second layer" of time—the religious dimension. As a prophet/supreme force, Yeshua, by the novel's design, cannot lie or err, and thus Bulgakov uses him to express what he believes to be the only correct stance. The structure of power as violence is reflected in literary critic Dmitry Bykov's interpretation of what Bulgakov wanted to say to Stalin: "These people have been corrupted by the housing problem; they are slaves. We acknowledge your evil, but you are a necessary evil. These Romans, administrators, Variety Theatre visitors, Varenukha, housing managers, and

Latunsky critics deserve no better treatment—be harsh with them. But protect the artist, so that he may grant you moral sanction for your evil deeds." [Sokolov, B. V. M. Bulgakov's Novel 'The Master and Margarita': Essays on Its Creative History. Moscow: Nauka, 1991. - 354 p.]

After further revisions, the seventh version of The Master and Margarita was produced. This version introduced significant plot and compositional changes, such as splitting the chapter "The Burial" into two, adding an epilogue, rewriting the beginning of the "Margarita" chapter, and conceptually altering the author's views on the hierarchy of good and evil (Matthew Levi appears in Moscow's reality and petitions for the fate of the Master and Margarita).

The eighth and final version was developed between 1939 and 1940. At this stage, concerns arose about the novel's ending—particularly its potential impact if published—reflecting the author's anxiety about the Soviet environment at the time:

May 15. Yesterday, we had a reading session—the novel's ending. Faiko, Markov, Vilenkin, Olga, Anusya, and my Zhenya were present. During dinner, Petya and Zhenya arrived. For some reason, everyone froze while listening to the final chapters. Everything frightened them. Pasha (P. A. Markov—A. G.) anxiously assured me in the hallway that it absolutely must not be submitted—there could be terrible consequences. (From Elena Bulgakova's diary. Moscow, 1990. p. 259)

The figure of Woland in the text undoubtedly mirrors Stalin, which was the root of their fear:

"After the reading, Misha asked, 'Who is Woland?'

Vilenkin said he had guessed but refused to say.

I suggested we write it down and exchange notes.

So we did.

He wrote: Satan.

I wrote: The Devil." [Yanovskaya, L. M. The Creative Path of Mikhail Bulgakov. Moscow: Sov. pisatel, 1983. - 235 p.]

Figure 2: Timeline of the Creation and Publication of The Master and Margarita (1928–1966)

"As shown in Figure 2, the creation of The Master and Margarita underwent nearly 40 years of evolution..."

It was precisely this mirroring of the Soviet leadership that prevented Bulgakov's masterpiece from being published during his lifetime. It was not until the 1960s, after numerous twists and turns, that a censored version was permitted for publication by Soviet authorities. This study will also elaborate on and analyze this publication history.

4.2 Publication History

After Bulgakov's death on March 10, 1940, due to nephrosclerosis, the publication of his works was primarily overseen by his widow, Yelena Bulgakova. Between 1940 and 1966, Yelena tirelessly edited his works and attempted to publish them. In 1946, six years after Bulgakov's death, Yelena Sergeevna sent a letter to Stalin's assistant, Alexander Poskrebyshev, requesting publication. However, shortly afterward, a resolution by the Central Bureau of the Bolshevik Party concerning the journals Zvezda and Leningrad affected the fates of writers such as Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova. This incident forced publishers to become cautious,

responding to inquiries about the publication of The Master and Margarita with the phrase, "It's not yet the right time." It was not until the early 1960s, during Khrushchev's Thaw, that the situation began to change.

In 1966, the writer and poet Konstantin Simonov proposed the publication of the novel to the journal Moskva. At the time, Moskva was considered a regional magazine and received less attention from the Central Committee compared to all-Union publications. When Simonov invited Yevgeny Yefimovich Popovkin, the editor of Moskva, to review the manuscript, The Master and Margarita was granted permission for publication. A censored version of the novel was serialized in Moskva (Issue 11, 1966, and Issue 1, 1967), with approximately 14,000 words removed, accounting for 12% of the text. After the novel's publication in Moskva, Yelena Sergeevna Bulgakova transferred the complete text abroad and printed all censored excerpts, annotating the deleted lines and sending them to an "underground" publisher. In 1969, the Frankfurt-based Posev Verlag published the full text of the novel, with all Soviet censorship annotations printed in italics. [One Year in the Life of 'The Master and Margarita' in Soviet Journals. Bulletin of Moscow University, Series 10: Journalism. S.V. Filyukhina, postgraduate student, Department of Literary and Artistic Criticism and Journalism, Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.]

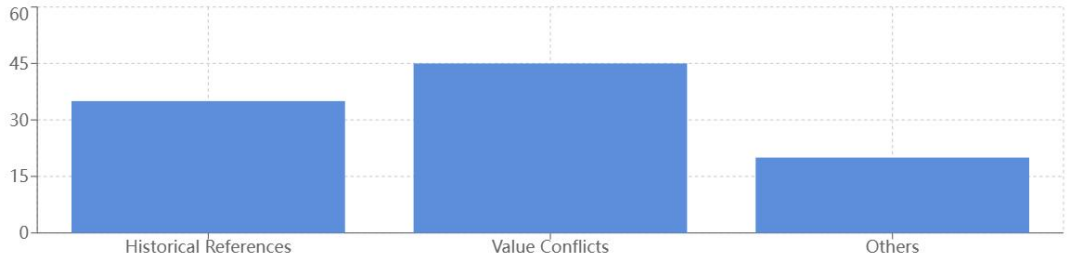

Figure3: Classification of Censored Content in 'The Master and Margarita'

"From the statistical data in Figure 3, it is evident that conflicts of values account for the largest proportion of censored content (45%)..."

Based on the logic of the censors' deletions, the excised content can be categorized into three types:

First Category: Historical Allusions

All references to Stalin's Great Purge.

The complete removal of scenes involving the disappearance of residents from Apartment 50.

Any use of terms such as "exile" or "arrest."

The persecution of the Master (an intellectual), as seen in Chapter 19, Margarita:

"Although he is not here today, Margarita silently conversed with him in her heart: 'If you were sentenced to exile, why couldn't you send me even a little message? Don't other exiles manage to communicate? Have you stopped loving me? No, somehow I can't believe that. Or perhaps you died in exile. If that's the case, I beg you to release me, to let me live and breathe freely.' Margarita answered for him.

Margarita involuntarily stepped back, her face turning pale, and said, 'Then you should have said so directly earlier, instead of talking about severed heads! Are you going to arrest me?' 'Does speaking a few words mean one must be arrested? What kind of logic is that? It makes no sense at all!'"

Similarly, in Chapter 13, The Hero Appears, the Master's questioning of whether his work could ever be published and his expression of mental collapse due to persecution were entirely

removed.

Second Category: Content Inconsistent with Soviet Values (Moral Level)

The removal of descriptions of Margarita's royal lineage in the chapter The Flight.

Scenes at the Variety Theater stage that were deemed damaging to the moral character of the Soviet people.

For example, in the chapter Black Magic and Its Exposure, the scene of Muscovites scrambling for money and Woland's candid evaluation of the citizens were deleted:

"Well, fine," Woland mused, "these people—after all, they're only human. They love money, and that's how it's always been... Humans are fond of money, no matter what it's made of—leather, paper, bronze, or gold. Well, they're frivolous... Yes... Sometimes compassion touches their hearts... They're just ordinary people... On the whole, they resemble people of the past... It's just that the housing problem has corrupted them."

The removal of a flirtatious scene in a lingerie shop with erotic undertones.

The deletion of the bloody scene involving Berlioz's severed head.

III. The Officiality of Literary Aesthetics in the Soviet Era

In the initial years following its publication, Soviet critics gave The Master and Margarita overwhelmingly negative reviews, condemning it for subjectivism, irrationalism, abstract humanism, and a lack of "people-ness" and "party spirit." Despite this, the novel enjoyed unprecedented popularity among the general public. The 1973 standalone edition immediately became a rare commodity and was resold at high prices. The book contained everything Soviet readers desired—subtle satire of everyday life, religious themes—and, overall, the work was exceptionally well-received by the populace. The Soviet authorities' negative appraisal of The Master and Margarita did not diminish the people's affection for it, and within the varying tones of official discourse, it is evident that the novel's literary merit was not entirely overlooked.

In 1967, approximately twenty newspaper and magazine articles about Bulgakov were published in Soviet provincial publications, and even a radio program was broadcast to coincide with the writer's birthday. Among these publications, the "new" novel The Master and Margarita was mentioned in three articles: two short pieces in Voskhod (Voronezh) and Sibirskie Ogni (Novosibirsk), with the first entirely and the second primarily dedicated to discussing the work, as well as an article in Novy Mir introducing the publication of Bulgakov's Selected Prose. [Bulletin of Moscow University, Series 10: Journalism. S.V. Filyukhina.]

Meanwhile, Soviet conservatives attempted to entirely ignore the work's artistic qualities, analyzing it solely on an ideological level and labeling it as politically harmful. Conservative critics declared the literary opposition's views to be counter-revolutionary and anti-communist. A. Metchenko stated: "Yes, the 1960s brought such a 'surprise' as the transformation of the idea of literary 'apoliticism' into a political doctrine. Have we not seen how this doctrine influences politics itself? But its 'peculiarity' lies in the fact that its supporters (not only in Czechoslovakia) shifted from the depoliticization of literature and the ruthless critique of the communist nature of art to proposing 'suggestions,' even demanding the 'liberalization' of the entire way of life in socialist countries." Throughout the Soviet era, conservative critics viewed Bulgakov as a proponent of subjectivism and abstract humanism, and this "reactionary" novel was met with prolonged official "silence."

The interplay between internal literary development and external censorship mechanisms is directly reflected in literary works. In the confrontation between three works (The Master and Margarita, Doctor Zhivago, The Rose of the World) and Soviet state censorship policies, the primary vehicle for the formation of 20th-century "Russian thought" becomes clear—a return to Christianity, which (albeit in different forms) provided writers and thinkers with the opportunity

to experience their dissent as a state of profound alignment with truth. [Literary Censorship and the Problem of the Formation of 'Russian Thought' in the Artistic and Journalistic Process of the 19th–20th Centuries: diss. ... cand. philol. sciences.–Moscow, 2004.–7 p.]

In The Master and Margarita, "Russian thought" does not appear in the form of direct statements but rather through "contradictions," presented through the depiction of a fallen world. The simple faith of our ancestors has vanished, and with it, the fundamental basis of moral life has disappeared.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the issue of "officiality" in The Master and Margarita, exploring the complex relationship between Bulgakov and Soviet authorities, and analyzing the work's creation, publication history, and textual characteristics. It addresses the following key questions:

(1) How Soviet official ideology influenced the author's creative process:

The research demonstrates that Bulgakov's writing was profoundly shaped by Soviet censorship. He repeatedly revised the novel to circumvent political risks, particularly during the period from 1928 to 1940, when he faced the confiscation of manuscripts and the banning of his plays, ultimately resorting to preserving the work in private manuscript form. During this phase, the Soviet authorities' ideological control over literature directly influenced the novel's themes, character development, and narrative strategies.

(2) How the logic of editorial revisions under Soviet censorship reflected officiality:

The study reveals that the 1966 publication of The Master and Margarita underwent significant cuts, with official censors removing content related to Soviet politics, censorship, and social critique. Although the complete edition was published in 1973, the Soviet authorities maintained a reserved stance toward it, reflecting the compromise strategies of Soviet literary policy during the "Thaw" period.

(3) How the text and artistic expression of the work embodied officiality under the censorship system:

The novel's magical realism, religious symbolism, and multi-layered narrative structure are interpreted as metaphorical responses to a totalitarian society. Woland's character has been subject to varying scholarly interpretations: on one hand, he symbolizes a transcendent arbiter of justice; on the other, he may be an allegory for Stalin, embodying the mystique and inviolability of official power. Additionally, the motif of "manuscripts that do not burn" has become a symbol of literary freedom under Soviet censorship, transforming the work not only into a vehicle for political critique but also a significant case study in literary self-reflection.

The "officiality" of The Master and Margarita is evident not only in the adversarial relationship between Bulgakov and Soviet authorities during the creation and publication process but also in the censorship, revisions, and interpretations of the text. The Soviet government's shifting attitude toward the work—from initial suppression to partial acceptance—reflects the delicate balance between political control and cultural compromise, as well as the distinctive characteristics of Soviet official literature.

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