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Making the Irrational Rational: Nietzsche and the Problem of Knowledge in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*

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MAKING THE IRRATIONAL RATIONAL: NIETZSCHE AND THE PROBLEM OF
KNOWLEDGE IN MIKHAIL BULGAKOV'S *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA*

by

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DEDICATION

In Memoriam James Dwyer and Pierceson Mooney. Even in death you live on in me and in every word I pen. May you live on in these pages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Ogden for his guidance, discerning insights, and access to his boundless depths of knowledge; Dr. House for his feedback, and mind-bending and thought-provoking conversations; Dr. Kalb for her continual encouragement and introduction to *The Master and Margarita*; Shannon, my wife, for her love and unending patience.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is twofold: first, to explore the influence of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche on the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov, and second, to use Nietzsche's unpublished essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (written 1873) to examine the problem of knowledge in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (written 1928-1940).

In existing scholarship on Bulgakov's masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*, the novel's epistemological underpinnings are a topic that remains relatively unacknowledged. The "supernatural" element presents an opportunity to examine the manner in which man interacts with unprecedented phenomena, that is, phenomena that do not correspond to his perception of reality. Critical scholarship tends to treat the "supernatural" element in the novel as merely an instrument to other ends. However, analysis of the supernatural in its own right exposes another layer of the text. If we use as a critical lens Friedrich Nietzsche's essay about the construction of knowledge and the correlation of knowledge to reality, Bulgakov's text becomes clearer despite the fact that these texts are essentially epistemological countercurrents. That is, while Nietzsche's text ultimately reveals objectivity to be subjective, Bulgakov's text conversely attempts to integrate the subjective into objectivity. An examination of the treatment of the supernatural element and its perception by the human element reveals man's participation

in the fashioning of knowledge and its boundaries, and the ultimately devaluing effects of a rationalistic worldview on experience.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the interactive relationship between reason and the individual, or “objectivity” and subjectivity, found in the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s early essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (written 1873), and in the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (written 1928-1940). It also examines Nietzsche’s influence on Bulgakov direct and indirect, and analyzes the manner in which Bulgakov deconstructs knowledge in his celebrated novel, using Nietzsche’s essay a theoretical lens.

Chapter 2 examines Nietzsche’s epistemological essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in which Nietzsche scrutinizes the status of knowledge as “objective.” By revealing the role of man’s perceptions in the construction of knowledge, Nietzsche concludes that knowledge is a subjective construct. However, as man regards knowledge to be “objective,” he defers all his potential actions and the legitimacy of his experiences to it, ultimately devaluing his own subjectivity in favor of a standardized subjectivity, disembodied from its originator. The relation, in which Nietzsche positions objectivity relative to subjectivity, is a relevant theme for Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*.

Chapter 3 examines the movement of Nietzsche’s works, traversing space and time, from the moment of their publication in Germany to their receipt, dissemination, and appropriation in Russia. Despite direct evidence of Bulgakov’s interaction with a text

of Nietzsche, there remain other considerations such as the presence of Nietzsche's ideas at large in both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, to which Bulgakov was exposed. Although Nietzsche was a philosopher, his thought did not remain solely a phenomenon of philosophical thought; it pervaded literature, culture, and politics. The official stance toward Nietzsche's thought was one of fluctuation. Despite the apparent disappearance of his works and ideas following an edict for their proscription, they only assimilated into the culture. So, Bulgakov's exposure to Nietzsche is not only direct, but also indirect, through political, philosophical, artistic, and cultural interactions with Nietzsche's work that were available for Bulgakov's experience.

Chapter 4 examines Bulgakov's explicit familiarity with Nietzsche's ideas, evolving relationship toward Nietzsche, and the manner in which Bulgakov's text interacts with the themes discussed in chapter 1. In his masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*, its epistemological underpinnings are a theme that remains relatively unacknowledged in the critical discussion. Critical scholarship tends to relate to the "supernatural" element in the novel as merely an instrument to other ends. Two works that provide an epistemological study of *The Master and Margarita* are Miglena Dikova-Milanova's "Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and the Illusions of Kant's Speculative Season," and Riitta H. Pittman's *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita*. The manner in which this analysis of the supernatural differs is its treatment of the supernatural in its own right. Rather than acknowledging the limits of reason and the human intellect as Pittman and Mikova-Milanova do, the analysis in chapter 5 examines the manner in which man interacts with unprecedented phenomena, that is, that do not correspond to his perception of reality, and the effects of prior

knowledge on the inclusion of novel knowledge. It is notable that their texts operate in converse manners. That is, while Nietzsche's text makes the "rational" irrational, Bulgakov's makes the "irrational" rational. Each text emphasizes that the rational/irrational dichotomy is false. By using Nietzsche's essay as a critical lens, Bulgakov's treatment of knowledge becomes more easily perceptible. Bulgakov's portrayal of the interplay between the supernatural and its perception by the human element, reveals man's creative role in the formation of knowledge and its boundaries, and the ultimately devaluing consequences of a rationalistic worldview on the human experience.

CHAPTER 1

The Nietzschean Knot: The Implications of Epistemic Uncertainty¹

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was an enlightener of the Enlightenment. That is, although he was not a Romantic, he was intellectually aligned with the Early German Romantics in two crucial respects: their treatment of Enlightenment thought and their belief in the subjectivity of man's perceptions. Unlike its later, more well-known form, Early German Romanticism can be seen not as a rejection of Enlightenment thought, but as a critical continuation thereof. Richard Littlejohns characterizes the intellectual position of the Early German Romantics: "[P]recisely because they valued rationality, they insisted on using it to question rationalism itself..." (Littlejohns 62). One of many names for such a position is "the enlightenment of the Enlightenment" (Aufklärung der Aufklärung) (Littlejohns 62). Excepting nothing, the Early German Romantics were critical even of their own values. However, they did not "reject knowledge, just the opposite: they insist that reasoned thought cannot stand still, but in an everlasting state of flux must question its own assumptions and build on them dialectically" (Littlejohns 62). Their perpetual inquiry renders nothing beyond critical examination. Knowledge is never stagnant or privileged, but always subject to revision. In this regard, Nietzsche's outlook

¹ Unlike its Gordian predecessor, the Nietzschean Knot presents no difficulty, only insolubility.

does correspond to that of the Early German Romantics. As the foremost scholar of Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann, states in regard to Nietzsche's desire to render philosophy more "scientific," "he had in mind the 'gay science' of fearless experiment and the good will to accept new evidence and to abandon previous positions, if necessary" (Kaufmann 64). Nietzsche's position corresponds directly to his Early Romantic predecessors, for both are interested not in the status of knowledge remaining stationary, but rather in its continual progress, regardless of its possibly destructive consequences concerning prior knowledge. Their interest is not in completion, but in progress. Furthermore, the Early German Romantics also believed in man's role in the constitution of his perception of reality. Johann Fichte, an early German Romantic, conceived, "if all perceptions of reality are conditioned by our consciousness...then in a sense we determine that reality; everything outside the ego is only the postulate of the ego, it is 'Nicht-Ich,' non-ego" (Littlejohns 65). This is an idea fundamental to Nietzsche's thought, despite the fact that his ideas generally do not correspond to those of Romanticism. Kaufmann characterizes Nietzsche's relationship to Romanticism as one of opposition. "[T]he 'ambiguity' of the romantics – their protest 'against reason, enlightenment, taste, and the eighteenth century' (WM 849) – is just what Nietzsche denounced" (Kaufmann 15). Nietzsche's opposition is to a later form of Romanticism, as the Early German Romantics were indeed not against reason and enlightenment. Nietzsche considered himself "the heir of the Enlightenment" (Kaufman 356), which was a constant position throughout his career.

In 1873 Nietzsche wrote “On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense,” an early epistemological essay that would anticipate much of his later work.² In it, for practical concerns, Nietzsche advances the unverifiability of the perceived reality of man’s knowledge as a means of empowerment, rendering man the ultimate author of knowledge. Thus Nietzsche posits that knowledge, truth, morality, and objectivity are artistic, human, and, therefore, subjective constructs. The position of regard and preference that “objectivity” occupies is without merit, a result of artifice. The purpose of constructs such as knowledge or truth is self-preservation, of which society serves as a continuation. However, the establishment of truth prohibits man from inventing other possibly competing constructs, from acting according to his artistic nature. Over time such constructs as truth have acquired a semblance of intrinsicality, resulting ultimately in the unintended consequence of a devaluation of human experience, rather than enabling human experience to continue. In the end, after the establishment of truth, the only remaining space immune to the devaluation of human experience is found in art.

In the middle of this essay, Nietzsche arrives at a conclusion, which is actually a premise of his essay, too. Postulating that truth is a linguistic construct, Nietzsche states, “Are designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities? It is only by means of forgetfulness that man can ever reach the point of fancying himself to possess a ‘truth’ of the grade just indicated” (Nietzsche 7). In other words, language is not objective, but a subjective expression of reality as man perceives

² Although there is disagreement among critics as to whether Nietzsche’s position towards these ideas changes throughout his career, critics do agree that these philosophical concerns are continuous. See Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) 41. See also Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (London: Harvard UP, 1985) 42. See also Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (Tucson: U of Arizona, 1965) 54. See R.J. Hollingdale, “Theories and Innovations in Nietzsche: Logic, Theory of Knowledge and Metaphysics,” in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, ed. Peter R. Sedgwick (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995) 114. Finally, see Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1990) 65.

it. However, man regards truth as objective. Nietzsche indicates that the very basis of truth is relative to man's experience, inquiring, "how could we still dare to say 'the stone is hard,' as if 'hard' were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation" (Nietzsche 8). Man acquires knowledge of reality through the subjective medium of his senses and their perceptions. As there exists no means of knowing reality in circumvention of man's senses, the role that his senses play in constituting his reality is imperceptible and, therefore, unverifiable.

It is remarkable that Nietzsche's conclusion concerning the unverifiability of man's senses is also a premise of his essay. However, it is ultimately inconsequential, for the unverifiability of man's perceptions amounts to uncertainty. Either his perceptions are accurate or they are inaccurate. However, for practical reasons, man cannot remain inactive because inactivity due to insoluble, conceptual uncertainty results in very tangible consequences or death. So, man must act in the affirmative, as he has been acting, despite this uncertainty. Practical concerns precede those of theory. However, as a thinker, Nietzsche assumes a position of negation from which to act, that is, he assumes that man's perceptions do not necessarily correspond to reality, thus empowering man, and rendering his position a source of authority that is both indefensible and irrefutable.³ Nietzsche is able to predicate his entire argument on this decision because the truth concerning this uncertainty is unverifiable. In other words, as this uncertainty is unsolvable, and, as there is no proof, no proof is required, only a decision. However, in contrast to Nietzsche's negation, the very same unverifiability also means that man's

³ In *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics*, Tsarina Doyle emphasizes Nietzsche's decision to negate the possibility of knowing the "thing-in-itself" (Doyle 85).

perceptions could be accurate, which man assumes in practice, even though in fact this remains unknowable. The opposite of Nietzsche's assertion is equally unverifiable. Whether there are transcendental truths,⁴ whether man's knowledge is accurate, or whether "things in themselves"⁵ are accessible to man, are unknowable questions, and are therefore, once again, both indefensible and irrefutable. As a result of this insolubility, in every statement there exists its dichotomous variant's counterpoint, emphasizing Nietzsche's interest in the result of his negative position.

For Nietzsche, the intellect is essentially a survival mechanism, producing knowledge, a source of protection both physical and existential. Not only is the intellect a source of meaning,⁶ but also of "truth," a protective convention. Knowledge is an invention of man, a product of human existence and is therefore not intrinsic to the universe. The intellect has no applicability "beyond human life" (Nietzsche 4). Its inventions are simply products made by man and for him, too, so the intellect affects the universe only insofar as it concerns his experience. Concerning the more tangible, self-preservative nature of knowledge, Nietzsche writes, "as a means for the preserving of the individual, the intellect unfolds its principle [sic] powers in dissimulation, which is the means by which weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves – since they have

⁴ See chapter 3 of Maudemarie Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1990), for an interpretation of knowledge's unverifiability as a source of value.

⁵ Immanuel Kant coined the term "thing in itself" in his essay *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Nietzsche's contemporaries would have been familiar with Kant's work.

⁶ Critics generally treat knowledge, a product of the intellect, as satisfying basic human needs. For example, "Turning the goad of knowledge against knowledge implied that knowledge had stopped deluding itself about the fact that it is itself a protective device against the void" (Safranski 131). See also Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche's kind of philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge UP, 1996) 163. See R.J. Hollingdale, "Theories and Innovations in Nietzsche: Logic, Theory of Knowledge and Metaphysics," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, ed. Peter R. Sedgwick (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995) 114.

been denied the chance to wage the battle for existence with horns or with the sharp teeth of beasts of prey” (Nietzsche 5). Those unsuited for survival by means of physicality employ the intellect for self-preservation. The intellect “dissimulates,” that is to say that it is of a “deceptive” nature. Nietzsche assigns no moral value to this “deception,” but simply acknowledges both that it is a product of man’s intellect, and that that, which man creates is not inherent to reality. The “principal” power of the intellect is dissimulation, so man is naturally artistic. The intellect enables those of a weaker physicality to create their own means of protection. For Nietzsche, the intellect produces knowledge, an intellectual means of empowerment that prevents physical victimization, which unintentionally results in the relocation of this battle to an intellectual plane. However, as man is also a social being, he does not simply want to survive, but also to commune safely with other human beings. Expanding upon the intellect as a survival mechanism, Nietzsche writes, “from boredom and necessity, man wishes to exist socially and with the herd; therefore, he needs to make peace” (Nietzsche 6). So, in order to satisfy both the need to survive and the desire for social interaction, society is born, which makes innocuous interaction possible through knowledge. Peace is a prerequisite for the formation of society, so society necessitates the establishment of truth, a non-animalistic guiding force.

As, for Nietzsche, truth, like knowledge, is an invention, it, therefore, possesses no inherence. It is a manmade linguistic order of designations. So, for the formation of society, truth, “a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislations of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth. For the contrast between truth and lie arises here for the first time...” (Nietzsche 7). Truth as a human

creation is ultimately an emblem of man's artistic nature. With the genesis of truth, the difference between truth and lies also arises. However, man dissimulates by nature. Truth is a product of dissimulation, the aim of which is to preclude further dissimulation. Truth secures for itself a perennial position, by eliminating all threatening counter narratives. In practice, the invention of truth also punishes man for behavior in accordance with his nature, compelling man to act *unnaturally*. Therefore, a liar's "immorality," for example, is not a determination based on criteria independent of man; rather, those who are "immoral" or "criminals" simply do not abide by the construct necessary for the continuation of society and its benefits. "If [a person] [dissimulates] in a selfish and moreover harmful manner, society will cease to trust him and will thereby exclude him. What men avoid by excluding the liar is not so much being defrauded as it is being harmed by means of fraud" (Nietzsche 7). For society, knowledge, or truth function as an exclusive order. Not only does truth protect its adherents, but it also neutralizes any threats to the continuation of its dominant status by means of exclusion. The intellect, as realized in society or in groups of people, is ultimately stronger than the physicality and actions of an individual. Society is ultimately for the physically weak, who employ conventions as protection, maintaining their own security by excluding threats, and ostracizing the physically strong who employ force rather than the intellect and the intellectually strong who do not abide by the established truth. Furthermore, truth is intended to protect its adherents not so much from deception, as from victimization by way of deception. The aim of truth is to prevent its bearers from occupying an inferior status of power, the position of the victim. However, without an ultimate source of authority regarding knowledge, the very definition of "truth" is subject to potentially

innumerable changes. Existence essentially becomes an endless conflict for the supremacy of a narrative.

It is at this point that Nietzsche makes the conclusion that also serves as his premise. That is, as there are no independent means by which to verify the accuracy of man's perceptions, it remains for man himself to decide the relation of his perceptions to their objects. So, emphasizing the conventional nature of truth, Nietzsche indicates that it is only by forgetting that man regards truth as possessing an essence independent of man's existence, that truth is originally subjective, as it is a linguistic construct, created by man. He concludes that man's perceptual faculties, or his senses, obstruct his ability to differentiate between reality and his perception of it. The point at which external reality begins and the influence of one's senses on the perception of that reality ends is indiscernible. So, whether man's perceptions correspond to reality is unverifiable.

Concerning the idea that man's perceptions accurately represent their perceived objects, or objectivity, Nietzsche intentionally positions his essay in dialogue with a predecessor, Immanuel Kant, by using the phrase "the thing in itself." Nietzsche states, "the 'thing in itself' ... is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for. This creator only designates the relations of things to men..." (Nietzsche 8). In other words, the creator of language cannot comprehend the "thing in itself." It is incomprehensible to him because the creator of language is a human being, whose invention is one of his perceptions.⁷ He knows

⁷ Indeed, Gregory Moore, in his *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, states, "[Nietzsche] argues that the world is the way it is, or rather the way it appears to us, because of the peculiar structure of the human sensory apparatus – a different biology would deliver an entirely different universe" (Moore 98).

nothing certainly but subjectivity, and therefore objectivity is incomprehensible.

Language indicates the relations of things to Man, so it is an anthropocentrizing invention as its concerns only relate to these relations and not the objects themselves despite the appearance of objectivity. Although Nietzsche's position negates any inherent importance concerning man as a species, emphasizing man's lack of inherent worth, he does distinguish between man and animal later in his essay without assigning a value to that distinction.⁸

Just as man eventually regards truth not as a subjective invention, but rather as intrinsic, so does he regard language. For Nietzsche, it is as a result of generalization, disregarding the details of specific examples such as a "leaf" that the idea of a "leaf" becomes communicable. However, in addition, this generalization "awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the 'leaf': the original model..." (Nietzsche 10). Nietzsche's statement opposes the Platonic ideal.⁹ Unlike Plato, he argues that the idea of an original, or an "ideal" from which all earthly copies are fashioned, is erroneous. Rather, the Platonic ideal is a product of the generalizing or de-individualizing nature of language. The utility of language lies in its broad applicability at the sacrifice of individuality and precision of expression. However, as the word "leaf" attempts to refer to all leaves, it does not refer to a single leaf objectively. The word "leaf" is in service to man, referring to a generalized leaf for the sake of utility as defined by man, so

⁸ In *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, Christoph Cox indicates that although he separates man from animal, "Nietzsche argues that this difference is not hierarchical" (Cox 75). He notes finding within this text among others, "an argument against a notion of evolutionary progress that takes human beings to be the goal and pinnacle of nature" (Cox 225).

⁹ In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates advances a "theory of Forms," referring to an original, an ideal, or a universal, that is incapable of encapsulation in reality.

it does not correspond to reality, and is not objective but subjective. Ultimately, man extends the scope of these de-individualizing categories, imposing his perceptions as prescriptions for reality.

Rendering a phenomenon communicable by the assignment of a name simply classifies it. However, man cannot assert that he has arrived at its essence, nor can he state that he has not. “Although we should not presume to claim that this contrast [between categories] does not correspond to the essence of things: that would of course be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, would be just as indemonstrable as its opposite” (Nietzsche 10). Whether man is capable of attaining such an essence is unascertainable because man possesses no means for its verification that is independent of man. All of man’s tools are simply extensions of man, who endows them with the same subjective interference, as man possesses. Nietzsche once again acknowledges the mere choice of his position of negation.

Although man cannot verify his possession of objectivity, he favors it to the detriment of his subjectivity. Nietzsche posits that the difference between man and animal is the ability to think in abstraction, the ability to consider not solely with regard to immediacy and particularity, but rather in more general terms. “As a ‘rational’ being, [man] now places his behavior under the control of abstractions. He will no longer tolerate being carried away by sudden impressions, by intuitions. First he universalizes all these impressions into less colorful, cooler concepts, so that he can entrust the guidance of his life and conduct to them” (Nietzsche 11). Nietzsche’s statement renders the very knowledge hailed by the Enlightenment’s rationalism as originally irrational,

necessitating the reassessment of man's understanding of rationality.¹⁰ Although rationality is subjective in origin, its origin is no longer that of its possessor, and over time it acquires a semblance of objectivity. So, man acts according to these manmade constructs as opposed to his own subjectivity, constructs the reality of which is unverifiable. He no longer considers his experiences with regard to their particularity, but rather he attempts to position them in preexisting categories built upon apparent "objectivity," or experience not his own. Just as truth strives to preclude man from acting according to his creative nature, objectivity averts man from acting upon impulse, from acting according to his subjectivity. A consequence of the ability to think in abstraction is a loss of individuality.^{11,12} Difference is no longer valuable, only similarity. Abstraction makes possible that of which the sphere of subjectivity is incapable: "the construction of a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, and clearly marked boundaries – a new world, one which now confronts that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world..." (Nietzsche 11).

Abstraction makes possible order, organization, and classification. Ironically, man

¹⁰ In *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption*, Ted Sadler writes, "scientific knowledge is legitimated in relation to the world of physical phenomena, it is devalued because it cannot attain the 'in-itself' of reality: metaphysical knowledge turns out to be impossible, while scientific knowledge emerges as strictly subjective. In this way the philosophical ideal of knowledge which has determined the whole Western tradition since Plato is undermined" (Sadler 27).

¹¹ In *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*, John T. Wilcox states about the consequences of abstraction, "this last remark suggests, as the rest of the essay makes quite clear, that Nietzsche is not merely *attacking* man's conceptual ability; he is analyzing it and point out both its power and its cost. Its cost has to do with the way in which it abstracts from and hence omits empirical individuality" (Wilcox 131).

¹² Writing of the possible consequences of one truth supplanting another, in *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, Arthur C. Danto states, "there is always the possibility that some of our experiences might fail to fit the scheme with which we work. These we cannot express in the language made available to us by society, for, by hypothesis, they are deviant... There is no reason to suppose that these experience, deviant under this structure, may not become standard under another, so that language which is deviant here and now may sometime and somewhere else be plain speech" (Danto 41).

eventually regards his own subjectivity and its impressions as less human, less known, and less dependable than the “objectivity” of these abstract categorizations. Man imbues objectivity with the very authority that he believes it to possess. Man is therefore unwittingly the source of its authority, and, to a degree, subordinates himself. Man achieves a sense of security by living according to constructs not of his own making, but that of his predecessors. Society causes man to disfavor his own subjectivity. His own senses and perceptions are no longer reliable.

However, Nietzsche indicates that the notion of the objective world as more human and therefore less threatening than the world of man’s perceptions is deceptive and even dangerous. By mistaking knowledge for objectivity as opposed to a rendering of these perceived objects in relation to man, he mistakenly believes that he knows phenomena as objects in themselves. “[Man’s] method is to treat man as the measure of all things...He forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to be the things themselves... only by forgetting that he himself is an artistically creative subject, does man live with any repose, security, and consistency” (Nietzsche 14). Man becomes “the measure of all things,” and so, man does not understand the object in its own right, but rather renders it more subjective, more human, less strange and therefore less threatening. He imposes his subjectivity in everything he does. By forgetting that knowledge and language are subjective, man eventually regards them as objective and intrinsic, allowing himself to arrive at a false sense of security. Man confuses his subjectivity with objectivity, rendering his world less dangerous than it actually is.

Although man is not necessarily cognizant of his nature and the societal opposition embodied in truth, it is irrepressible. Nietzsche defines human nature as artistic. “The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive...” (Nietzsche 17). These metaphors are language, the medium for all knowledge. Nietzsche writes, “a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor” (Nietzsche 8). The image in one’s mind of any phenomena is a metaphor as it is unverifiable whether the image corresponds to reality, and it is subjective as its rendering is a result of one’s senses, so the image is only a *representation*, or a metaphor. Then one names the image by speaking a word. The word only represents the image. It is a translation, as is the image. Such inventions are natural to man. Truth is an application of language, a subjective invention, that attempts to preclude further invention insofar as it is detrimental to its participants, either inventor or spectator. Truth is intended not to prevent deception, but rather victimization by means of it. Nietzsche states, “this drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds it... in art generally” (Nietzsche 18). Man’s drive to invent is undeniable. Despite the moral conditioning, assigning certain manifestations of this inventive drive the value of “undesirable” or “bad,” the desire to invent persists. Such a channel for man’s natural creativity is to be found in art. Nietzsche’s interest in the unverifiability of reality enables him to define man as the artist of his own reality.

According to Nietzsche, art is permissible in society due to the fact that, as an artifact, art is benign. The drive to invent manifests itself as “an ardent desire to refashion

the world which presents itself to waking man, so that it will be as colorful, irregular, lacking in results and coherence, charming, and eternally new as the world of dreams” (Nietzsche 18). Despite societal impediments such as truth and morality, man’s nature remains unchanged. He simply can no longer express as freely his natural, artistic proclivity. This drive does not desire order. It desires to uninhibitedly create. However, as truth functions as a delegitimizing force, this drive is unable to occupy a position of dominance threatening to truth. So, this artistic drive by necessity has recourse to art. Truth, like man, does not fear deception, a product of this drive, but rather the victimization by way of deception. In art, deception is permissible, as it does not compete with truth for dominance. As seen in the previous quotation, Nietzsche likens art to dreams; he expands on this, “indeed, it is only by means of the rigid and regular web of concepts that the waking man clearly sees that he is awake; and it is precisely because of this that he sometimes thinks that he must be dreaming when this web of concepts is torn by art” (Nietzsche 18). This drive does not adhere to such constructs as reason. It continually creates in such a manner consistent with the unreality of dreams because, although dreams resemble reality, the “rules” of reality are no longer applicable, and their violation is of no consequence.¹³ The wakeful world is recognizable by the inflexibility of its concepts. Dreams are not threatening to its counterpart, as they are not interchangeable. In art, the violation of these concepts is permissible because the violation is as inconsequential as in dreams. However, Nietzsche does not account for art

¹³ As Arthur C. Danto notes in *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, “even though there is no general exit from our conceptual prison, save momentarily through art or through the intuitions which can become art, we have some choice as to prisons, and so we enjoy a limited conceptual freedom” (Danto 41). Concerning the position of this idea throughout Nietzsche’s career, he notes, “These notions, first introduced in *Concerning Truth and Falsehood in an Extramoral Sense*, were in essence to remain with Nietzsche always” (Danto 41).

as a means of conveyance; he treats art as an artifact without an audience. As truth is not immutable, art serves as a possible means to subvert the current truth, indicating the constructed nature of truth by presenting former truths.

Art is not only harmless applications of deception, but man also finds it pleasurable. As Nietzsche maintains, “man has an invincible inclination to allow himself to be deceived and is, as it were, enchanted with happiness when the rhapsodist tells him epic fables as if they were true...so long as it is able to deceive without injuring, that master of deception, the intellect, is free” (Nietzsche 19). Man wants to participate in deception as both a creator and a spectator. Man wants deception, but not to be the victim of it. He does not want to surrender his creativity entirely. Art is liberating, for it allows man to act according to what Nietzsche calls “intuitions,” or subjective impulses. However, due to the fact that language is an order that foists upon man a generalizing means of expression, he extricates himself by means of disorder. Nietzsche states, “there exists no word for these intuitions; when man sees them he grows dumb, or else he speaks only in forbidden metaphors and in unheard-of combinations of concepts. He does this so that by shattering and mocking the old conceptual barriers he may at least correspond creatively to the impression of the powerful present intuition” (Nietzsche 20). There are no adequate words for these intuitions. Words as they are, are insufficient, so man either does not speak, in order not to devalue his intuitions by forcing them into the order of language, or he uses language not literally but figuratively so as to circumvent the limitations of language. In art, fixed metaphors become mobile again. When the intellect is not restrained, it is able to act according to intuitions. In other words, it abides by its own internal, subjective impulses. Art enables man to confuse metaphors that

would, outside of art, typically lead to societal exclusion. Apart from art, such a confusion of metaphors would be tantamount to a willful misuse or abuse of linguistic conventions by which man usually abides, subjecting himself to exclusion and perpetuating the very language that ultimately devalues his subjectivity. However, in art, it is a means to individualize an intentionally generalized medium. The only remaining means of deception permissible in society is art due to the fact that, disregarding its effects on its audience, the deceptions of art as an artifact alone is innocuous.

To reiterate, this essay anticipates Nietzsche's later works. Throughout his career, he continues or reworks various concerns found in this essay. For example, Nietzsche's choice to act negatively, which is to say that he regards absolute knowledge of "things in themselves" as inaccessible and alien to the human experience, thus enabling and empowering man to create his own truths, and rendering existence a ceaseless conflict for a truth's supremacy despite the fact that a truth, embodied in a society, is ultimately more powerful than bodily strength alone, as those who are physically weaker are able to overcome those who are stronger through employment of the intellect. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the role of the "strong" continues to prove productive, culminating in his conception of the "Übermensch," whom the lack of objective truth inspires to action. Although Nietzsche does not explicitly prescribe action, he does present man's only obstacle as his extrinsic, or rather intrinsically meaningless, morality, and thereby enabling action. In this essay, Nietzsche posits that truth is a linguistic order, subjective in origin, and not reflecting reality, but man's perception of it. The "thing-in-itself" remains inaccessible. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche reworks his idea concerning the "thing-in-itself," concluding with its nonexistence. In other works such as *Beyond*

Good and Evil and *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche's ideas concerning knowledge as subjective, a lack of objectivity, and the perspectival nature of morality evolve. Such ideas begin in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," as portraying man as self-victimizing. That is, favoring the subjective "objectivity," man devalues subjectivity and experience. His unknown "artistic" ability results in his belief to be less vulnerable and more "knowledgeable" than he is in reality. This is an idea that proves particularly influential on Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940). Man classifies descriptions of perceived phenomena, which result in deceptive phenomenal prescriptions. Ultimately, man surrenders his rights to act according to his nature for the sake of self-preservation, that is, for the sake of the continuation of human experience, which ultimately causes the devaluation of it. Enlightening Enlightenment thought, Nietzsche deconstructs rationalism, and acknowledges that man has sacrificed his subjectivity to no avail. Finally, he reveals rationalism's unacknowledged dependence on experience and subjectivity that results in there remaining for man only one of recourse: art. For Nietzsche, life and art are one, although man has become ignorant of his own artistry.

CHAPTER 2

Nietzsche in Russia and the Soviet Union: Antecedents to Bulgakov's Reception

The fate of Nietzsche's works and ideas in Russia is a complicated and inconstant one. The controversial and contagious nature of his thought has attracted the attention of extra-literary spheres, in particular, that of politics. From the late 1880's, Nietzsche's work had begun to circulate in the Russian literary underground, and, although there was thenceforth vacillation in official policy regarding the status of his works, once they had entered, they never left. They simply mutated into various manifestations, the origins of which were no longer patent.

Official welcome did not accompany the debut of Nietzsche's works in Russia. This inevitably resulted in a widespread understanding of Nietzsche essentially divorced from his writings. Prior to 1892, censorship had banned them in the Russian Empire (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 71). In 1892, the first publication related to Nietzsche appeared, not in the form of one of his own works, but rather that of literary criticism (Lane 51). V.P Preobrazhensky wrote a favorable article entitled "Friedrich Nietzsche: The Critique of the Morality of Altruism," published in the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology (Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii)*(Lane 51). However, Nietzsche's works had already been a topic of discussion in Russia years before the publication of Preobrazhensky's article (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 70). For example,

while in Europe in the late 1880's the author Dmitri Merezhkovsky discovered Nietzsche's works, which he discussed in his literary circle, and "by 1890 Nietzschean themes were evident in his own work" (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 70). The first translations of Nietzsche's work into Russian appeared in 1894, which were *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem* (originally published in German in 1888) in *Artist* and letters of Nietzsche's in *Northern Messenger* (*Severnyi Vestnik*) (Davies 357). Due to censorship, it was only in 1898 that the first publication of one of Nietzsche's less innocuous works *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was permissible in the Russian Empire; this occurred in *The New Journal of Foreign Literature* (*Novyi Zhurnal Inostrannoi Literatury*) (Davis 359). The initial censorship of Nietzsche's works resulted in a period of six years in which there was a plethora of secondary sources about Nietzsche and his thought available to the public, but, excepting smuggled copies of originals, there were not any of the corresponding primary sources. This ultimately facilitated not only intentional, but also unwitting distortions – "vulgarizations" - of Nietzsche's thought.

Despite his favorable presentation of Nietzsche, the publication of Preobrazhensky's article began the vulgarization of Nietzsche's ideas in Russia. Edith W. Clowes in *Nietzsche in Russia*, defines vulgarization as "negative, distortive popularization. Here an idea is presented without regard for the author's original intention. It is identified with superficially similar, but essentially different phenomena – whether situations, stereotypes, or ideas – which bring about its ultimate discrediting" (Clowes 317). Conversely, popularizations are essentially faithful to the original. Though, as Clowes notes, differentiating between vulgarization and popularization requires the reader to make a "value judgment" (Clowes 317). So, the determination "vulgarization"

is subjective, that is, depends on a reader's understanding of Nietzsche, but it is nonetheless demonstrable. Clowes categorizes interaction with Nietzsche's thought into three categories: intentional vulgarization, unintentional vulgarization, and popularization. For example, the editors of the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, to whom Preobrazhensky submitted his article, were not without reservations about both the nature of Nietzsche's ideas and the government censor's possible reaction to them (Lane 52). So, the editors appended a prefatory note to the beginning of the article in order not to confuse its publication with endorsement. In it, they stated that they had decided to publish "an explication of the moral doctrine of Friedrich Nietzsche, outrageous in its final conclusions, with the aim of showing what strange and sick phenomena are at present afflicting a prominent trend of Western European culture" (My translation) ("изложение возмутительной по своим окончательным выводам нравственной доктрины Фр. Ницше, с тою целью, чтобы показать, какие странные и болезненные явления поражают в настоящее время известное направление западноевропейской культуры." (Preobrazhenskii)).¹⁴ They continued, admitting that although Nietzsche is not untalented, he has been "blinded by hatred for religion, Christianity, and God Himself" ("ослепленный ненавистью к религии, христианству и к самому Богу." (Preobrazhenskii)). According to them, Nietzsche encouraged crime for the sake of human perfection, concluding, "what a great and instructive lesson is the fate of this unfortunate, prideful man, who ended up in a lunatic asylum owing to the *idée fixe* that he is the Creator of the world" ("Какой великий и поучительный урок представляет судьба этого несчастного гордеца, попавшего в дом умалишенных

¹⁴ Further translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise credited.

вследствие *idée fixe*, что он Творец мира.” (Preobrazhenskii)). So, the editors’ note is a source of intentional vulgarization, for it deceptively presents its authors’ ignorance of the work under consideration as accurate information. Concerning the actual note, as Ann M. Lane notes, the editors wrote it because they were concerned about the *government* censor’s reaction (Lane 52). However, the content of the prefatory note is largely about Christianity because not only was there a governmental censor, but there was also a religious one. Moreover, the Russian Empire was predominantly Christian. Since the contents of the editors’ addendum are intended to please the censor, the note serves to maintain a narrative of Russian, Christian moral superiority.

Although Preobrazhensky’s article is not a vulgarization, it is nonetheless problematic, for it presents an interpretation and critique of Nietzsche, and is therefore already at one remove from its primary source. Regardless of his intentions, the journal’s audience is at the mercy of his interpretation. Furthermore, the editor’s appendage is in reaction to Preobrazhensky’s interpretation, not to the original source. As, at that moment, journals were the only source of information about Nietzsche available to the public in Russia, such articles were the only means by which readers were able to appraise Nietzsche’s ideas. The article’s preface does not and, in actuality, cannot attempt to engage the material, but rather it appeals to its audience’s Christian mores and nationalistic sentiment as grounds for its complete dismissal. While this article and the note do make a hitherto unknown author accessible to an audience ignorant of his works, the preface is ultimately a source of vulgarization, as its authors are attempting to force its readers to form negative conclusions from their uninformed, biased interpretation of an interpretation.

In contrast to intentional vulgarizations, unintentional vulgarizations often result from ignorance or a misunderstanding about a given work. For example, in his 1900 short story “The Story of Sergei Petrovich,” Leonid Andreev conflates the ideas of Nietzsche with those of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (Clowes 322). Although Nietzsche and Dostoevsky’s ideas are distinct, they are not entirely dissimilar, as the author Dmitri Merezhkovsky indicates in his 1901 essay on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 87). In Andreev’s story, the protagonist Sergei Petrovich is reading Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he misquotes, “if you do not succeed in life, if a poisonous worm eats at your heart, know that you will succeed in death” (“ ‘Если жизнь не удаётся тебе, если ядовитый червь пожирает твоё сердце, знай, что удастся смерть’ (SP, 250)” (qtd. in Clowes 322)). He understands this misquotation as an endorsement of suicide, however, it is not Zarathustra who advocates suicide, but the character Kirillov from Dostoevsky’s novel *The Possessed (Besy)* (Clowes 323). Andreev’s conflation of Dostoevsky with Nietzsche further vulgarizes Nietzsche, for the ideas Andreev conflates are seemingly related, but essentially different ideas. Although Andreev’s story publicizes Nietzsche’s name, it misinforms its readers about Nietzsche’s thought.

Although there were popularizers, who faithfully reproduced Nietzsche’s thought; however, Clowes’ study investigates vulgarization, so little information is available about popularizers. She does note that for some, misinterpretations were recognizable as vulgarizations. For example, the critic Yuri Aleksandrovich recognized Andreev’s story as a vulgarization (Clowes 327). On the other hand, critics such as S.A. Vengerov believed stories like those by Mikhail Artsybashev to be essentially faithful to

Nietzsche's ideas (Clowes 327). So, despite the fact that "Nietzsche's" ideas have become more accessible, there has been no subsequent agreement about their meaning. However, this disagreement is not simply the result of differing interpretations of a given work, but rather it is also the result of the various filters through which readers encounter Nietzsche. The historical circulation of Nietzsche's thought through complicates determining whether a work is simply a *different* interpretation, or an interpretation is based on misinformation.

Historically, in Russia and the Soviet Union, the government and political ideology have influenced the public's access to Nietzsche's works. By 1904 the public is familiar with Nietzsche to such a degree that his is "household name," and by 1911 all of his major works are available in Russian (*Nietzsche and Soviet Culture* Rosenthal 6). Though, to what degree the public is familiar with Nietzsche and with "which" Nietzsche is unknown. During World War I, Nietzsche's ideas disappeared, having become unpopular associated with "German militarism," but by 1916 he had regained prominence in Russia (*Nietzsche and Soviet Culture* Rosenthal 6). In 1923, in the early Soviet period, Nietzsche's works became once again unavailable. "[They] were removed from libraries or put on closed reserve, and some were actually burned by decree in 1923-1924" (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 4). By 1933 the Soviet Union officially renounced Nietzsche in order to disassociate itself from Germany, which had begun to employ Nietzsche's works in Nazi propaganda (Agursky 272). Ironically, the Soviet government regards access to Nietzsche's works as politically synonymous with Nazi association. However, despite the official position with regard to Nietzsche, much of the population had been exposed to the ideas of Nietzsche long before their renewed proscription, and

these ideas remained, becoming part of Soviet culture; Russia's initial opposition at the turn of the century proved ineffectual.

In their initial artistic productions and political activities, the youth division of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, or the Komsomol, repurposed Nietzsche's individualistically oriented ideas in the name of the collective. Founded in 1918, the Komsomol defined the youth as "the vanguard of the proletarian revolution," associating the term "vanguard" with both politics and the military (Tirado 236). Its members, the so-called "Komsomolites," would publish poems and manifestos sharing imagery and ideology common to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Tirado 237). Often members did not encounter Nietzsche's ideas directly, but indirectly through other works that served as conduits for Nietzsche's ideas, such as those of the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (Tirado 238)¹⁵. Nonetheless, essentially Nietzschean images "of warriors and war, of the future, of determination and courage abound" (Tirado 238). Nietzsche's ideas focus on the individual furthering his or her own interests, whereas the Komsomolites produced works ostensibly depicting individuals struggling on behalf of the collective (Tirado 246). However, their works ultimately become regarded as ideologically problematic, for they appear too individualistic (Tirado 249). As a result, the Komsomol redirects its efforts to transforming consciousness toward Communism (Tirado 250), and by the late 1920's Nietzschean traits are no longer present in their works (Tirado 250-51). Despite the officially anti-Nietzsche ideology, his influenced did not simply disappear.

¹⁵ For further discussion of Nietzsche's influence on Mayakovsky, see Bengt Jangfeldt, "Nietzsche and the young Mayakovsky," in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994) 35-57.

Just as the influence of Nietzsche's works was manifest in the youth division of the Communist Party, so it was present in the Communist Party itself. Anatoly Lunacharsky, an art critic and Alexander Bogdanov, a philosopher and writer, were both Bolsheviks, who explicitly acknowledged Nietzsche's influence on them (Agursky 256). Lunacharsky was Soviet Commissar. Nietzsche was also an influence for The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1918 to 1930, Georgy Chicherin (Agursky 257). People influenced by Nietzsche such as these often occupied administrative positions, positions of power, so the public was familiar with Nietzsche embodied in these government officials. Although it is unknown whether Yosef Stalin was familiar with Nietzsche, prominent writers of the time depicted him as an Übermensch (Superman) figure.

Despite the official proscription of Nietzsche's works, the government continued to permit works influenced by Nietzsche to circulate. For example, Stalinist artists influenced by Nietzsche even tried to depict Stalin as an Übermensch. "Panferov, Wishnevsky, Gladkov, Aleksei Tolstoi, and others started to build his [Stalin's] image as an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent Superman, a model for the master race" (Agursky 280). For example, in *Energy* (1933), Gladkov depicts leader (Stalin) as an Übermensch (Agursky 280). The governmental organization known as the Union of Soviet Writers was founded in 1932, so a prerequisite for his 1933 novel's publication was ideological conformity. Furthermore, other literary works by authors influenced by Nietzsche's thought issued from abroad. The works of authors, such as Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Upton Sinclair, and, most popular of all, Jack London, were available uncensored during

Stalin's reign (Agursky 271). The official position to Nietzsche was therefore only a nominal opposition. In fact, the regime essentially endorsed Nietzsche's thought.

To reiterate, the influence and presence of Nietzsche's ideas in Russia and the Soviet Union still endure during the early Soviet period despite their apparent disappearance. His ideas affected all layers of society, from the intelligentsia and to proletariat in addition to proving fruitful to spheres other than philosophy such as politics, and literature. Regardless of the official Russian and Soviet reception of Nietzsche's works, characterizable as a perpetual vacillation between proscription and acceptance, Nietzsche's ideas never disappear upon proscription, but simply his name becomes disassociated with his works. Although initially censored, Nietzsche's ideas eventually percolate into everyday life. Regardless of whether one reads his works, his ideas are present in the works of others to various degrees. His ideas were enduring to such a degree that, for example, the Komsomol's poetry was recognizably Nietzschean, despite the fact that their exposure to Nietzsche was secondhand, through other authors such as Vladimir Mayakovsky. Although Nietzsche's works became proscribed yet again, their effects were not subject to proscription. Aspects of Nietzsche's ideas and politics became inextricably linked in the Soviet Union. Soviet writers depicted Stalin as such in the form of the "Übermensch." Works and people influenced by Nietzsche continued to thrive. Policy contradicted praxis. Regardless of whether Russians and Soviet citizens encountered Nietzsche's ideas directly or through secondary sources, versions of his ideas continued to exist in their minds to the extent that they redefined an entire culture.

Three Case Studies of Russian Intellectuals Interacting with Nietzsche's Thought

The critical discussion of Nietzsche's influence in Russia is a relatively new field. There are two volumes inaugurating the study of Nietzsche's influence in Russia: *Nietzsche in Russia* (1986), and *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture* (1994). However, considering Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* is a novel concerned with Christianity and spirituality, in order to situate Bulgakov's contribution appropriately in the critical discussion, an examination of other works with similar concerns is appropriate. As atheism was official state policy in the Soviet Union, *Nietzsche in Russia* ultimately proves to be more productive. Three writers, whose interaction with Nietzsche is ultimately to a religious end, Dmitri Merezhkovsky, Vasily Rozanov, and Nikolai Fedorov. Although they do not engage with all the same texts, nor do they relate to Nietzsche in the same manner, they do use Nietzsche's ideas to a similar end: to assist them in the definition of their own earthly Christian visions.

Dmitri Merezhkovsky

The author Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) uses Nietzsche's ideas in order to reconcile a lifelong internal conflict of perpetual oscillation between a Christian and secular worldview as a source of values. In Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal's chapter in *Nietzsche in Russia* "Stages of Nietzscheanism: Merezhkovsky's Intellectual Evolution", she portrays Merezhkovsky's ideas as in endless flux, his views changing according to his experiences. Throughout his life, Merezhkovsky experiments with many of Nietzsche's ideas, though some are less transient than others. He engages with ideas of

Nietzsche such as the primacy of art, beauty, and the artist, the concept of the mindless “herd” as opposed to the Übermensch, “the revaluation of values” or the ultimate lack of objectivity, and emphasis on the flesh, an affirmation of life. Merezhkovsky’s initial concerns relate to life, death, the mind, and the body, concerns which neither a secular philosophy nor Russian Orthodox Christianity satisfy (Rosenthal 69). So, throughout his life, his worldview hesitates between these two poles, trying to reconcile these disparate attitudes, which ultimately culminates in a new, consciously created Christianity.

Following the initial period, during which Merezhkovsky viewed Nietzsche’s ideas as “a crass warrior’s creed” (Rosenthal 70), he embraces Nietzsche’s philosophy of aesthetics. “Esthetic creativity became his prime value, and beauty became the means to make life meaningful, to give man the courage to go on living” (Rosenthal 70). As Bernice Rosenthal rightly indicates, the origin of such an idea lies in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. For Merezhkovsky, as for Nietzsche, creativity functions as a basic survival mechanism, rendering the horrors of life endurable. At this point in his trajectory of ideas, Merezhkovsky is merely a selective receptacle of Nietzsche’s ideas; he does not modify them. Uncertain, he cannot profess them wholeheartedly, for “he could not accept Nietzsche’s statement ‘God is dead’, nor could he believe that art was *only* an illusion”(Rosenthal 71). Aesthetics are not the only source of meaning for him. He is in search of some kind of inherent order and meaning, absent in Nietzsche’s ideas. So, he ignores Nietzsche’s ideas concerning metaphysics and epistemology to a large degree, as he was unable to accept the world as meaningless (Rosenthal 72). Merezhkovsky’s stance is antithetical to Nietzsche, Nietzschean in but a superficial manner, as it is this very meaninglessness that empowers Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, Merezhkovsky’s

ideas eventually shift. In a lecture, in a manner after Nietzsche, he assaults the exalted position of reason, but asserts, “the artist’s intuition and imagination are divine gifts” (Rosenthal 72). Although the idea of creativity as “divine” does not correspond to Nietzsche’s ideas per se, for Nietzsche, creativity does occupy an elevated position and reason an erroneously exalted one. As divinity temporarily recedes for him, Merezhkovsky accepts Nietzsche. Beauty becomes central to his lifestyle, “[featuring] defiance of established verities, smashing the old ‘tablets of values,’ adoration of the flesh, and exaltation of the artist as superman...” and he declares, “ ‘ we will break all laws... For the artist, ‘all is permitted’ ” (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 75). Truth and objectivity are no longer absolute, but relative for him, an artist, whose primacy he extols. In addition, his views coincide with those of Nietzsche in denouncing the Christian denial of the body.

His works begin to highlight a struggle between these polar sets of values. However, over time, he becomes disenchanted with Nietzsche, for he returns to his former irreconcilability to Nietzsche’s “epistemology of an orderless universe”, so, he begins “to seek a specifically Christian faith to prove absolute values and the certainty of eternal life” (Rosenthal 79). Merezhkovsky begins to fashion a Christianity from what he found attractive in these two polar worldviews. His product is ultimately an apocalyptic narrative, focusing on the Second Coming of Christ, but to a more earthly end, he attempts to elevate the value of the body, what he calls “holy flesh” (Rosenthal 86). Despite his renunciation of Nietzsche, an attempt at the redefinition of Christianity, at the creation of a new culture, is a tenet of Nietzsche’s concept the *Übermensch*. Even in his denial, Merezhkovsky remains Nietzschean to a degree. Following an example of

Nietzsche's thought, Merezhkovsky attempts to "posit a new Christian morality" while recognizing morality as "internal"(Rosenthal 89). Although, like Nietzsche, Merezhkovsky acknowledges that morality does not order the universe, but rather man's perception of it, he nonetheless desires it. For him, a morality's value does not originate in its intrinsicity, but rather the value arises from the manner in which it affects its bearer's life. However, unlike his prior Russian Orthodox Christian values, his vision does not deny the body, and is a continuation of his attempt to reconcile Nietzsche and Christian, as Nietzsche viewed Christianity as non-life-affirming.¹⁶ As an *Übermensch*, Merezhkovsky creates a new Christianity, using Nietzsche's critiques of Christianity as an inspirational source of correction.

Vasily Rozanov

The influence of Nietzsche on the philosopher and writer Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919) is similar to that of Merezhkovsky¹⁷: each critiqued Christianity for the sake of its improvement. Anna Lisa Crone contends in "Nietzschean, All Too Nietzschean? Rozanov's Anti-Christian Critique," that Rozanov's resemblance to Nietzsche is one of both content and form, that is, they both critique Christianity and there are stylistic similarities (Crone 95). Although Rozanov denies Nietzsche's influence (Crone 98), affirming his own originality, Rozanov did indeed read Nietzsche (Crone 104). Like Nietzsche, Rozanov proclaimed "the death of God," which would result "in the collapse

¹⁶ In his *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche argues that Christianity is essentially a religion that values death over life, for it emphasizes sexual abstinence and living in such a manner in order to receive an unverifiable life after death.

¹⁷ Indeed, they did know one another (Crone 96), although Rozanov believed that Merezhkovsky's resexualization of Christianity would "de-Christianize" it (Crone 109).

of all social and cultural values based on Christianity” (Crone 99). Moral order is therefore not objective but subjective, dependent on man’s beliefs, which corresponds to Nietzsche’s thought. Another similarity between the two is that each views Christianity as being in opposition to life (Crone 103). Nietzsche writes of Christianity in such a manner in *The Anti-Christ*. Each regards Christianity as the source of “a slave morality, as an institution inducing men to powerlessness” (Crone 103). By means of textual parallels, Crone concludes that Nietzsche’s style influenced Rozanov. “It is the irreverent manner of address, the unbridled use of language, a verbal bravado reminiscent of Nietzsche’s, which produces a shocking effect” (Crone 108). However, thematically, the most noticeable difference between Nietzsche and Rozanov is the pointed emphasis on how Christianity negatively relates to sexuality, “how the religion [Christianity] deprived man of his proper relation to sexuality” (Crone 111). Like Nietzsche, many of Rozanov’s critiques are for effect, but ultimately, his critiques are not intended to annihilate Christianity, but to correct its flaws (Crone 110).

Nikolai Fedorov

In “Fedorov’s Critique of Nietzsche, the ‘Eternal Tragedian,’ ” Taras D. Zakydalsky posits that Nietzsche influenced the Christian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1828-1903), albeit negatively (Zakydalsky 113-14). That is, Fedorov often understood his own ideas more clearly in opposition to those of Nietzsche. Referring to his own practical philosophy as “supramoralism,” Fedorov set as a “common task” for mankind the perfection of science and technology in order to eventually conquer nature and

resurrect the dead, realizing the Kingdom of God on Earth (Zakydalsky 113). With regard to Nietzsche, their primary points of coincidence are that each philosopher's ideas were essentially practical, set a task in which mankind would participate as a whole, and emphasized the value of life (Zakydalsky 115). Although each abandons Christian morality, it is to differing degrees. Fedorov's abandonment of Christian morality simply meant abandoning "a morality of individual action incapable of gaining control over nature and conquering evil at its root" (Zakydalsky 115). However, their points of divergence are much more significant. Fedorov considered Nietzsche to be an aesthete and himself a moralist. For him, Nietzsche was a "spectator", passively viewing life as one would a play, thus explaining Nietzsche's simultaneous affirmation of life and insistence on death and endless battle as a spectator desires an interesting plot (Zakydalsky 117-18). It is due to this seeming contradiction that Fedorov names Nietzsche "the eternal tragedian," for Nietzsche regards life as a "tragic play" (Zakydalsky 118). The two Nietzschean ideas that Fedorov engages are the concepts of "eternal recurrence" and the Übermensch. Eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's least understood idea. For Fedorov, it entails a literal return to life of every individual, who will eventually die again, ad infinitum, and will "[remain] forever immature and powerless against death" (Zakydalsky 119). So, eternal recurrence is akin to viewing a play multiple times, despite multiple viewings (continual rebirth), nothing changes. On the other hand, as a result of Fedorov's envisioned resurrection, man would attain "perfect life" (Zakydalsky 119). Fedorov's vision attributes meaning to man's existence, whereas Nietzsche views life as inherently meaningless. Concerning Nietzsche's Übermensch, Fedorov was particularly critical, for he believed that the only quality

deserving distinction to be immortality, so Nietzsche's Übermensch is essentially indistinguishable from man. His beliefs served as a counterpoint to those of Nietzsche. For Fedorov, "an individual is not his own creator: what he is is determined largely by the culture into which he is born...what one creates...consists mostly of what one has borrowed from others...what is truly original and one's own can be only a minute element of one's work" (Zakydalsky 121). In other words, man is a cultural composite. That is, everyone is essentially derivative of their culture and preceding cultures, and man's individuality is but minimal in degree. His final objection to the Übermensch consists in Nietzsche's assignment of value to the will rather than to chance (Zakydalsky 123), for, biologically speaking, Übermenschen cannot result from the will, as is implicit in Nietzsche's call for humanity to breed with the aim of producing Übermenschen, but rather such people are the products of chance (Zakydalsky 121). So, although Nietzsche was not influential in the typical sense, that is, Fedorov did not agree with Nietzsche's ideas, Nietzsche did ultimately enable Fedorov to give greater clarity to his Christian vision.

So, in conclusion, although each of these writers and thinkers has different concerns, generally, they are all able to use Nietzsche's ideas as tool to better define their own ideas. Although each thinker is Christian, members of a religion emblematic of an afterlife, and Nietzsche's thought primarily relates to earthly concerns, their interaction with his works ultimately assists them in their earthly efforts.

CHAPTER 3

Bulgakov's Deconstruction of Knowledge

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov make an unlikely pair. Nietzsche is the man who penned the polemical phrase “God is dead” (*The Gay Science* Nietzsche 167), a declaration of man’s turning away from God in favor of Man as a source of knowledge, whereas Bulgakov authored *The Master and Margarita*, a novel about a return to God and spirituality in defiance of man. As a child, Bulgakov’s conflicting convictions oscillated between favor of religion and favor of science, or man, embodied in his theologian father and his physician stepfather, respectively (Haber 14). There is evidence that Bulgakov did indeed read Nietzsche; furthermore, the culture around him was thoroughly infused with Nietzsche’s thought. Bulgakov was born in 1891, and all of Nietzsche’s major works were available by 1911, so during Bulgakov’s lifetime, he had access to Nietzsche’s works (*Soviet Culture* Rosenthal 6). The means by which Bulgakov could have encountered Nietzsche’s works are myriad, as Bulgakov lived and grew up in a Russian Empire and Soviet Union steeped in Nietzsche’s ideas. There is a multiplicity of cultural, artistic, and political phenomena through which Bulgakov experienced Nietzsche, albeit indirectly. There were also cultural occurrences, available for Bulgakov’s observation, such as Soviet mass theatre, the youth organization the Komsomol, in addition to the politicians and practices

in the Soviet Union, in all of which Nietzsche's influence was present to various degrees.¹⁸

Nietzsche's influence on Bulgakov is manifest particularly in the manner in which he deconstructs knowledge in his celebrated novel *The Master and Margarita*. Indeed, Bulgakov's deconstruction is significantly more concrete and accessible than Nietzsche's abstract philosophy. In the novel, Bulgakov portrays "supernatural" events, for which forms of knowledge such as reason cannot account, for knowledge does not actually correspond to reality, or does so inadequately. For various characters, who are "reasonable," such events do not correspond to their understanding of reality despite being witnesses to them or learning of them indirectly. Such characters do not question their understanding of the world, but rather deny these events by re-categorizing them as resulting from insanity, mass hypnosis, etc. Reluctant to acknowledge that knowledge is a construct as are its boundaries, these characters are punished by a "supernatural" or "spiritual" being. Society ostracizes those who acknowledge such possibilities regardless of whether their belief arises from experience or speculation. Their exclusion reflects the effects of knowledge as devaluing subjectivity, experience, and the individual. Bulgakov's deconstruction of knowledge is an attempt to forge a space for spirituality in an atheist state. However, exposing knowledge as a construct and a distortive reflection of reality proves to be ultimately futile, as, in the novel, the desire to reconfigure the boundaries of knowledge results not from intersubjectivity but experience, so the masses remain unchanged. In addition to employing Nietzsche's ideas, Bulgakov's text also serves as a critique of them. Bulgakov's text appropriates Nietzsche's ideas, which the

¹⁸ See chapter 3 for further discussion.

novel's narrative repurposes to endorse a single Christian truth incapable of recognition by reason and science despite its tangibility. Furthermore, *The Master and Margarita* presents the Union of Soviet Writers as a complication of Nietzsche's assessment of art as innocuous. In a Soviet reality that is artificially bereft of religion, art becomes a vehicle for potentially subversive narratives.

In the critical discussion about *The Master and Margarita*, there is a single article that speculates about Nietzsche's influence on Bulgakov based on textual parallels. In *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*, Boris Groys writes about a common comparison of Woland, Bulgakov's character from *The Master and Margarita*, to Stalin, for both are described as Übermenschen (Groys 385). However, the heart of Groys' argument lies elsewhere. When considering the scenes from *The Master and Margarita* that occur in Bulgakov's rendering of Jerusalem, he posits "in their philosophical-ideological content they turn out to be in exclusive proximity to the interpretation of the Scriptures and the image of Christ suggested by Nietzsche in *The Antichrist*" (Groys 383). In addition, Bulgakov's Jesus corresponds to Nietzsche's "psychological type of the Redeemer" (Groys 384). Although Groys merely hypothesizes, "there can be little doubt that Bulgakov read this book, since it was rather well known in Russia at that time" (Groys 383), there is direct evidence that Bulgakov did indeed read Nietzsche. Not only does Bulgakov himself confirm his own familiarity with Nietzsche's work, but his sister and a friend do as well.

Of Bulgakov's initial encounter with Nietzsche, during the winter of 1912-1913, Bulgakov's sister Nadezhda wrote in a journal entry, "unbridled Satanic pride... pride heightened by the consciousness of his own exceptional nature, an aversion to the

ordinary way of life – the Philistine, and hence: the rights to egoism,” which she later elucidates, “we were reading Nietzsche at the time and discussing him; Nietzsche fired the imagination of callow [neokrepshaia] youth” (qtd. in Haber 14). All of the qualities enumerated indeed correspond to those of the Übermensch presented in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Bulgakov’s sister emphasizes what Bulgakov valued in Nietzsche: his exceptional individuality and the focus of *living* accordingly. However, with age, Bulgakov regards Nietzsche differently. In a 1923 journal entry, at age 32, Bulgakov wrote of Nietzsche, “perhaps the strong and bold don’t need him [God], but for the likes of me it is easier to live with the thought of him... that is why I place my hope in God” (qtd. in Haber 15). Now Bulgakov’s pride has dissipated, as he has grown older, and he begins to believe in God, creating a life beyond death. As Nietzsche indicates in *The Anti-Christ*, Christianity is a religion that focuses fundamentally on life after death (*The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche 29). Ultimately, as Bulgakov’s death from illness approaches, his resignation turns into disdain. According to Sergei Ermolinsky, a friend of Bulgakov, not long before his death Bulgakov said,

If you are not successful in life, remember, you will be successful in death...Nietzsche said that, in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, I think...What arrogant nonsense... Sometimes I think that death is a continuation of life. We just cannot imagine how it happens. I am not talking about the afterlife. I ask you: what will happen to you after death, if you are unsuccessful in life? Nietzsche, the idiot. (Sokolov 75)

Если жизнь не удастся тебе, помни, тебе удастся смерть... Это, сказал Ницше, кажется, в «Заратустре». ..какая надменная чепуха! Мне мерещится иногда, что смерть – продолжение жизни. Мы только не можем себе представить, как это происходит... Я ведь не о загробном говорю... но я тебя спрашиваю: что же с тобой будет после смерти, если жизнь не удалась тебе? Дурак Ницше.¹⁹

(Соколов 75)

Indeed, Bulgakov is correct that the original source of that quotation is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Although Bulgakov is not referring to a Christian afterlife, he does believe in a life after death. Throughout his life, his focus with regard to Nietzsche has changed from a focus on life to one on a religion emblematic of the afterlife, and finally,

¹⁹ It is remarkable, however, that Bulgakov’s diction resembles most closely that of Leonid Andreev’s character Sergei Petrovich’s misquotation of Zarathustra. Petrovich declares, “if you do not succeed in life, if a poisonous worm eats at your heart, know that you will succeed in death” (“Если жизнь не удаётся тебе, если ядовитый червь пожирает твоё сердце, знай, что удастся смерть”) (Andreev 250)” (qtd. in Clowes 322). There are various reasons for such a resemblance, such as Bulgakov having read Andreev or both of them having read the same poor translation. Y. M. Antonovsky produced a translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1903 (Davies 372). His translation reads, “for some life turns out badly: a poisonous worm eats at his heart. Let him try to make it so that his death turns out that much better” (“иному не удастся жизнь: ядовитый червь гложет ему сердце. Пусть же постарается он, чтобы тем лучше удалась ему смерть”) (Nietzsche trans. to Russian Y. M. Antonovsky). Although it is probable that Bulgakov read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* based on evidence from journal entries, it is noteworthy that he misremembers the quote in the same form in which Andreev’s character misquotes it.

to a focus on a personal, non-religious belief in an existence post mortem. Although towards the end of his life Bulgakov ridicules Nietzsche, someone with whose works he had at one time so identified, he is ultimately unable to rid himself of Nietzsche's influence, for in *The Master and Margarita* he deconstructs knowledge in a manner similar to Nietzsche, continuing to explore other such phenomena that rationalism cannot support.²⁰

Reason Imperfected

As the novel begins, Bulgakov introduces two characters, a poet and the editor of the Moscow literary establishment MASSOLIT, sitting on a bench near Patriarch's Ponds, conversing. The editor, Berlioz, is explaining to the poet, Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyrev, known as "Homeless," the essential flaw in the antireligious poem that the editor had commissioned Homeless to compose: he has written a poem depicting Jesus as life-like, albeit unappealing, rather than simply nonexistent. Berlioz speaks at length about why the figure of Jesus is fictional. The main point of his argument lies in that, "Jesus, as an individual, had never existed on earth at all and that all the stories about him were mere fabrications, myths of the most standard kind" (Bulgakov 5). He continues to support his argument, as "the editor was a well-read man and in his speech he made very clever allusions to ancient historians such as the famous Philo of Alexandria and the brilliantly educated Flavius Josephus, neither of whom had said a word about the

²⁰ It is notable that Bulgakov's interaction with Nietzsche is similar to that of Dmitri Merezhkovsky. In his youth, Merezhkovsky eagerly espoused tenets central to Nietzsche's work such as the primacy of the individual, the affirmation of life, and the denial of an extra-earthly existence, but ultimately spurned Nietzsche later in life as he accepts his mortality as inevitable. Despite his official repudiation of Nietzsche after 1905, Merezhkovsky is unable to rid himself of Nietzsche's influence (*Nietzsche in Russia* Rosenthal 69). In this regard Bulgakov is not exceptional.

existence of Jesus” (Bulgakov 5). For him, absence of evidence is tantamount to evidence of absence. The conversation continues. Eventually, upon overhearing their conversation, a stranger, whose name is later revealed to be Woland, asks to sit with them and join in. Shortly thereafter, they broach the subject of atheism in their country, and Berlioz explains to Woland, “in our country atheism comes as no surprise to anyone... the majority of our population made a conscious decision long ago not to believe the fairy tales about God” (Bulgakov 7). Berlioz renders the majority’s atheism a “conscious” choice, as a result of agency. Their decision originates in consciousness or knowledge, whereas the decision to believe does not; the origins of religion lie in ignorance. The stranger then changes the subject to the proofs of God’s existence, applications of reason attempting to prove the existence of a spiritual world and spiritual inhabitants therein. In response, Berlioz states, “surely you would agree that reason dictates that there can be no proof of God’s existence” (Bulgakov 8). Berlioz then begins to mock such uses of reason, singling out Immanuel Kant’s proof in particular²¹. Although Berlioz esteems reason, he discounts its application to spirituality. He values reason only insofar as it provides him with desirable answers. Suddenly, Homeless exclaims, “ ‘this guy Kant ought to get three years in Solovki for proofs like that...’ ” (Bulgakov 8). Homeless reveals not only his ignorance of Kant, but of the proofs, too. His outburst serves as an unintentional revelation that his atheism, that is, his disbelief of spiritual or supernatural possibilities, is unfounded, or rather not founded on knowledge or reason, but on ignorance. To

²¹ In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant advances his “proof” of God’s existence which states that it is man’s duty to achieve the “highest good.” If it is a duty, it must be achievable, and it is only achievable, if God exists. Either Bulgakov or Berlioz confuses this proof with Kant’s statement from *The Critique of Pure Reason* that reason is incapable of proving God’s existence.

Homeless' exclamation, Woland replies, "that's the very place for him! As I told him that time at breakfast 'As you please, professor, but you've contrived something totally absurd...'" (Bulgakov 8). Upon hearing Woland's words, "Berlioz's eyes popped. 'At breakfast...with Kant? What kind of nonsense is this?' He thought" (Bulgakov 8). Indeed, his reaction is very *reasonable*, as they are citizens of the Soviet Union, so they are living in either the 1920's or 1930's, whereas Kant died in 1804. For Woland to have had breakfast with Kant, he would be well over 100 years old, which, as reason, based on experience and observation, dictates, is not possible. If Berlioz or Homeless accept Woland's statement as true, then they must confront their understanding of the world and its phenomena as insufficient.

They nevertheless continue their conversation, which leads to the question of the order of the world and man's role in his own fate, to which Homeless responds that man orders his own fate. Woland then asserts the impossibility of his claim due to the brevity of man's life, his egotistical nature, and his "unexpected" mortality. Next he "predicts" Berlioz's death, "your head will be cut off... by a Russian woman, a member of the Komsomol" (Bulgakov 10). Regardless of Berlioz's disagreement that it is, "highly unlikely" (Bulgakov 10), and his statement concerning his evening plans, Woland replies, "no, that cannot be... Annushka has already bought the sunflower oil and not just bought it, but spilled it as well. So the meeting won't take place" (Bulgakov 10). Berlioz once again denies the possibility of a prescient being, and he cites probability, a form of reason, by characterizing his foretold fatality as "highly unlikely." He does not recognize the possibility of phenomena hitherto inaccessible to reason. So, as a result of Woland's prediction, Homeless inquires, "You haven't by any chance spent some time in a mental

hospital, have you?" (Bulgakov 10). Homeless' beliefs concur with those of Berlioz. His question precludes Woland's question from legitimization. He rejects its truth absolutely, for it is a contradiction to his perception of the world, albeit one of ignorance, categorizing the possibility of a supernatural "vision" as insanity. Such a deviation from his understanding of phenomena is tantamount to mental illness. Therefore, fault lies not in his mind, but in that of the believer. In return, Woland answers, "I have indeed [spent time in a mental hospital]... I'm only sorry I never managed to ask the professor what schizophrenia is. So you'll have to ask him yourself, Ivan Nikoalyevich" (Bulgakov 11). Although it is unclear at this moment in the novel, Woland's enigmatic statement proves to be an accurate prediction, the veracity of which Homeless recognizes only later. The realization of Woland's prediction forces Homeless to empathize with him, as Homeless' subsequent claims are true despite their unbelievability. Eventually, the editor and poet start to conclude that Woland is a spy and are interested in examining Woland's identification, which he provides them immediately *prior* to the utterance of their request. He explains, "I'm a specialist in black magic" (Bulgakov 12). After the explanation of his presence in Moscow concerning the authentication of certain manuscripts about black magic, Berlioz asks, "'ah! So you're a historian then?' ... with great respect and relief" (Bulgakov 12). Berlioz does not acknowledge the existence of black magic, as, based on his knowledge, it is impossible. So, he experiences great relief, realizing that Woland's profession is characterizable as "historian" rather than "black magician." Berlioz acknowledges the existence of the world and its phenomena only insofar as their precedence is present in his knowledge.

Next Woland begins to recount to them a narrative, but before beginning, he reminds them, “keep in mind that Jesus did exist... he simply existed... no, no proof is required” (Bulgakov 12). He advances the idea that absence of evidence, which is a measurement of truth and objectivity, does not correspond to absence, expressing the value of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. He then proceeds with his narrative concerning Yeshua (Bulgakov’s rendering of Jesus) and Pontius Pilate.

After having listened to the narrative, Berlioz states that although it is an interesting narrative, without evidence or witnesses, its truth is unverifiable, whereupon, the stranger replies, “the fact is... I myself witnessed the whole thing. I was there on Pontius Pilate’s balcony... but I was there in secret, incognito, so to speak...” (Bulgakov 34). Woland’s confession unnerves Berlioz, who begins to doubt Woland’s sanity. So, the pair poses additional questions about Woland’s visit to Moscow in order to detain him long enough to notify the authorities. However, Woland wants to continue their conversation, so he asks, “And the devil doesn’t exist either?” (Bulgakov 34). Although neither Berlioz nor Homeless responds, Woland continues, “I implore you, at least believe that the devil exists! I ask no more than that. Keep in mind that for this we have the seventh proof, the most reliable of them all! And you are about to get a demonstration” (Bulgakov 34). Berlioz feigns blatant agreement, and, so, under the pretense of making a personal telephone call, he temporarily leaves them to locate a telephone booth. However, he never reaches it. Homeless discovers that Woland’s prediction is correct as he witnesses from the bench, “the streetcar covered Berlioz, and a round dark object was propelled under the railing of Patriarch’s Ponds path onto the cobbled slope. After rolling down the slope, it began bouncing over the cobblestones of

Bronnaya Street... It was Berlioz's severed head" (Bulgakov 37). Thus, the realization of Woland's fatal prediction demonstrates that phenomenal non-conformity to precedential knowledge is not synonymous with impossibility. Berlioz's death is explicable as punitive, for the rejection of such possibilities. The prediction and Berlioz's subsequent decapitation are the "seventh" proof. Although the proofs are historically of God's existence, since God and Satan are a dichotomous, the proof of one evinces its counterpart.

Nietzsche's influence on Bulgakov is manifest in the scenes from the Patriarch's ponds not on a linguistic plane, but rather in the novel's assumption that man's perception of reality resulting from language.²² To reiterate, Nietzsche states that it is by forgetting that man thinks that language mirrors reality. Language or linguistic "designations" are simply descriptions of man's experience. However, the ultimate result of these designations is the establishment of categories, or groups of designations, which man regards not as resulting from subjective linguistic descriptions but erroneously as objective phenomenal prescriptions. That is, man eventually regards phenomena as acting according to these designations.

Reason is a category of knowledge realized in language, a subjective phenomenon. It is the result of experience in the form of a description, which Berlioz applies prescriptively. Berlioz is reason personified; however, it is noteworthy that his views coincide with the rational dismissal of religion in larger society. He acts only according to reason, which results from man's experience, and is therefore subjective. He only values that which corresponds to reason. All divergence from it is valueless and

²² For further discussion of Nietzsche's ideas, see chapter 1.

therefore impossible. He is incapable of evaluating phenomena that contradict reason. According to reason, prescience and the existence of spiritual beings are impossible because reason does not contain knowledge of them. Nonetheless, Berlioz regards reason as god-like, omniscient. As a product of man, such omniscience implies that man's knowledge of phenomena is infallible and complete, and all contradictions thereto do not reveal that his knowledge is incomplete, but rather that man is mistaken in his perception of a given phenomenon. So, exceptions are subjected to exclusion, maintaining reason's assumed perfection. However, Woland's prescience proves the insufficiency of knowledge and that reason is not intrinsic; phenomena do not act according to reason. Rather, man is to incorporate such events into reason, thereby redefining it. The novel's narrative renounces the delegitimizing characterization both of phenomena such as prediction, as impossible, in addition to the consignment of their embodiments to the category "insane." Human knowledge and its categories are manmade constructs. Therefore, if a phenomenon does not correspond to them, the construct is inadequate.

Categorical Exclusion and the Devaluation of Subjectivity

After witnessing Berlioz's decapitation, Homeless is aghast. However, consciousness returns to him upon hearing the name "Annushka." Her name produces in him a host of mental connections concerning the recent events to which he has been an observer. In the end, he concludes, "There was no longer even a shadow of a doubt that the mysterious consultant [Woland] had known beforehand, and in exact detail, the entire scenario of Berlioz's horrible death.... He's certainly no mad man! That's all nonsense!"

(Bulgakov 39). Homeless' acceptance of recent events is in part attributable to his ignorance, as becomes apparent later in the novel. The boundaries of knowledge embodied in Homeless are not as intransigent as those in Berlioz. Homeless is able to reconcile these recent events with reason, acknowledging the imperfection of his understanding and refashioning its boundaries according to his experience.²³

Homeless then proceeds to pursue the "historian" and his quickly accumulating and quickly escaping entourage, which now consists of Woland, a choir-master and a giant cat. His pursuit, however, is unsuccessful, so the poet begins to wander throughout Moscow. He finds himself, for reasons initially unbeknownst to him, stealing an icon and taking a brief baptismal swim in the Moscow River. After emerging from the river, he discovers his clothes have been stolen, so, clad in only his underwear, he sets out for the Writers' Union both to continue his search and to gather people to aid in the apprehension of Woland and his gang. His minimal attire shocks those present at the restaurant located on the ground floor of the Writers' Union building. Immediately, he begins to search for Woland and his entourage there, and explains, "call the police right away and tell them to send five motorcycles armed with machine guns to catch the professor [Woland]. And don't forget to mention he's got two accomplices: a tall fellow in checks... and a fat black cat..." (Bulgakov 53). In the background, while Homeless is speaking, the head of the restaurant is berating the doorman for admitting Homeless into the restaurant and then orders him, "call a policeman. Write a report. Order a car. Send it

²³ Matt F. Oja in his "The Role and Meaning of Madness in *The Master and Margarita*: the Novel as a Doppelganger Tale," writes "Woland's proof represents an irreconcilable challenge to this whole system of beliefs on which Berlioz pontificates in his lecture, and as Ivan comes to see that he must choose between Berlioz's orthodox wisdom and the irrational evidence of his own eyes, he abandons the former in favour of the latter" (Oja 144).

to the asylum...” (Bulgakov 54). The general reception of Homeless’ directives is one of wary incredulity, for the information that he offers is inconsistent with the preexisting knowledge of his audience. Onlookers regard him as a madman. So, a fellow poet, Ryukhin, accompanies Homeless to a psychiatric clinic, where the doctor questions him concerning the events preceding his arrival. While retelling the narrative of Berlioz’s demise, Homeless exclaims, “he’s in league with evil powers! That’s an incontrovertible fact. He personally conversed with Pontius Pilate...” (Bulgakov 58). The narrative preceding Homeless’ arrival serves as a verification of his version of events, but for those without direct knowledge of them, their unshakable reaction is to disbelieve his account and interpret him otherwise. So, prior to his departure, Ryukhin inquires about Homeless’ condition. The doctor responds, “speech and motor excitation...delirious episodes...clearly a complicated case...Schizophrenia, one must assume” (Bulgakov 59). Concerning the origin of Homeless’ sickness, the doctor says, “he probably saw someone who excited his disturbed imagination. Or perhaps he was hallucinating” (Bulgakov 59). Woland’s enigmatic prediction about Homeless’ eventual diagnosis as schizophrenic turns out to be accurate. Like those at the Writers’ Union, the doctor does not recognize Homeless’ experience as real because it does not correspond to his perception of the nature of phenomena, so he ascribes his narrative to mental illness. Mental illness amounts to unreality. Homeless’ “contradictory” statements result in his exclusion from society. The legitimacy of truth is contingent upon its correspondence to the preexisting Truth.

Nietzsche defines truth as a manmade linguistic order of designations.²⁴ Truth, “a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth. For the contrast between truth and lie arises here for the first time....” (Nietzsche 7). Truth is a narrative and human creation. The difference between truth and lies becomes manifest only after the production of a “truth” narrative that achieves dominance over all other competing narratives. However, man is creative by nature, so, in order for the dominant narrative to maintain its position, it subjects all counter narratives to exclusion. Crime and immorality are not absolute determinations but subjective criteria requisite for the continuation of society and its benefits. “If [a person] [dissimulates] in a selfish and moreover harmful manner, society will cease to trust him and will thereby exclude him. What men avoid by excluding the liar is not so much being defrauded as it is being harmed by means of fraud” (Nietzsche 7). Truth operates as an order of exclusion. Those who do not conduct themselves according to it are subjected to exclusion.

This exclusion results from man’s innate ability to abstract. With regard to the fate of the individual (from chapter 1), Nietzsche posits that, man detrimentally favors an unverifiable objectivity to his subjectivity. Advancing the idea that man’s capability for abstraction results in the formation of classifications, Nietzsche states, “as a ‘rational’ being, [man] now places his behavior under the control of abstractions. He will no longer tolerate being carried away by sudden impressions, by intuitions. First he universalizes all these impressions into less colorful, cooler concepts, so that he can entrust the guidance of his life and conduct to them” (Nietzsche 11). Although rationality is ultimately a

²⁴ For further discussion, see chapter 1.

linguistic order, subjective in origin, its origins are of a distant, disembodied subjectivity, and over time rationality acquires a semblance of objectivity. No longer considering the particularities of his experience, man attempts to position them in preexisting categories of “objectivity.” Resulting from the ability to abstract is a loss of individuality.

Abstraction enables that which the subjective sphere cannot “: the construction of a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, and clearly marked boundaries – a new world, one which now confronts that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world...” (Nietzsche 11).

Ironically, man eventually considers his own subjectivity as less human, familiar, and dependable than the “objectivity” of these abstractions. His own perceptions are less reliable than the constructs of his forebears. The production of objectivity results in man involuntarily excluding his own subjectivity, and ultimately devaluing it.

Although Homeless initially disbelieves irrational phenomena such as the existence of God, Satan, or prescience, his seemingly contradictory experience does alter his perception of phenomena and their boundaries. Reason does not cause Homeless to distrust his senses. At the end of the novel, it is ultimately society that leads him to disbelieve his senses. Following Berlioz’s predicted death, Homeless goes to the Writers’ Union, where, in his post-traumatic, seemingly deranged state, non-eyewitnesses easily categorize his behavior as mental illness, for language impairs his audience from being able to evaluate Homeless’ experience as unique. The description of his experience does not correspond to their knowledge of reality as defined by language, the very language that consigns his experience to the category of insanity, which ultimately excludes him

from society and de-legitimizes his claims. For thereafter, Homeless is conveyed to a psychiatric clinic where he is diagnosed as schizophrenic for ranting about his “delirious episodes,” which, as the reader is aware, in actuality, correspond to the narrative. So, those who are not eyewitnesses to the event constrict the seemingly “supernatural” excesses of Homeless’ narrative into a more “natural” one. That is, the doctor attempts to render Homeless’ “lies” unintentional, as a liar knows the difference between truth and a lie, using that knowledge to his advantage, whereas a madman is blameless, for his misuse of linguistic conventions is inadvertent, resulting from sickness, an altered state of mind.²⁵ Akin to Nietzsche’s text, there is a tension between the boundary of the natural and the supernatural, as the natural determines the supernatural, and in Bulgakov’s text the boundary between them is revealed as potentially permeable. However, the uncompromising nature of the boundaries of knowledge within humanity engenders a devaluation of experience while reinforcing an epistemological normativity absent of “paranormal” possibilities.

Art as more than an Artifact

The novel then returns to Woland in Moscow who is to perform a “black magic” show at the Variety Theater that evening. The intervening chapters are essentially similar to Berlioz’s experience. That is to say, two characters, Grigory Rimsky, the financial

²⁵ There are interpretations of Homeless’ “schizophrenia” as genuine or symbolic. See Matt F Oja, “The Role and Meaning of Madness in *The Master and Margarita*: the Novel as a Doppelganger Tale,” in *Bulgakov: The Novelist-Playwright*, ed. Lesley Milne (Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995) 142-56. See also Riitta H Pittman, “Intellectual Background,” in *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991).

director, and Ivan Varenuvka, the theater manager, unsuccessfully attempt to account for the supernatural disappearance of their colleague Styopa Likhodeyev by way of reason, for which they are ultimately punished, albeit not fatally. Eventually, Woland's so-called black magic show commences. Although nominally the show is his, the performers consist solely of Woland's entourage, who execute various "tricks" as part of an experiment to determine the character of contemporary Muscovites. In the end, Woland assesses them as violently avaricious and materialistic. The objective of this "magical" performance is ultimately not epistemological but moralistic.²⁶

While the show is in progress, at the clinic an unknown man disturbs Homeless, entering his room, uninvited, through the balcony. The unknown man is later revealed to be the "Master," a name conferred by his beloved for his gift as a writer. The two then begin to discuss the causes of their commitment to the psychiatric clinic. Homeless answers, "because of Pontius Pilate" (Bulgakov 112), which the Master refers to as a "coincidence" (Bulgakov 112), for his consignment thereto is the same. Homeless recounts the events culminating in Berlioz's death, and the Master informs him of Woland's identity, "yesterday at Patriarch's Ponds you had a meeting with Satan" (Bulgakov 112). However, as a result of his psychiatrist's reasoning, Homeless once again insists on Satan's nonexistence, to which the Master replies, "you're the last person

²⁶ Whether Woland is the traditional, evil Satan, Satan prior to his "fall," or Bulgakov's own creation has long been a debate, although critics tend towards the second and third variants. See Edith C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," in *The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion*, ed. Laura D. Weeks (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1996) 164. See also Anthony Colin Wright, *Mikhail Bulgakov: Life and Interpretations* (Toronto: U of Toronto, 1978) 269.

in the world who should say such a thing. You were obviously one of the first ones to suffer at his hands. And here you are, as you very well know, in a mental hospital, and yet you still claim that he doesn't exist" (Bulgakov 113). The Master's casual attitude toward Homeless' committal to a "mental hospital" as a result of belief in the supernatural or spiritual indicates a consciousness of the prevailing epistemological and ideological narrative and of Homeless' initial belief in the supernatural that he has once again forsaken. The Master continues, "as soon as you began describing him... I guessed who it was you had the pleasure of conversing with yesterday... And I'm really surprised at Berlioz! You, of course, are an innocent... The very first words the professor [Woland] spoke confirmed all my suspicions. It's impossible not to recognize him..." (Bulgakov 113). The Master believes in the supernatural and spiritual embodied in Woland's existence, in addition to God and Jesus, as Woland's "first words" concern atheism. He elucidates concerning Homeless' "innocence": "you're, if I'm not mistaken, an ignorant man, are you not?... But Berlioz... He's not only very well-read, he's also very shrewd" (Bulgakov 113). His statement serves as confirmation that Homeless' disbelief is founded on ignorance, whereas Berlioz's disbelief results from a willful "ignorance."

Concerning his presence at the clinic, the Master admits that his commitment is voluntary, but causally not dissimilar to that of Homeless. He reveals, "I'm in here for the same reason you are, namely, because of Pontius Pilate... the fact is that a year ago I wrote a novel about Pilate" (Bulgakov 114). Having completed his novel, the Master had attempted to publish it, but received rejection officially not for its ideologically adverse content, but rather for logistical reasons. The Master proceeds to recount his interview conducted by the editor, "he said nothing about the novel itself, but asked me who I was,

where I came from, whether I'd been writing for a long time, and why nothing had been heard of me before...who had given me the idea of writing a novel on such a strange subject?" (Bulgakov 119). Despite the official excuse for his rejection, there slowly appear articles referring to his submission for publication, lambasting the Master for writing "an apologia for Jesus Christ," for "Pilatism," and one article refers to him as a "Militant Old Believer" (Bulgakov 120). The true cause for rejection is ideological. His artistic ability is irrelevant. He endures a written onslaught for the content of his novel. So, the articles about the Master's submission result in what the Master describes as, "fear...No, not fear of the articles, mind you, but fear of things totally unrelated to either the articles or the novel. For example, I started being afraid of the dark..." (Bulgakov 121). His fear is historically intelligible because his attempt to submit a novel about a religious figure occurs in a militant, atheistic state, so he fears for his life. He is afraid of the secret police, so he burns his novel, evidence of dissidence, and commits himself for his own protection. The psychiatric clinic serves both as protective exclusion for the Master and exclusive protection for Moscow from Homeless.

Bulgakov depicts a Soviet Union convoluting Nietzsche's assertion of art as simply innocuous. In *The Master and Margarita*, art and spirituality inseparable, embodied in the novel that the Master submits about Pontius Pilate. The historical counterpart of the Writers' Union was a governmental initiative, the scope of which was defined by a genre: socialist realism. Its definition, given in 1934 at the Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, reads as follows:

Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in

its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism. (Tertz 54)

The problematic aim of socialist “realism” is not realism but the ideological reshaping of reality in artistic form. The Writers’ Union does not simply favor socialist realist texts, but precludes the publication of deviating texts. Art, a means to convey ideas, is under governmental control, so the government controls the ideas conveyed. As Philip Walters states, according to Marxist-Leninist ideology, religion was to disappear, something that those in power guaranteed, “since its [religion’s] continued presence was a rebuke to the claims of the ideology” (Walters 4). So, there can be no religion in any publication from the Writers’ Union, as it would contravene its own purpose.

Nietzsche posits that art is a space in which deception is permissible, as artistic deception is a counter narrative inoffensive to its dominant counterpart.²⁷ Relating art to dreams, Nietzsche asserts, “indeed, it is only by means of the rigid and regular web of concepts that the waking man clearly sees that he is awake; and it is precisely because of this that he sometimes thinks that he must be dreaming when this web of concepts is torn by art” (Nietzsche 18). In dreams as in art, man may invent, unimpeded by the rigidity of reality. Although dreams and their material originate in reality, the restrictions of reality no longer apply, and their contravention is inconsequential because dreams and reality are not confusable, therefore dreams are unthreatening to reality.

²⁷ For further discussion, see chapter 1.

For Nietzsche, art is harmless, as all contradictions to the dominant narrative or “truth” contained within them do not victimize the participants. Although *The Master and Margarita* does not contradict Nietzsche’s ideas concerning art per se, it does depict particular instances in which art is not inconsequential. However, its consequence is not inherent but unintentionally imparted.

A fundamental tenet of Marxist-Leninist ideology is a projection of a world absent of religion (Walters 4), originating from Marx’s statement that religion was the opiate of the masses (citation). In 1905, building upon Marx’s ideas, Vladimir Lenin wrote in the journal *New Life* (Новая Жизнь),

“Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression, everywhere pressing on the masses, crushed by endless work for others, by need and by solitude...Religion teaches him, who works and is in need all his life, to be humble and patient in his earthly life, consoling him with hopes of heavenly reward.” (Lenin 142)

“Религия есть один из видов духовного гнета, лежащего везде и повсюду на народных массах, задавленных вечной работой на других, нуждою и одиночеством....Того, кто всю жизнь работает и нуждается, религия учит смирению и терпению в земной жизни, утешая надеждой на небесную награду.” (Ленин 142)

In his statement, Lenin advocates a materially focused life, producing tangible results.²⁸ Lenin renders the disappearance of religion a source of liberation. A dismissal

²⁸ Remarkably, Lenin’s statement resembles one by Nietzsche. Both focus on earthly life, and religion’s emphasis on the necessity of death preceding reward. “In [God] war is declared on life, on nature, on the

of God and religion had been a central tenet of Marxist Communism ever since Karl Marx famously stated that religion was the opiate of the masses. After Soviet communism established itself, atheism became official state policy.

Predicting the disappearance of religion, this ideology advances a narrative of reality or truth dependent upon that disappearance. Disciples of Marxism-Leninism value the realization of its ideas, such as the disappearance of religion, thereby empowering it for its envisioned realization. However, religion does not simply vanish, necessitating its assisted disappearance (Walters 4). Ironically, the leading Marxist-Leninist proponents, projecting this religious absence, thereby empower religion, for one of the core tenets of Marxism-Leninism affirms its disappearance. Such an affirmation suggests religion's impotence before it; any remnants of religion render its affirmation inaccurate and the ideology's perception of its own power exaggerated or even intentionally deceptive. So, religion as such and references thereto are potentially subversive and impermissible in general, including in art, which is one means of their conveyance in addition to any other opposing ideas. Art is no longer innocuous, as artistic, religious allusions are potent referents to a conception of reality or an alternative narrative that no longer prevails but endures. The former narrative persists in these allusions, evincing its oppressor-ideology's lack of absolute power, and the subjectivity of its narrative. Atheism is Soviet policy, reflective of their desired "perception" of reality defined by a historically explicit ideology, so counter narratives are impermissible. Art functions as a contagion of ideas

will to live! God becomes the formula for every slander upon the 'here and now,' and for every lie about the 'beyond'! In him nothingness is deified, and the will to nothingness is made holy!" (*The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche 29).

that is as threatening to the dominant ideology as they are communicable.

At the beginning of the novel, Berlioz affirms that, “Jesus, as an individual, had never existed on earth at all and that all the stories about him were mere fabrications, *myths* of the most standard kind” (my italics) (Bulgakov 5). For the Soviet Union, in control of the Writers’ Union, Jesus is not simply a mythical figure, for, if he were, his presence would be unthreatening. Homeless’ poem requires rewriting, as it portrays Jesus as life-like. As Lesley Milne notes, “Berlioz is, of course, using the word ‘myth’ in the sense of ‘purely fictitious narrative’”(Milne 233). The Writers’ Union, which commissions the poem, is attempting to reclassify Jesus as mythical rather than religious and historical, thereby assisting, or rather forcing the disappearance of religion. Similarly, the rejection of the Master’s religious novel is ideological. Its rejection relates not to the novel’s artistic form, so art is not formally threatening, but rather its rejection prevents the dissemination of its content. Art is malignant only as a means to an end. Reference to Jesus is acceptable insofar as he is a mythical figure, that is, it does not pretend to historicity, becoming no longer a myth. However, the Master’s novel is not innocent of such pretensions. The Master reads articles containing charges of writing, for example, “an apologia for Jesus Christ” (Bulgakov 120). A justification does not relate to that which never was but for that which was. The attacks directed toward the Master pertain to his novel’s implications of religious claims to historicity. The Master’s departure for the security of the psychiatric clinic does not result from a novel simply about an innocuous myth, but rather results from the negation of its mythic status. Art is no longer simply an innocuous artifact, for, with an audience, it becomes a means to render ideas communicable, ideas that threaten the dominant narrative.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, the Master's beloved, Margarita, is desperate to find him, and prior to exiting her house, her maid, Natasha, recounts the events following the black magic show, which she has observed in addition to rumors concerning the "magical" events at the show. Margarita repeatedly responds to the effect, "Natasha! Shame on you... a girl like you who knows how to read; people in lines make up the devil knows what, and here you go repeating it" (Bulgakov 188). Her account results in Margarita's disbelief. Margarita disbelieves events of a magical nature based on knowledge from education. However, the boundaries of knowledge within her prove to be pliable. So, having departed, Margarita goes into Moscow, and while observing Berlioz's funeral procession from a distance, one of Woland's entourage, Azazello, sits next to her. He has been sent on Woland's behalf to invite Margarita to host a ball that is to take place in the apartment that both Berlioz and Likhodeyev had occupied jointly prior to their respective death and disappearance. Initially, she believes Azazello to be a "pimp," but, upon discovering his knowledge of the Master, she is willing to do anything necessary to learn of his fate, declaring, "then I'll go... I'll go anywhere you want" (Bulgakov 194). Before disappearing, Azazello gives her a jar containing a cosmetic cream that she is to apply as instructed, tells her the time of the ball, and departs. Later she applies the cream, which, unbeknownst to her, is magical, whereupon she "gave a little jump and stayed suspended in the air, just above the carpet" (Bulgakov 197), and then exclaims in excitement, "Oh, what a cream! What a cream!" (Bulgakov 197). If she were Berlioz, she would have doubtless been terrified, however, not only is she not terrified, the very prospect of magically hovering delights her. Regardless of her initial disbelief in Natasha's claims,

her understanding of phenomena is not rigid from knowledge, but rather corrigible only with evidence or experience.

Eventually, Margarita departs for the event taking place at the late Berlioz's apartment, which is a "Satanic" ball. Her role is that of hostess. She witnesses numerous supernatural phenomena such a game of chess and is, in reaction, "fascinated and astounded that the chess pieces were alive" (Bulgakov 219). During the ball, she meets numerous deceased historical figures, after which she admits to Woland, "I thoroughly enjoyed myself at the ball. So much so that if it had lasted longer, I would have been glad to let thousands more murderers and gallows birds kiss my knee..." (Bulgakov 241). Unlike various other characters, her supernatural experiences do not warrant reassignment to the category of "insanity," but simply broaden for her the boundaries of knowledge. In exchange for her service, Woland offers her anything she wants, to which she ultimately answers that she desires the Master's return to her, whereupon, "a greenish square of a nocturnal light fell from the windowsill onto the floor and in it appeared Ivan's night visitor, who called himself the Master" (Bulgakov 243). Her reward for her role as hostess is only possible because, upon viewing evidence that her understanding of phenomena is insufficient, she modifies her personal boundaries of knowledge accordingly, rather than forcing phenomena to correspond with her understanding.

The Master and Margarita are magically returned to their apartment, and in their absence, Matvei (Matthew the Levite), who has thus far only been present in the Yershalaim chapters, appears before Woland on Yeshua's behalf as a messenger. He informs Woland, "He [Yeshua] has read the Master's work... and asks that you take the Master with you and grant him peace..." (Bulgakov 305). Although the Master's reward

is directly connected to his novel, the content of the Master's novel is intimately intertwined with his personal beliefs concerning spirituality, as it is a novel about Pontius Pilate and Jesus. The division of the various writers in the novel such as Berlioz, Homeless, and the Master, is not only according to literary talent, but also according to their epistemological beliefs. Berlioz and Homeless deny the existence of Satan and God; the Master does not. It is the Master's work that Yeshua recognizes as worthy of regard, which Woland grants in the form of peace, not light.^{29,30,31} The only other character to receive such a reward is Margarita. Her reward is an additional aspect of Yeshua's request as relayed by Matvei, "He asks that you also take the one who loved him and who suffered because of him" (Bulgakov 306). However, her receptivity to knowledge previously impossible according to her understanding distinguishes her from the majority of other characters in the novel. As Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour notes in "The Uses of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov," although Margarita is not an intellectual, her distinguishing characteristic is her "broad-mindedness" (Beaujour 697). The Master never denies such possibilities, and Margarita is resistant only insofar as she disregards hearsay. Their general openness to unprecedented experiences distinguishes them from Homeless, who, despite witnessing Berlioz's predicted death, eventually begins to revert

²⁹ Although there is no explicit explanation in the novel, there is a multitude of possible explanations. For example, in Nadine Natov's *Mikhail Bulgakov*, she notes "the Master, who punishes his Pilate because 'cowardice was the most terrible sin of all,' (735) recognizes shortly before his death that he is also guilty of pusillanimity" (Natov 103). For a similar conclusion, see Edith C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*." *The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Laura D. Weeks (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1996).

³⁰ "The Master and Margarita too are given what they most desire: 'peace' (not 'light,' which for one reason or another they have not deserved) and sharing each other's fate" (Wright 262).

³¹ Lesley Milne, in her *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography*, explains their receipt of "light" either as a means to stave off the bad luck of a writer metaphorically envisioning his own success before its fruition or because it is for the reader to determine an author's final fate (Milne 241).

to his former consciousness due to the overwhelming support for his prior position and little for his latter. Ultimately, the Master and Margarita receive their reward in the form of an eternity together on an otherworldly plane, whereas Homeless remains in Moscow to continue his earthly existence.

During Homeless' time at the clinic, Woland has performed various ultimately unsuccessful experiments on the population in order to determine their spiritual and epistemological corrigibility, after which he departs and it remains for the town to account for the recent, inexplicable, supernatural phenomena. In the end, the explanation, or rather lack thereof, is hypnotism. Homeless is eventually discharged from the clinic, with the knowledge that, "in his youth he was the victim of hypnotist-criminals and that he had to go in for treatment and was cured" (Bulgakov 333). The official explanation implies that Man's knowledge of phenomena is infallible and complete, and all contradictions to it are revelatory of only a misperception of those phenomena. However, the novel's narrative impugns this implication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Master and Margarita* depicts a world in which science and reason are at variance with experience. The "supernatural" events of the novel present opportunities for various characters including Berlioz, Homeless, the Master, and Margarita to demonstrate the nature of their epistemological views, which is to say, whether they presume the perfection of man's knowledge embodied in science and reason, and spurn all seemingly divergent phenomena as sensory misperception, thereby

rendering man's knowledge intrinsic and independent of man; or whether they presume the fallibility of man's knowledge, and integrate new knowledge so as to refine it, admitting man's role in the establishment of knowledge. Berlioz belongs to the former, and the Master and Margarita to the latter, whereas Homeless begins as the former, and although he does change, ultimately relapses. Bulgakov deconstructs knowledge in a Nietzschean manner, indicating the defective nature of a rationalistic worldview. Berlioz's experience with prescience, for example, evinces the limitations and imperfection of human knowledge.³² According to his knowledge, prescience is impossible. However, his knowledge cannot prescribe enforceable boundaries to phenomena. Regardless of whether his experience is the first example of prescience, Berlioz overextends the scope of descriptive knowledge, turning it into prescriptive knowledge. He renders that for which science cannot account nonexistent. As Nietzsche states, knowledge consists of linguistic designations, expressions of man's perceived experience, which man ultimately regards as objective and prescriptive. Berlioz essentially dies for informing Satan of his own nonexistence. On the other hand, Homeless initially extols reason, albeit ignorantly. Upon witnessing the fatal realization of Woland's prediction, he reassesses his epistemology, incorporating his new experience into his knowledge of phenomena. However, while attempting to apprehend Woland, he encounters resistance to his newfound worldview at the Writers' Union, where those present regard him as a madman and have him delivered to a psychiatric clinic, excluding

³² However, in contrast to Miglena Dikova-Milanova's "Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and the Illusions of Kant's Speculative Season," and Riitta H. Pittman's "Woland's Genealogy" in *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita*, which state that these "supernatural" phenomena reaffirm "limitations" are absolute, the novel renders these phenomena accessible, presenting opportunities for man to correct reason's imperfections.

him from society. They discount Homeless' experience because it does not correspond to their knowledge as defined by language. Once at the clinic, Homeless is diagnosed with schizophrenia, explaining the non-conformity of his experience to the doctor's knowledge as the result of a traumatic event, and de-legitimizing Homeless' experience as a traumatized mental production rather than an eyewitness account. The doctor's rearrangement of Homeless' narrative in order to correspond to a psychological narrative maintains the current epistemological normativity, devaluing subjectivity. As Nietzsche states, the dominant truth narrative is subjective in origin, but man ultimately regards it as objective. Man employs "objectivity," devaluing his own subjectivity for the sake of another's. Society makes Homeless revert to his former worldview. Unlike Berlioz and him, the Master and Margarita are receptive to spirituality and the supernatural. However, the Master's experience is not without its own normative obstacles.

The Master is the author of a novel about Jesus and Pontius Pilate, which he submits for publication. It is rejected ultimately on ideological grounds. Its readers are concerned not with his novel as a work of art, but rather with the novel's claims concerning the historicity of its characters. The Writers' Union is in the process of re-categorizing Christianity from religion to myth. As Nietzsche indicates, art as such is not a counter narrative threatening to the dominant narrative, for it does not pretend to reality. However, the readers of the Master's novel regard it as possessing pretensions to reality, becoming a counter narrative. So, it is their duty to exclude it, which they accomplish by publishing belligerent articles that eventually cause the Master to commit himself to the psychiatric clinic, a form of protective self-exclusion. In the end, the Master is returned to Margarita in return for her services at Woland's ball. Implicit in the services rendered as

hostess to Satan's ball is Margarita's receptivity to supernatural phenomena. As Moscow ultimately proves unreceptive to such phenomena, Woland, at Yeshua's behest, rewards the Master and Margarita with a peaceful, otherworldly existence.

Woland, Bulgakov's Satan, visits Moscow setting in motion unparalleled phenomena that are currently not found within the realm of reason. Titling his first experiment the "seventh proof," Woland foretells Berlioz's death, which he associates with the devil's existence. The realization of his prediction proves the existence of the devil and, by implication, the existence of God as well. Woland's prophesy positions Satan and God on an experiential plane, accessible to man, forging a conduit between a world governed by reason and a world hitherto elusive to knowledge. However, the space forged for spirituality remains unoccupied. Bulgakov repurposes Nietzsche's epistemological ideas in order to create this space for, or posit the possibility of, the existence of spiritual or supernatural beings. However, unlike Nietzsche, Bulgakov's goal is not to make the "rational" irrational, but to make the "irrational" rational. In the novel, Bulgakov renders the hitherto unknown potentially accessible to man, but shows that this potential remains unrealized, since another God reigns, that of reason. He portrays man as requiring "objective" evidence, and distrusting subjectivity and intersubjectivity as sources of knowledge. Ultimately, this work indicates the futility of a spiritual narrative that is antithetical to Soviet policy, demonstrating the self-legitimizing nature of narratives regardless of whether a narrative is representative of reality or whether such a representation is possible or desirable. In the end, the deification of objectivity becomes the mortification of subjectivity.

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