

## Fear and Truth

Set in Moscow during the height of Stalinist terror in the 1930s Mikhail Bulgakov classic novel, *The Master and Margarita*, gives readers a panoramic view of Soviet society. Members competed with each other to achieve social status, material goods, and increased living-space all in an atmosphere of mutual fear and distrust. The main characters exemplify how Soviet citizens experienced fear on a daily basis, and how this contributed to the miasma of untruth that pervaded Soviet society. Ivan, a minor poet and an insignificant character, exemplifies an individual who lacks the courage and the conviction to challenge the increasing bureaucratization of the Soviet literary establishment. Ivan is not a true believer in socialism nor does he have a strong foundation in Soviet philosophy, nonetheless he has been effectively co-opted by the state. Rather than searching for internal sources for identity formation, Ivan looks to the state to provide him with a path and a formula for living. The Stalin era formed his character. He contributes to the growth of Stalinist literature by writing poor quality poetry that praises the state.

Ivan represents the Soviet intelligentsia. The members were forced to work either in outright service to the state or walk a precarious tight rope between their own human principles and deference to the wishes of the government. A false move could mean disgrace, imprisonment, or death. Intellectuals with active minds had to live with the consequences of the silence they imposed on their own thoughts. The alternative was to be driven into silence by a state that disapproved of original thinking and non-conforming behavior. The reader can see that the co-optation of the intellectual class strengthens the totalitarian state immeasurably. Public support, tendered by respected men and women of letters, legitimizes the authority of a state. The Soviet state was quick to recognize and capitalize on this phenomenon.

Support for the Soviet state translated into suspicion and fear of the state's enemies. In the novel's beginning, Ivan becomes immediately suspicious of Woland. The phantasmagorical traveler to Moscow set in motion a chain of disastrous occurrences that power the novel. Despite Woland's charm and the cosmopolitanism of the members of his entourage, Ivan is suspicious of the stranger. As a product of Soviet society, Ivan has been taught to fear foreigners and distrust anybody who appears to be different. Convinced that Woland is a foreign spy or a Soviet traitor, Ivan immediately demands the man's identification papers. His zeal to unmask enemies of the state, sets Ivan on an unending chase that ultimately consumes him. Ivan ends up in a mental asylum as the authorities fear for his very sanity. His desire to capture and punish Woland inadvertently strengthened the institutions of Soviet surveillance. Ivan believed that he was a part of the Soviet system and worked aggressively to advance the state's agenda. He eventually becomes both a literal and metaphorical prisoner of the Soviet system.

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