

Title: Heroes in Exile: Narrating the Stalinist Subject in *The Master and Margarita*
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Abstract:

The humorous and chaotic intersection between characters, plots, and narrative forms in Mikhail Bulgakov's unfinished masterpiece *The Master and Margarita* contribute to both the novel's popularity among readers and the difficulty it presents for scholarly interpretation. As the novel's proclaimed titular "hero" and the author of its manuscript-within-a-manuscript, the Master provides a convenient textual bridge between the novel's Moscow and Pilate plots for scholars wishing to reconcile the two. As such, many studies of the novel focus their thematic and formal analyses around the Master's work and actions. However, little attention has been given to the relatively minor role that the Master plays in the novel's plot and narrative structure. Although he is read as *The Master and Margarita*'s stated "hero", the Master bears few of the traditional traits of a novelistic protagonist, possessing neither narrative interiority, nor significant space or development across the novel's plot. A victim of Stalinist terror, the Master is exiled to the margins of the text, hiding in the mental hospital alongside the Moscow chapters' minor characters, while Margarita, his titular counterpart, struggles through a distorted version of an archetypal hero's quest in order to rescue him and his work from destruction. What causes the Master's minor status and why are we still inclined to read him as a hero? Why does Margarita receive textual freedom that the Master lacks? In this paper I argue that *The Master and Margarita*'s unique characterization of its protagonists can be tied to its historical context, in particular the crisis of subjectivity faced by the Stalinist subject in the 1930s. Using recent studies in Soviet historiography and narratology as my framework, I show the problems that Bulgakov's narration of Stalinist subjectivity can pose for existing theories of character in the novel.