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J. A. E. Curtis

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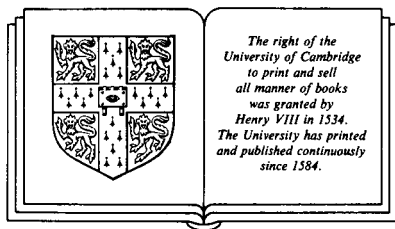
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521106528

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First published 1987
This digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Curtis, Julie.
Bulgakov's last decade: the writer as hero.
(Cambridge studies in Russian literature)
Bibliography.
Includes index.
I. Bulgakov, Mikhail Afanas'evich, 1891–1940 – Criticism
and interpretation. I. Title. II. Series.
PG3476.B78Z63 1987 891.78'4209 86-23323

ISBN 978-0-521-32671-1 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-10652-8 paperback

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To R. C. O.,
with love and with gratitude for
his deft midwifery and
unstinting support

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Preface

The biography of Mikhail Bulgakov has been the object of a number of studies in the West as well as in the Soviet Union, and the present study assumes that the availability of these monographs renders it unnecessary to rehearse the story of his childhood and of the first part of his career as a writer. My purpose here is to draw attention to a distinct period in Bulgakov's writing, his last decade, and to suggest the many ways in which his intellectual preoccupation with the fate of literature spilled over into his fiction and even came to dominate it during the 1930s. Within the chronological limits set for this study, I have traced a pattern of gradual retreat in Bulgakov's treatment of the major theme of his writing throughout the period of the composition of *The Master and Margarita*, that of the writer and his relations with society. Official rejection of his biographical works on Molière and on Pushkin, and the frustration of his attempts to introduce Gogol as the lyrical narrator of his own literary creations, obliged Bulgakov increasingly to concentrate his views about the destiny of the writer in the purely fictional character of the Master, hero of a novel that looked unlikely to be published. In the last years of his life Bulgakov's concern at the constraints imposed on creative endeavour gave way to bitterness at the realization of his own defeat. None the less, within his last novel Bulgakov insists on the special status of the writer and of his creation; fulfilment is denied to the artist in the dimension of reality which *The Master and Margarita* presents, but on another plane, in an unorthodox after-life, their value is assured.

In adopting an interpretative rather than a biographical stance I am seeking to sketch a literary profile of the writer. The opportunities I have had to work in Soviet archives, and especially in Pushkinsky Dom and in the MKhAT Museum, have made it possible to draw on documentary materials to illuminate Bulgakov's working methods. Much of my study, therefore, is taken up

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with textual analysis on the basis of drafts, variants and other archival materials, and this is complemented by a survey of Bulgakov's handling of the sources he used for his works throughout this period.

The separate endeavours of Ellendea Proffer, Lesley Milne, Colin Wright, Peter Doyle and Lydia Yanovskaya have brought together a vast amount of information about Bulgakov's life and work. I am particularly happy to acknowledge also the importance for my study of the wide-ranging archival work of Marietta Chudakova, whose interest in Bulgakov's reading opened up many of the paths that I wanted to explore in order to show how the ways in which Bulgakov worked on his materials fitted in with the views he put forward about the functions of art and the role of the writer. The idea of approaching Bulgakov as an artist who can be related to the European Romantic tradition has been broached before, in the work of T. R. N. Edwards, although I have developed it in a rather different direction in my concluding chapter.

I should like to record my gratitude to the following for their help, advice and support: many friends and scholars in Moscow and Leningrad, including Bulgakov's second wife Lyubov' Yevgen'yevna Bulgakova-Belozerskaya; the staff of the Taylor Institution Slavonic Annexe, the Bodleian Library and St Antony's College, Oxford; staff at the Lenin Library, the MKhAT Museum and the Vserossiyskoye Teatral'noye Obshchestvo in Moscow, and at Pushkinsky Dom in Leningrad; Michael Shotton, Michael Nicholson, Lesley Milne, Peter Doyle and Colin Wright for help and suggestions provided at various stages of my research; the British Council, to whom I am indebted for supporting me on several research visits to the Soviet Union; my colleagues at the Department of Russian Studies at the University of Leeds for their generosity in allowing me enough time to complete this book; and my patient family, especially Mike Randall, who was just in time to help with the final version.

Leeds, 1986

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Notes on the text

Translations

All the translations in the text are my own. I have given the original Russian alongside my prose translations for verse passages only; Russian and English titles have been given together for first references to works of fiction, but English titles have been used thereafter; titles of newspapers and journals have been transliterated but not translated.

Transliterations

The transliteration scheme used is based on that adopted for the *Slavonic and East European Review*. Where names have an accepted equivalent in English this has been used, except when there is a deliberate strangeness in the original; so 'Iyeshua' – but 'Pilate', 'Caiaphas', 'Eva', 'Kiev', etc.

Abbreviations

AN	Akademiya Nauk (Academy of Sciences)
ed. khr.	edinita khraneniya (archival item number)
F.	Fond (archive number)
NEP	Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika (New Economic Policy)
MKhAT	Moskovsky Khudozhestvenny Akademicheskyy Teatr (Moscow Arts Theatre)
RAPP	Rossiyskaya Assotsiyatsiya Proletarskikh Pisateley (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers)