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Julia Wang April 15, 2014

Against Tyranny in the Cave: Narratives of Compulsion and Nonviolent Resistance

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Abstract

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The allegory of the cave is arguably one of the most recognized and enduring passages of Plato's *Republic*. From this allegory arises a duality of the philosopher's plight: once he or she has entered the world of light outside the cave, the philosopher risks alienation from society or is faced with returning to the cave, in which the philosopher may indeed endanger his or her own life.

This thesis examines the significance of Plato's cave allegory through several reinterpretations that emerge from varying sociopolitical contexts. Concurrently, the notion of nonviolence arises very naturally as a complementary focus to the authentic philosopher's character. Both Etienne de la Boétie and Henry David Thoreau, though hailing from drastically different historical eras, sociopolitical backgrounds and geographical locations, wrote formally on nonviolent disobedience in their respective essays, which this thesis analyzes in its first chapter. These two historical figures' lives serve to represent the very problems that arise from Plato's allegory and are linked by the philosophical foundations found in their writing. In contrast, Heidegger and Arendt, presented in the second chapter, wrote about the allegory directly, and their lives nonetheless reflected the very issues of which they wrote. In examining these different historical figures' lives and philosophies, the question of a solution to the philosopher's dilemma inevitably looms behind each analysis. Therefore, this thesis turns to fictional literature and the act of writing as a means to reconcile the philosopher's predicament. The third chapter looks specifically to Mikhail Bulgakov's life and work, *The Master and Margarita*, in which the notions of laughter and carnivalesque emerge, alongside the novel's cave-like imagery, as the ultimate transmission of philosophy and liberation.

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Introduction

The principal goal of this thesis is to examine the significance of Plato's cave allegory and several of its dialogical reinterpretations in varying sociopolitical contexts. This interdisciplinary approach acknowledges at the outset that there may be no single or practical solution to the debates that arise from this allegory; instead, I intend to show and articulate something of the remarkable attractiveness of the model that has remained viable in different historical contexts and proves to be very much alive today. I find it equally fascinating that the importance of the conversation provoked by Plato's allegory reaches across different narrative genres, which include works of essayists, philosophers, political theorists and literary authors. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the allegory of the cave will be therefore also approached as a text common to the various theories, views and aspirations of several historical figures, theories and views that prove crucial for both their writing and their lives. In short, each reinterpretation reflects not merely the thoughts of the authors, but also the respective worlds in which they find themselves and the choices – personal, political, philosophical, literary – that these writers make in the process. Throughout this thesis, the important notion of nonviolence also emerges concurrently as a complementary focus, through the lens of which the role of the unprotected and unarmed witness against tyranny exhibits strengths and weaknesses characteristic of these various historical figures.

Plato presents the cave as a fantastical city, dreamlike in its bizarre cast of prisoners who dwell shackled in the shadows. The allegory is narrated in the form of a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, in which the former poses the scene as a hypothetical situation for the two to ponder. Thus, Socrates draws a picture where for the entirety of their lives, these cave dwellers have been shackled by their legs and necks and are only able to gaze straight ahead,

incapable of turning around. The entrance, located above and behind the prisoners, spans the length of the cave. There is also a fire, burning fiercely some distance behind the prisoners, and "a kind of roadway above which passes between the fire and the prisoners, with a low wall built along it like the screens which puppeteers put up in front of their audience, and above which they exhibit their puppets" (Plato, *Republic* 250-251). On the other side of the low wall that stretches along the road behind the prisoners, human beings walk carrying all sorts of figurines and statues raised above this wall, and the figures they carry cast shadows onto the wall in front of the prisoners. Glaucon understandably responds to Socrates' setting: "You are describing a strange scene, and strange prisoners" (Plato, *Republic* 251). The scene of shadows is the only reality that the prisoners know, and it is because of their inability to see behind them that "surely such persons would hold the shadows of those manufactured articles to be the only truth" (ibid).

Socrates now poses a situation where one of the prisoners is somehow freed from his fetters; he turns around and is painfully confronted by the direct glaring light. The unshackled prisoner perceives a difference but does not comprehend it—he can neither draw a connection between the shadows and the light, nor enjoy their contrasts. He is puzzled and finds the new sights to be not only unfamiliar but also profoundly uncomfortable:

> SOCRATES: And if he were further compelled to gaze at the light itself, would not his eyes be distressed, do you think, and would he not shrink and turn away to the things which he could see distinctly, and consider them to be really clearer than the things pointed out to him?
> GLAUCON: Just so. (Plato, *Republic* 252)

While the prisoners miss the comfort of the shadows, they are compelled to go even further, to negotiate the steep ascent of the cave into the sunlight, and, once they have exited the cave that has been their only home so far, they slowly accustom themselves first to shadows, most similar to their past, and eventually to their new natural environment, to other beings and to the "light of

the moon and stars." In due course, they "will be able to observe and contemplate the nature of the sun, not as it appears in water or on alien ground, but as it is in itself in its own region" (ibid). This understanding is the seeker's ultimate stage of understanding; he or she becomes a philosopher who comprehends the nature of ideas, represented by the primordial source of light, and comes to see the whole world in its interconnectedness through the various studies and experiences that characterize the full ascent into the world of light illumined by the good (Plato, *Republic* Book VII).

Socrates, however, also poses to Glaucon the theoretical possibility of the philosopher's return to the cave, where such a person descends into the shadows and finds himself disillusioned and threatened in a world, for which he or she may have compassion but a world he or she no longer understands. Socrates imagines that the cave dwellers turn violent, ridiculing the strange notions of the returning philosopher: "would he not be made a laughingstock, and would it not be said of him, that he had gone up only to come back again with his eyesight destroyed, and that it was not worthwhile even to attempt the ascent? And if anyone endeavored to set them free and carry them to the light, would they not go so far as to put him to death…?" (Plato, *Republic* 253). Thus, Socrates closes his cave allegory with an array of seemingly unanswerable questions, which find their variations in radically different outcomes throughout the course of history.

The intention of this thesis is to address select portions of the historical dialogue that finds its foundation in problems encountered in Plato's cave. In contrast to the imaginary conditions of the philosopher endangered in this fictional cave, Chapter One moves into the political and social philosophies of two historical figures caught in an actual historical cataclysm, and yet engaged in a dialogue that spans very different historical eras and geographical locations: French judge and poet, Etienne de la Boétie, and the well-known American author and

philosopher, Henry David Thoreau. Though relatively unknown, La Boétie writes formally on peaceful noncompliance during the years leading up to the French Religious Wars of the 16th century, long before Thoreau publishes in the mid-19th century his prominent work, "Civil Disobedience," an essay that became one of the most seminal influences in the emergence of the important theme of nonviolence. The common thread running between select works of La Boétie and Thoreau, both of whom are deeply influenced by Plato as well as Socrates, has been duly noted by scholars, though it has not been confirmed that Thoreau studied La Boétie definitively because of the latter's relative obscurity. Nevertheless, Murray N. Rothbard, a 20th century political theorist and economist, observes that various historians have "come to recognize [Boétie] as one of the seminal political philosophers, not only as a founder of modern political philosophy in France but also for the timeless relevance of many of his theoretical insights" (Rothbard, *Politics*). Indeed, La Boétie's "The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude" introduces the themes of civil protest and of democratic principles important for the civic world of France that had been accustomed only to monarchic rule and the far-reaching dominance of the Catholic Church. However, by adapting a relatively under-explored approach, overlooked by La Boétie scholars, this chapter finds it important to discuss the distinct discrepancy between the content of the "Discourse" and the author's tone. This contrast creates for us an interesting paradox, since La Boétie's principles of freedom do not necessarily coincide with the life he led. Therefore, while La Boétie's work is especially relevant for the discussion of Thoreau's contribution to nonviolence, it is equally important to emphasize the drastically different social and political contexts in relation to which both writers directed their works. Some of La Boétie's more startling insights, offered to the elevated strata of an autocratic and aristocratic society, are reinterpreted by Thoreau for the democratic common person. Nonetheless, despite all these

differences, the foundational political philosophy, underlying the importance of non-violent protest, remains unwavering, and, since this thread remains constant, the break or implicit rupture between the philosopher and the political realm never disappears.

My second chapter moves into 20th century philosophy and engages the seminal philosophical discourse of Martin Heidegger, in which Plato's cave functions not merely as an influence, but rather as the direct foundation of Martin Heidegger's understanding of the role and duty of the philosopher. Heidegger's "totalistic"[1] understanding of the implications of the confrontations in the cave between the philosopher and the prisoners permitted him to accept fascism and, ultimately, his own unrepentant participation in the Nazi Party. I position Heidegger's interpretation of Plato in sharp contrast to Hannah Arendt's arguments in *The Promise of Politics*. Arendt's understanding of Socrates' fantastic picture is directed firmly against fascism, but it is remarkable to what extent this seemingly straightforward argument becomes convoluted throughout her essay "Socrates," particularly a feature of which this thesis focuses. The only conclusive statement that Arendt makes is that the philosopher, under no circumstances, should ever be involved in government, and yet, at the same time, she cannot downplay the fact that the philosopher finds himself or herself[2] naturally drawn to the realm of men and politics. In her broader examination of Plato, Arendt's argument is directed against Heidegger's reasoning, for she clearly understands its attractive power. Should the nonviolent philosopher find himself caught in the violent upheaval of Heidegger's absolutism (which claims itself to be the liberating vision for humankind) such a philosopher may find himself or herself

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[1] "Totalism" refers to the definition found on pp. 15 of Mikhail Epstein's *In Marx's Shadow: Knowledge, Power, and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia*. A "quintessentially Russian 'ism'," "totalism" describes a complete union of "knowledge and existence, of reason and faith, intellectual and social life."

[2] It is worth pointing out an often overlooked feature of Plato's *Republic*, namely, the fact that Socrates includes in his "philosopher-kings" both men and women.

powerless in combating such ideology, propelled by powerful manipulation and fear, and it is because of this confusion that Arendt believes that the philosopher ultimately can only be responsible for himself. The examination of Heidegger-Arendt's argument in Chapter Two culminates in the unavoidable and startling human dilemma within which two opposing sides claim for themselves the role of the philosopher liberated from the shadows. On the one hand, ideologies such as fascism present themselves as liberators of humankind from the chains imposed by weaker races, whereas, on the other hand, the philosopher, aware of those chains and shadows in the cave, can and should never participate in this seemingly benevolent political and social reality, which while claiming to liberate others, ensnares them in an ideological maniacal self-certainty that is infinitely difficult to resist.

Chapter Three shifts the focus of the thesis to the fictional world and examines select themes in Mikhail Bulgakov's 20th-century masterpiece, *The Master and Margarita*. Both the novel's story and its immediate historical context resonate with the challenges of fascism as ideology, whose reality is experienced with such radical difference by Heidegger and Arendt. Moreover, the novel's narrative, however fictional, reflects the restrictions forced upon Bulgakov as a writer during the Soviet era at the height of Stalin's dictatorship. Thus, it is no longer simply the philosopher who has to face the dangers of the political world: the writer who creates fictional spaces that are rooted in historical realities must risk his life in the process. In his novel, Bulgakov reinterprets the biblical story of Christ and Pontius Pilate, introduced by him as the story of a peaceable philosopher, Yeshua, who is persecuted by the political figure, Pontius Pilate of Caesar's regime. The peaceful philosopher, able to inspire understanding in Pilate through a few instances of compassion, ultimately accepts death without seemingly influencing any one, much less the entire regime or, in this case, Roman society. However, the argument

between the two men becomes an eternal dialogue that induces a jester-like Mephistopheles to come to the Moscow of the late 1930s and to seek out the Master, the writer of the tale. In the meantime, Pilate, suspended in an eternal limbo-like setting, waits to be forgiven by the writer, so he can join Yeshua in the light in order to continue their conversation. Thus, in contrast to the previous historical figures of earlier chapters I shall examine, my third chapter deals with fictional space, in which the act of fictional writing, rather than an actual political statement or philosophical treatise based in historical realities, serves as a liberating act.

The complexity of this conflict between the state and the unarmed thinker reflects the ideology that embraces Bulgakov and his Master during their respective times of writing. If the political context of Heidegger's writing was the ideology of fascism that claimed for itself the ability to liberate the German people from their enslavement to inferior nations and races (a vision Heidegger accepted and, to a great extent, served), Bulgakov faces an altogether different kind of ideological certainty of the would-be liberators of humanity. The Soviet regime, introduced by the violent revolution of 1917, goes one major step further than the ideology of Nazi Germany and claims the role of the liberator of *all* mankind. This ideology grows to be so very powerful that the human being becomes deeply afraid and confused not only because he is afraid of power, but rather because he is rendered speechless, unable to find words (or philosophical arguments) to combat the all-reigning ideology of liberators who seem so seductively to claim the totality of truth. If in Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor[3], a work clearly well-known to Bulgakov, Christ refuses to speak with the Inquisitor (who also claims to be a

[3] The story of the Grand Inquisitor comes from one of Dostoevsky's best-known works, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In this tale, the rational liberator of all mankind, the Inquisitor, is juxtaposed with the compassionate Christ figure, reflecting the opposing philosophies that gripped Russia during the 19th century, a conflict that Dostoevsky often incorporated into his works.

liberator of mankind), Bulgakov's fictional world of Soviet Russia, with the help of the rebellious eternal knight Woland, combats the reigning ideology not through argument or discourse, but through carnivalesque laughter, which, in Bakhtin's world, proves to be the only force capable of unravelling all prevailing sociopolitical hierarchies and of undermining any conventions of normality. Laughter and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque as a particular literary technique returns agency to the individual (both the writer and the reader) and simultaneously overturns the prevailing social and political realities within which the literary work is written and received.

Ultimately, this thesis offers an interdisciplinary exploration of the ever-new instances of the individual human spirit that fights to overcome oppression through the power employed by the written word. I anchor my analysis in Plato's cave allegory as a story that, alongside all the reinterpretations presented in this thesis, poses numerous fundamental questions that reflect and define the historical conditions of human beings. I acknowledge that there are countless thinkers and writers who can be thus connected to the allegory of the cave, and for this purpose I have intentionally selected several historical figures that are representative of various sociopolitical environments yet whose thematic arguments weave a common thread throughout their discourses. The philosopher enters the cave with a newfound broader identity, understanding and educational passion, but inevitably the resultant ethical divergence between brutality and nonviolence becomes a particular focus. The strengths and weaknesses of nonviolent resistance to tyranny vary depending on the medium or method through which resistance is applied. Therefore, the nonviolence of the philosopher in the cave, as drawn by Socrates and, thus, Plato, becomes for us a philosophical focus whose active agency is reintroduced not so much through

political activism, but rather through forms of art—philosophical or fictional writing—as a force that counters evil without imitating its methods of tyranny.

Chapter One
Nature and Freedom in Society: La Boétie and Thoreau

The history of nonviolent resistance to political and societal injustice finds a number of focal points in literary discourses which often serve as the inspiration for leaders of peaceable movements, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Nonviolence as a form of social protest arose as a model, or effective and conscientious option, for combating state-imposed limitations to freedom. This chapter will trace and analyze two key political treatises that contributed to the philosophy of nonviolence by examining Etienne de la Boétie's "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude" and Henry David Thoreau's iconic work "Civil Disobedience." Though it has not been confirmed that Thoreau definitely read La Boétie's *Discourse*, the central idea of noncompliance found in "Civil Disobedience" is so closely aligned with La Boétie's thought that the works' correlation and resonance cannot be ignored. Thus, this chapter will emphasize the dialogical link that can and should be established between La Boétie and Thoreau, where the text of the latter plays a decisively formative role for so many writers of nonviolence, including Leo Tolstoy and many other activists, such as the English social advocate Henry Salt, a friend of Mahatma Gandhi. Indeed, although Thoreau was not the first writer to produce discourse on nonviolent strategy, he is hailed as one of its major inspirational figures. The extensive influential weight of influence of Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" cannot be underestimated and its theoretical foundation that can be found in La Boetie's essay must not go unexamined. In explaining the interrelation of the theories of these men, this chapter will also contextualize their works from the perspective of their surrounding cultural milieu as well as of their lives. In addition, this chapter will contextualize these essays within the frame of Plato's cave, with La Boétie taking on a tone that is eerily prophetic of 20th century ideologies such as fascism and socialism. Indeed, La Boétie's description of the lovers of liberty foreshadows the

fourth stage of Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the cave allegory, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. Equally as important, Chapter One will show that in his theoretical foundation for nonviolent resistance, Thoreau in fact distances himself from society, and in his philosophical reflections he effectively produces and grounds his own alienation. Consequently, in this comparison between these two historical figures, I intend to emphasize the necessity for the problematic unfilled space that must remain between philosophy and politics, an eternal problem that Hannah Arendt (whose writings offer a complementary focus to Heidegger's thought in Chapter Two) advocated as a matter of principle. In summary, the goals of this chapter, in addition to explaining the various streams of thought in La Boétie's and Thoreau's respective works, are twofold: to demonstrate the importance of nonviolent thought in both essays and to highlight, in light of Plato's cave allegory, the challenging position of the philosopher who exists in a political world.

Etienne de La Boétie: "the first theorist of the strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience"

One of the first theorists of nonviolent disobedience, Etienne de La Boétie, was a 16th century French poet and magistrate better known, perhaps, for his friendship with Michel de Montaigne, a relationship that was immortalized in the latter's *Essays*. La Boétie was born into an aristocratic family in 1530 in Sarlat, France. Orphaned during his early youth, La Boétie was raised by his uncle, the curate of Bouilbonnas, and went on to attend the University of Orléans, where he completed his law degree in 1553 (Rothbard, 9). A brilliant student, La Boétie received a royal appointment to the Bordeaux Parlement upon completing his studies (even though he was under the minimum age requirement) Thus, in Bordeaux he led a successful

career as a judge and diplomatic negotiator, and he is also remembered to have been a notable poet and humanist (Rothbard, 10). La Boétie died in 1563 at the young age of thirty-two.

At the University of Orléans, La Boétie encountered a liberal atmosphere that promoted questioning and theorizing, so prevalent in the academic institutions of the time where "questing and religious ferment" characterized the social and political environment of 16th century France (ibid). Indeed, although the tumultuous French Religious Wars officially started in 1562, there had been a series of crucial historical events that created a progressively more tenuous political and religious atmosphere in the decades leading up to the Wars. The introduction of Lutheranism came to France during the reign of Francis I (1515-47), whose hesitancy as a ruler allowed those who craved a religious reinvigoration, independent from the unchanging Catholic faith, to accept this early form of Protestantism (Knecht, 2). It was not until the subsequent reign of Henry II (1547-59) that this "religion for rebels" gained shocking momentum, wherein John Calvin's influence on Protestantism grew considerably (Knecht, 3-4). Though the origin of the term Huguenots is unclear, Huguenots represented the militant group of Protestants who, under the leadership of Calvin, established an organized community of churches across France's provinces. It is also important to note that the origins of the French Calvinists were overwhelmingly bourgeois; relatively few converts came from the peasantry and it was not until the mid-1500s that Protestantism even made its way into the French nobility (Knecht, 7-11).

In light of the comparatively liberal atmosphere of French universities, it is no surprise that Calvin's radical religious ideas took root in law schools similar to the one La Boétie attended in the University of Orléans (Rothbard, 10). This open-minded atmosphere allowed La Boétie to compose what was a remarkably insightful and revolutionary work of political thought for his time: indeed, it set a literary precedent for the theory of nonviolence. Though rarely

studied by students of political science today, La Boétie's "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude," written sometime between 1549 and 1553, stands as an authoritative defense of personal liberty and, though relatively brief, provides a decidedly shrewd explication of tyranny's foundations. While never officially published by La Boétie, the work was disseminated in manuscript form. Indeed, Nannerl O. Keohane, a distinguished American political theorist, explains that La Boétie's treatise "offer[s] an unusually powerful defense of the value of liberty and an equally powerful condemnation of authority" as well as "some sophisticated insights into ethics and political psychology" (Nannerl, 122). Though the "Discourse" does not offer any practical solutions towards establishing an alternative to tyranny, its greatest achievement, perhaps, is its philosophical conclusion that man's natural state is that of an inherently free individual, for which foundational philosophers such as Hobbes or Locke, who come *after* La Boétie, are credited.

In order to show how radical his treatise was in the context of his social and political environments, I will now highlight and explain La Boétie's major arguments as they are laid out in the "Discourse." In Part I of the "Discourse," La Boétie, whose literary skill is clear in the poetic rhetoric he employs in his writing, questions emphatically *why* it is that so many men and so many nations submit to tyranny and its restrictions upon liberty. He points specifically to monarchic rule and the absurdity that so populous a nation could submit to the will of a single man: "who could really believe that one man alone may mistreat a hundred thousand and deprive them of their liberty?" (La Boétie, 49). With expressive flair, La Boétie reflects on the wretched state of submission, despising the almost welcoming disposition that so many people possess toward enslavement: "A people enslaves itself, cuts its own throat, when, having a choice between being vassals and being free men, it deserts its liberties and takes on the yoke, gives

consent to its own misery, or rather, apparently welcomes it" (La Boétie, 50). Of course, his sarcastic tone only serves to reaffirm and augment his insistence that the refusal of liberty is simply ridiculous. Once he sufficiently ridiculed the plights of enslavement, he proposes, in a moment of clarity, a solution that seems almost too simple: you are free the moment you *decide* to be free—the instant you choose to ignore the power imposed upon you. But this apparent solution proves to be remarkably empowering to the individual will. La Boétie's call to freedom, in its literal implementation, is nonviolent, since he does not call for a violent uprising to usurp the tyrant's throne—to be sure, such a method, in his mind, might produce a ruler even more fearful than the last. Instead, La Boétie argues for the inner resolve of freedom from enslavement:

> From all these indignities…you can deliver yourselves if you try, not by taking action, but merely by willing to be free. Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces?" (La Boétie, 52-53)

La Boétie does not so much provide an actionable route to freedom as he plants a liberating seed of the idea of inherently rightful individual freedom. This distinction is important to make, all the more so since for La Boétie himself, up to his premature death, was nevertheless a faithful servant of the French government, a puzzling contradiction to the very principles of liberty he presents in "Discourse."

It is in Part II that La Boétie's descriptions align most closely with Plato's cave allegory, especially when La Boétie's presents servitude as an ugly result of its lengthy history, where man has come to know nothing but the shackles he wears in submission to the tyrant. Believing each man to possess the ability to turn to the light of freedom, La Boétie declares: "…I think I do not err in stating that there is in our souls some native seed of reason, which, if nourished by good

counsel and training, flowers into virtue, but which, on the other hand, if unable to resist the vices surrounding it, is stifled and blighted" (La Boétie, 55-56). Therefore, man's understanding of his natural state of liberty is either cultivated into virtue, or it is sullied by wickedness, where eventually all notions of liberty are extinguished altogether. As La Boétie demonstrates, nature is no match for habit, whose force of repetition is so great as to crush the ability to return to man's own inherently inquisitive character, a character that, in Aristotle's later famous phrase, "naturally desires to know." But, in the present context, La Boétie's language in the above passage more directly reflects the language of Plato's *Republic*: the eye of the soul, in Plato's image, has to be turned around to the light of the good so that the seeds of virtue can blossom, since virtue, as Plato observes, is "alone without a master" (see Book VII and Book IX). The alternative for Plato is the devolution of the naturally free human being into oppression and tyranny (*Republic* Books VIII-IX), something that La Boétie describes in the above passage.

Consequently, La Boétie demonstrates this battle between the two opposing forces: "It cannot be denied that nature is influential in shaping us to her will…yet it must be admitted that she has less power over us than custom, for the reason that native endowment, no matter how good, is dissipated unless encouraged, whereas environment always shapes us in its own way, whatever that may be, in spite of nature's gifts" (La Boétie, 60-61). Thus, what is "unnatural," or contrary to our best flourishing, can, in due course, be reintroduced as normal and acceptable so long as there is repetition throughout time. Men will eventually become habituated to oppression, thinking that the generations before them were subjected to such tyranny only because "it has always been that way." Though La Boétie makes no explicit reference to Plato's cave, he paints the oppressed as living in a world of shadows, where these men, subjected to tyranny, are not even conscious of the possibility of a life free from their fetters. Keohane cites

La Boetie's metaphoric employment of darkness and light utilized to communicate consciousness: "La Boétie points out that a child born in regions where there are months of darkness followed by months of continual sunlight would not long for the light if he had never seen it; we do not long for what we have never experienced" (Keohane, 124). Therefore, just as Plato described in his portrayal of the enchained prisoners, La Boétie attributes the darkness of willful subjection to concentrated Power to the inheritance of our past, and he views this legacy of submission to be a binding force that perpetually reasserts the habit of compliant submission to state authority.

In the final portion of the "Discourse," La Boétie examines the foundations of tyranny, and the theories he proposes are highly perceptive in highlighting the manner under which the tyrant secures for his rule a deep and extensive reach. It is, indeed, worthwhile summarizing the major points La Boétie makes here. First, the tyrant ultimately commands obedience through his immense network of men who benefit from his despotic rule. While the necessity of a loyal following of agents who bolster and ensure authoritarian order has always been part of any political structure, the manner by which such compliance is won can take numerous forms. It is no secret, for instance, that the tyrant utilizes monetary means to win a loyal following. His subjects do not necessarily understand at first that, by relying on the tyrant's constant source of money, they essentially sell themselves for the tenuous wealth and power that comes with the indebtedness to a tyrant. A real-life Faustian deal, or implicit "contract," this exchange drains the subject of any agency, but this loss of agency appears to an obedient servant as an issue of no concern when compared with the possibility of immediate personal gain. La Boétie shows that through this expediency of power and wealth, the "wicked dregs of the nation" are likely to perceive tyranny just as valuable as liberty appears to others. Indeed, "all those who are

corrupted by burning ambition or extraordinary avarice…gather around [the tyrant] and support him in order to have a share in the booty and to constitute themselves petty chiefs under the big tyrant" (La Boétie, 78-79). As the tyrant's retinue begins to depend on him for their life source, fearing the alternative if they are to disobey, the tyrant's power only intensifies.

La Boétie cites several other tactics that ensure the tyrant's rule, including winning his subjects over with goods and spectacle: "Plays, farces, spectacles…and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny" (La Boétie, 69). And in utilizing spectacles, the tyrant finds it useful to "borrow a stray bit of divinity" to reinforce his rule, sometimes going to religion, either entrenching his rule in an established faith or enshrining his own godlike image within a new ideology (La Boétie, 73). At this point, the ruler appears both superhuman and generous, commanding devotion from the common people.

If one is to read the "Discourse" in its entirety, he or she will find it impossible to ignore the disparity between the principal message in La Boétie's treatise and his actual life following his enrollment at the University of Orléans. So powerful is this contrast that, there have, indeed, been what are surely unfounded claims that "Discourse of Voluntary Servitude" was not actually written by La Boétie but, in fact, by his dear friend Michel de Montaigne. However, the attentive reader will find that this strange disconnect between the life of La Boétie and his thought in "Discourse" (from which this rumor of mistaken authorship rose) can be located within "Discourse" itself—that is, La Boétie communicates in an elitist tone characteristic of his aristocratic rank at the very same time as he speaks in grand, sweeping declarations of the equality of mankind. As we begin to elicit the hidden contradictions within La Boetie's work, much like the paradoxes in Heidegger's *The Essence of Truth* that are discussed in Chapter Two,

the complexity of the philosopher's reorientation among the shadows become particularly intriguing.

"Discourse of Voluntary Servitude" is generally discussed for its merits of autonomy and equality, which, as Keohane shows, "rests upon a classical vision of a free and equal community of brothers, living according to the light of reason and the guidance of nature" (Keohane, 121). Keohane is one of the few La Boétie scholars to expound the disgust that La Boétie betrays for the common man in his essay, even while defending man's individual liberty. In spite of the emphasis on this aversion toward the common masses, Keohane describes La Boétie's temperament with the term "radical humanism" in that his thoughts were wholly removed from the conventional manners of organizing society. His primary concerns were with liberty and it is for this reason he denounces any individual's power over others, save parental authority (ibid). Perhaps, Keohane does not go far enough in attempting to understand La Boétie's contradictory thoughts; she attributes his tone of superiority to "a dominant feature of French ethical theory in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" that "placed their faith in the powers of great men" (ibid). Thus, she cites Paul Bonnefon, the major documenter of La Boétie's life from whom we obtain much of our knowledge concerning the author, to have "sympathetically" but inaccurately called "Discourse" utopian. Indeed, the student of 20th century Russian history will understand very directly Bonnefon's description of a heavily rationalized society that champions an idealized equality among men, but, suppressed by this monistic ideology, the citizens are "liberated" only to enter into a further combat with this political system. Certainly, La Boétie utters an attractive cry for liberation and denounces corrupt power, but how much of equality and liberty does he truly support? How would La Boétie execute the freedom from tyranny for which he calls? We must return to the text where there is reason to believe that, were La Boétie to

produce a treatise concerning a practical solution—to apply philosophy expressly to the political realm—his writing might not be rooted in a democratic or even libertarian point of view. Far from it, his envisioned society might align better with the very tyranny he sought to condemn.

In spite of La Boétie's stand for the equality of men, he nevertheless acknowledges that human potential varies and that superior virtue and talent are not distributed equally at birth. Moreover, he speaks of the common people with a palpable disdain for their weakness, servility and stupidity, and he contrasts the caliber of the brave versus that of the spineless: "To achieve the good that they desire, the bold do not fear danger; the intelligent do not refuse to undergo suffering. It is the stupid and cowardly who are neither able to endure hardship nor to vindicate their rights…Poor, wretched, and stupid peoples, nations determined on your own misfortune and blind to your own good!" (La Boétie, 51). One might argue that the dramatic tone La Boétie adopts is device of rhetoric—that he did not intend to lend dominance to one group of people and to ridicule another but rather draws such a drastic disparity only to elaborate on the ludicrousness of enslavement and to laud the quest for sovereignty. However, in Part II of "Discourse," La Boétie states that there must exist a superior class of men who *know* and chase freedom:

> There are always a few, better endowed than others, who feel the weight of the yoke and cannot restrain themselves from attempting to shake it off: these are the men who never become tamed under subjection…These are in fact the men who, possessed of clear minds and far-sighted spirit, are not satisfied, like the brutish mass, to see only what is at their feet, but rather look about them, behind and before, and even recall the things of the past in order to judge those of the future, and compare both with their present condition. These are the ones who, having good minds of their own, have further trained them by study and learning. Even if liberty had entirely perished from the earth, such men would invent it. For them slavery has no satisfactions, no matter how well disguised. (La Boétie, 65)

Whether or not La Boétie ever intended to give a right to these men of "clear minds and far-sighted spirit" in bringing liberty to the "brutish mass" is unclear and indeed may not be the most

important idea to emphasize. Rather, it is crucial to note the hierarchy itself, the disdain La Boétie at times communicates for the lower strata of society, and the admiration he possesses for great men. Keonane, in noting his elitist tone, goes as far as to make the aforementioned interpretation of La Boétie's essay, where these intelligent men have an express *duty* in preserving the notion of liberty: "…the only ray of hope held out is that a few men of superior intelligence and education might keep the idea of liberty alive while the gullible masses continue to live on bread and circuses in every century" (Keonane, 121). It is this window between the great man and the common man—the various gradations among the quality of humans that can be taken, interpreted and transformed into an ideological entitlement to power – that systematizes and divides the human race and immediately jeopardizes the individual freedom in which La Boétie's philosophy is anchored. Plato's belief in the philosopher kings, albeit purely theoretical, clearly assists La Boétie's thought in this regard.

La Boetie's faithful service to the French monarchy and his distaste toward the Protestant Huguenots further reinforced his highly hierarchical view of humanity. However, in somewhat remarkable twist of fate, Protestant Huguenots would eventually disseminate La Boétie's treatise in order to advance their own cause against the French Catholics, a cause that was ultimately settled in a tenuous truce by means of the Edict of Nantes in 1598, marking the end of the French Religious Wars. La Boétie's support of the French monarchy is particularly troubling when grasped concurrently with the central arguments in his "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude."

Montaigne's views of "Discourse" are especially insightful, since Montaigne explains albeit indirectly La Boétie's own attitude toward the prevailing French government. As David Schaefer cites in his essay "Montaigne and La Boétie," Montaigne felt that he and La Boétie were two spirits united—of a single will and mentality (Schaefer, 2). When Montaigne refused

to incorporate "Discourse" as the chief focus in his piece *On Friendship*, it was because La Boétie's treatise had been used by the Huguenots with the intent of subverting and dismantling the French monarchy without presenting a superior solution to take its place (Schaefer, 1). Consequently, we can surmise that La Boétie held similar views to Montaigne, and indeed this is reflected in his loyal service to the French court until his death as well as the written polemic he later produced supporting the monarchy and Catholicism in opposition to the Huguenots (Keohane, 128). In Keohane's view, La Boétie's service to the French monarchy might have been directed by prudence and protection of his own safety: "It is thus not surprising that La Boétie, like many other theorists after him, including both Montesquieu and Montaigne, set his radical visions apart from his daily life, and decided that the better part was to submit oneself to the laws of the country where one finds oneself. Like Montaigne he did the business of the king and did it well" (ibid). Readers can only debate whether or not La Boétie was conscious of the irony he lived, submitting to the very tactics the tyrant employs in his "Discourse."

La Boétie's method of peaceful withdrawal is nevertheless an enduring tactic of nonviolence proponents, and it is a notion that lies at the heart of Henry David Thoreau's famous "Civil Disobedience." Where La Boétie preferred to keep his thoughts concerning immediate political matters private, Thoreau, whose "Civil Disobedience" was a result of actual action of civic noncompliance, acted and adhered quite publicly to his own moral principles and philosophy. In turning to Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," this chapter highlights La Boétie's enduring thought, but also, and possibly more centrally, it emphasizes Thoreau's underlying anarchic principles and his resulting alienation, which will provide yet another layer in examining the difficulties that the philosopher encounters in engaging with the political world. However, in analyzing Thoreau's life and thought, it is important to note the contrast between

the social and political atmosphere of Thoreau's democratic America and La Boétie's monarchic France – if only in order to contextualize with more precision the actionable recommendations and principles found in "Civil Disobedience."

Henry David Thoreau: "the American author most beloved by reformers, naysayers, and dissenters"

Born in 1817 in Concord, Massachusetts, Henry David Thoreau is celebrated and remembered for his unwavering individualism as well as his unfiltered social critiques. His deep interest in natural history and environmental history characterizes the manner in which he led much of his life—anchored in a close relationship with nature as opposed to reliance upon the material and superfluous. It is often said that he spent much of his life in search for an essential truth to which only nature could provide insight. Thoreau's written works won him a perennial place in the American literary canon, though, like many great authors, he did not know the full extent of his literary success during his lifetime. Thoreau's professional occupations ranged from educator to pencil maker to repairman. However, from his years at Harvard and onward, one thing remained constant: writing. His forthright literary voice, complementing the radical and personal content he often espoused, immortalized his position (which had been also acclaimed by Walt Whitman who, too, praised his rebellious nature); he was and will always be regarded as "the American author most beloved by reformers, naysayers, and dissenters" (Cain, 5). Having compiled and edited the collection of essays found in *A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau*, William Cain explains that Thoreau's existence can be characterized by his dislike for "groups, organizations, and institutions, which, he believed, threaten to divert persons from honestly reflecting on their own lives and revivifying them" (ibid). His aversion to organizations and defiance of the unjust dealings of the American government are duly reflected

in “Civil Disobedience,” a work representative of the practical implementation of nonviolence that La Boétie neglected to produce in his “Discourse on Voluntary Servitude.”

Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” officially published as “Resistance to Civil Government” in 1849 and subsequently published under its better-known title in 1866 (four years after Thoreau’s death), ultimately defines the relationship man must have with his government; he bases his work in a practical understanding of the need for government but calls, at once, for each person to determine independently what a *better* government might be. His political philosophy therefore advocates for individual conscience to be the governing principle, as the majority cannot always be trusted to rule in the moral manner. Thoreau questions whether one’s principles must ever submit to the government—for why, then, does the human being even possess a conscience? (Thoreau, 64-65). This insistence on the essential role of conscience establishes the break between citizens and their acceptance of the government’s power, a division that the reader, as well as the citizen, hopes will remain nonviolent. If citizens are obligated to submit to the law or to accept it blindly, they are dehumanized, mechanically pursuing the wishes of the state, yet many a man in this position was oftentimes lauded as a “good citizen” (Thoreau, 66). Here, Thoreau demonstrates the ease of blurring his own individual sense of right and wrong: morality, as an individual’s highest duty and essential quality, is always endangered and smothered by the heavy hands of the state and, weakened, reemerges as subservience to the institution by which it was subdued.

Though some would inevitably argue otherwise, morality can generally be understood as an innate attribute (or, in La Boetie’s terms—that “native seed of reason”), which, if cultivated further, assumes a major role in guiding an individual through everyday ethical dilemmas. Insomuch as the moral conscience is refined, it nevertheless remains considerably subjective. To

Thoreau, how that subjectivity varies is less important than the fact that it is distinctly *individual*. Certainly, if one were to select a single term representative of Thoreau, it would be individualism. Never did Thoreau's personal responsibility to his own moral compass seek to manipulate another human being, much less the masses. His conduct in the realm of government was confined expressly to his own person, and he was not troubled with influencing the greater state machine:

> If injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the machine will wear out…but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn. (Thoreau, 73-74)

His philosopher seeks no return to the cave—sees no need for political involvement as a result of a proclaimed responsibility to educate others. Here, the principal thread of peaceful noncompliance that distinguishes La Boétie's "Discourse" re-emerges in Thoreau, who sees disobedience as a necessary path of action only if it is to preserve the harmony between action and conscience. More importantly, Thoreau makes it clear that such noncompliance is peaceful insofar as it is restricted to the individual who is acting on his or her own sense of right and wrong. Nowhere in these passage does Thoreau assume responsibility for anyone other than himself; nor does he imply that the resulting punishment, whatever that may be, is unwelcome, and he does not advocate responding to punishment with violence. Indeed, Thoreau's essay only came into existence after he willingly spent a night in jail for refusing to pay a tax that, in his eyes, funded an unjust campaign, the Mexican-American War. Thoreau felt as if he, as an individual, were freer inside jail than those men who stood guard outside his cell: "I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through, before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel

confined…I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax" (Thoreau, 80). Regardless of the implications that followed on his act of disobedience, Thoreau was at peace with his own conscience, for by following its guidance he achieved his own sense of freedom.

Where La Boétie's treatise can be read as a call to arms or a demand to withdraw consent to tyranny, its dramatic and sometimes militant tone is nowhere to be seen in Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience." Nevertheless, Shannon Mariotti, in her book *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal*, quotes David Villa in his work *Socratic Citizenship,* approaching Villa's view of Thoreau as altogether untenable: "Thoreau's essay…deepens the Socratic idea of conscientious individualism, yet it also goes beyond that idea insofar as it is an unabashed call to action…to arms… Thoreau's conscientious "no" to complicity with an unjust state leads to an impassioned "yes" to demonstrative, perhaps even violent, action'" (Mariotti, 10). As Mariotti notes, this interpretation is gravely mistaken. If one reads Thoreau's essay attentively, one cannot but understand that he only asks the individual to develop a heightened awareness of the individual duty to upholding one's morals. However, this misinterpretation is troubling enough in itself; Villa's understanding and explication at once distorts Thoreau's message and thereby possesses an ability to alter others' interpretations. Such a danger always looms when committing anything to writing for the public to digest, and it is instructive that such a misstep is possible even in a candid and unembellished text like Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience."

Thoreau's conscientious objections demanded a deeper individual reorientation than the state achieved through violence. Much like the aversion toward Western rationality that characterized intellectual debate in 19th century Russia, Thoreau's strong loathing toward the numbing rationalization and modernization of American society imbued his writing; he felt that these changes in society diminished the value and importance of individualism, destroying a

crucial foundation of a meaningful life. In his view, the westward expansion and ensuing industrialization of early to mid-19th-century America can be said to have detracted from the principles of freedom that fueled the American Revolution. (Mariotti, 95). Those involved in American Transcendentalism, such as Thoreau or Emerson, were particularly concerned with a return to spirituality through closeness with nature. For fear of a "loss of self and dilution of experience," transcendentalists like Thoreau rejected the standardized social structures and organizations of the time (Mariotti, 12). With an emphasis on introspective thought, Thoreau sought to elicit a higher understanding of truth that came hand in hand with a unity with nature.

If anything, Thoreau's preoccupation with deontological principles aligns him more closely with the moral philosophy of Socrates (Cain, 7). His essay "Civil Disobedience" serves more as an eternal tribute to Socrates' gadfly, and reflecting Socrates' address to Athenians, Thoreau also asks his readers to question the prevailing state of affairs and, in doing so, endeavors to produce a more conscientious individual. Thus, Thoreau's defense of morality and aversion to potential hypocrisy remind us of Socrates' own trial against Athens. Hannah Arendt, in her work *The Promise of Politics*, points to Socrates' belief that it is "much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than *being one* to be in disagreement with myself"; she sees Socrates' stance as the foundation of ethics (Arendt, 21). This agreement represents the self's adherence to its own conscience, despite what influences outside forces might impose. For Thoreau, even if the outright defiance of the law results in imprisonment, or death as it did for Socrates, it is better to be in prison where one remains truly adherent to one's internal moral values than to take up a hypocritical path of a "temporary guardian" of justice.

Such a relentless deontological devotion alienated both Socrates and Thoreau from the political world; like Socrates, Thoreau inevitably became a social pariah. While Socrates was

reproached by the unenlightened men of the state, Thoreau needed no such condemnation for his alienation. Rather, his disillusionment resulted from his inability to reconcile himself, his desire to experience the pathos of wonder, with the deadening modern machine of society, while Socrates, through his dialectical questioning, remained at the center of the civic life. Cain, in his work on Thoreau's life, cites a lecture that Thoreau gave at his graduation from Harvard College in 1837, where he prioritized the values of natural wonder over the practical institutions of his time: "'this curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient, more beautiful than it is useful—it is more to be admired and enjoyed then, than used'" (Cain, 13). Cain also mentions a particular comment of Thoreau that, perhaps, summarizes best his similarity to Socrates. Emerson had commented on the "many branches of learning" in Harvard's curriculum, to which Thoreau responded: "All of the branches and none of the roots" (ibid). Indeed, it was both men's nature to get at the "roots" which inevitably alienated them from the disposition of common citizens and their organized existence.

While Socrates, who would never hold a political office, was, nonetheless, a major figure in the market of Athens where Athenian citizens gathered for conversations, La Boétie and Thoreau championed a common notion of nonviolent withdrawal from prevailing unjust institutions. However, in doing so, the two figures chose drastically different paths. While La Boétie treatise may inspire the most valiant defense of individual autonomy, there is reason to believe that his elevated status (and consequently, at times, patronizing tone) predisposed him to side with privileged men of superior caliber and address them in his writing. Thoreau, in an honest defense for what is just and right, can only take responsibility for himself. An honest proponent of nonviolence, Thoreau possessed a truth-seeking nature that alienated him from society's commonplace activities and systemization, threatening to make him strange to the

common man. These dichotomous paths of nonviolent estrangement versus violent imposition arise from these philosophers' quest for a certain level of enlightenment.

Indeed, when they have escaped the cave of common opinion, what is the next step of their journey, especially when the world around them is threatened by an ever-looming potentiality for violence? Will they justify the necessity of the violent revolt or attempt to prevent it? This problem is an eternal obstacle that the philosopher must confront when faced with the realm of human affairs, a dilemma that this thesis further expounds in the following chapter.

Chapter Two
Imposing Freedom and the Dangers of Self-Certainty: Heidegger and Arendt

In order to understand the plight of the singular role of individual conscience of the philosopher (and thus of every citizen who approaches philosophy as a way of life), this chapter will utilize the writings of two prominent 20th-century philosophers: Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt – and their discourses addressing Plato's cave allegory. Apart from employing the *Republic*'s cave allegory, as well as Plato's other writings, this chapter will deal with two sources. The first is *The Essence of Truth*, a translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, initially published in 1988 and based on his lecture given in 1931-1932 at the University of Freiburg. The second is the essay "Socrates," to be found in Arendt's *The Promise of Politics* but originally published as "Philosophy and Politics" in the Spring 1990 edition of the academic journal *Social Research*. The fact that these two pieces are written before and after the ultimate failure of Nazi fascism is not merely a chronological fact: the time of writing plays a major role in understanding these works and the ensuing conversation. It is no secret, for instance, that Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher whose writings and critiques of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche garnered him extensive renown, unapologetically supported the Nazi Party. This decisive life event lent further notoriety to Heidegger's thought and fueled controversy about his philosophy. His political views notwithstanding, Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time*, a notoriously difficult work, has influenced numerous areas of philosophy such as existentialism and hermeneutics, among others. Hannah Arendt, a distinguished German-American political theorist, studied with Heidegger and eventually developed a romantic relationship with the German philosopher. Arendt, ethnically Jewish and no lover of Nazi Germany, developed great contempt for the weakness and self-

deceit of German intellectuals who had developed a philosophical rationale for positioning themselves with the Nazis (Bowing, *Hannah Arendt* 8). However, because of her deep love and admiration for Heidegger, Arendt ultimately defended his association with the Nazi Party as an "error," through which he "succumbed to the temptation to change his 'residence' and to get involved in the world of human affairs" (Arendt, *Martin Heidegger at 80*), claiming the involvement to be extraneous to his contributions to philosophy. Arendt, in a commemorative piece to honor Heidegger's eightieth birthday, eventually states that the inevitably grim fate awaiting the union of philosophy and politics cannot be surprising—that we, "even if our own residence lies in the midst of the world, can hardly help finding it striking and perhaps exasperating that Plato and Heidegger, when they entered into human affairs, turned to tyrants and Führers" (ibid). Such a dismissive, even forgiving, statement can likely be attributed to her love and respect for Heidegger as a thinker, but it provides no solace for those who have suffered at the hands of such "errors." Nonetheless, in arguing against both Plato and Heidegger in "Socrates," she goes beyond approaching Heidegger's loyalty to German fascism as a purely personal failure, but instead she attempts to discern a line which a philosopher cannot cross under any circumstances.

Turning Toward the Light: Unhiddenness in Heidegger's Four Stages

In *The Essence of Truth*, Heidegger imposes a rigid classification – four stages – upon the cave allegory and approaches the fourth stage as the philosopher's imperative return to educate the prisoners who dwell in the cave. Before we articulate these stages, it is important to introduce Heidegger's explanation of the Greek term *aletheia*—truth—as the *unhidden* or the *unconcealed*. This concept of the unhidden is different from other notions of truth such as correspondence or

coherence. *Aletheia* refers specifically to the continuous disclosure of truth grasped by the changing stages of understanding. In short, *aletheia*, in Heidegger's mind, represents the stages of truth as these are revealed or become unhidden to the subject and so they are deeply ingrained in the processes by which the subject consequently understands that truth. Heidegger describes *unhiddenness* as explicitly lacking *hiddenness*; hiddenness or concealment is loosened and subsequently ripped away, where what lies beneath is unhidden. This implies a *progression* from darkness to clarity, embodied by the progressive stages of the cave allegory. That Heidegger explains truth as *aletheia* to be specifically different from truth as correctness already implies a level of judgment and opinion that must be imposed on truth or uncovered in the progressive unconcealing of truth. He quotes Aristotle to emphasize that philosophy "does not mean to put forward correct and valid propositions, but that philosophy seeks beings in their unhiddenness as beings" (9). While the reader may find this comparison of truth to unhiddenness as problematic, it is also important to emphasize that truth as correspondence, an indisputably "correct" statement with which cannot be argued, presents truth as an inflexible principle. Heidegger, nevertheless, also implies a similar finality to ultimate *aletheia*. Thus, even in this reliance on the etymology of "aletheia," we already encounter Heidegger's attempt to communicate the philosopher's ability in establishing an ultimate character of truth that is applicable to *all* beings; moreover, he implies that the determination of this truth lies expressly in the realm of the philosopher. However, before we can make this claim with conviction, Heidegger's explanation of the cave, paying particular attention to his fourth stage, must be examined in more extensive detail.

In Plato's cave, the shackled prisoners have stared at their shadows all of their lives and, indeed, do not even understand the shadows to be *shadows*. In fact, these images are the

prisoners' reality and their truth; the cave dwellers would not be aware of the concept of a shadow. As Heidegger says, cave dwellers would impart a sense of *being* to these shadows: "man straightforwardly takes whatever presents itself before him as un-hidden, to be beings; indeed man is nothing else but *the* being that comports itself to what it takes as beings (an animal, plant, even less a stone, never comports itself to beings)" (21). This passage indicates that human beings behave in accordance with their understanding of an object, i.e., the unhiddenness of an object, and this behavior directly reflects their own state of being in the spectrum of unhiddenness.

In Heidegger's interpretation, the allegory, then, transitions to the second stage as the cave dweller encounters a further exposure to a higher degree of unhiddenness: this new stage corresponds with Socrates's address to Glaucon requesting the latter to consider a situation in which a cave dweller, becoming unshackled, is compelled to turn towards the fire or light. Though this step is indeed crucial to the emergence from the cave, Heidegger makes clear that this stage can by no means constitute liberation but is merely a nascent phase in transitioning into the light. Heideigger believes the first liberation to be a failed attempt at "healing from *delusion*" as the unshackled prisoner remains disoriented and resistant to the newly flickering light. Insofar as this liberation is sudden, the prisoner cannot grasp at the light and only remains bewildered; he perceives a difference between the light and the shadows but can neither fully *understand* these two separate entities simultaneously nor draw a lucid connection between them. Heidegger states: "Through this bare difference there arises nothing but confusion. What is shown to him does not take on any clarity and definiteness. For this reason he wants to return to his shackles…[light] remains external and fails to penetrate to man in his ownmost self"

(Heidegger, 28). Therefore, in the second stage human beings do not yet come into their own existence.

Nevertheless, Heidegger shows that in the second stage, the initially unsuccessful liberation of the cave prisoner, any understanding of unhiddeness suddenly begins to alter to the extent that a *difference* in vision is made apparent. The interconnectedness of things emerges—yet this new connection disrupts unhiddenness. Heidegger, therefore, moves into the concept of the *more unhidden*, which establishes that there are layers to unhiddenness, that truth is multifaceted and can be built upon in a self-transformative process (Heidegger, 25). He makes it a point to show that things do not necessarily increase or decrease in quantity or magnitude, "that more shadows are unhidden" but rather "that the *things themselves* become more unhidden" (ibid). Rather than enlarging a blurred image, where the image's obscurity only expands, this transitional process is comparable to an image gaining clarity, where each additional degree of clarity is akin to removing a layer of hiddenness—in other words, the resolution of one's vision becomes sharper. As a clearer image underlies a hazy, less unhidden depiction, distinct levels of clarity can be achieved in the process. And as understanding gains lucidity, Heidegger reinforces the description of the new reality within which the prisoner himself is "more beingful," implying thereby that one's extent or degree of being is directly dependent on how clearly one sees "truth." However, this newfound clarity is understood initially as the exact opposite of itself — the increased unhiddenness is disorienting, unfamiliar, and alienating. Here Heidegger closely relies on Plato's description of the painful state of the prisoner:

> Let us suppose that one of them has been released, and compelled suddenly to stand up, and turn his head around and walk with open eyes towards the light—and let us suppose that he goes through all these actions with pain, and that the dazzling splendor renders him incapable of perceiving those things of which he formerly used to see only the shadows. (Plato, *Republic* 251)

The painful nature of this turning permits the unshackled prisoner to initially reject the new images in their unfamiliarity, but nevertheless a fundamental layer of hiddenness has been removed and the philosopher is now able to make the treacherous ascent out of the cave.

The allegory then transitions to the third stage, where we understand Heidegger's theory of struggle towards further unhiddenness. The third stage brings us to the difficult ascent out of the cave; implicit in this new category is Heidegger's emphasis that there exists a highest form of unhiddenness. The supreme truth is exhibited by the world's primordial source of light: "And the sun that shines outside the cave symbolizes the highest idea, which one hardly dares to view directly" (Heidegger, 33). While the second stage is defined by a "sudden ripping loose," the transition that occurs outside the cave is ever more gradual and explorative. Moreover, Heidegger expressly declares that the process must be violent: "Attaining what is now unhidden involves violence…resistance, such that the one to be freed is forced up along a rugged path. The ascent demands work and exertion, causing strain and suffering" (Heidegger, 32). To contextualize Heidegger's emphasis on violence, it is important to reexamine the relevant passage from the discussion between Socrates and Glaucon. This passage, detailing the process of turning around, which corresponds to Heidegger's second and third stages, unfolds in Plato by disclosing an emergence of a new power in the process of seeing. By using the phrase "*power of seeing,"* Plato, in contrast to Heidegger's interpretation, implies that the art of turning around does not mean forcefully, forcibly or brutally coercing a subject's direct transition to seeing the philosopher's truth, the highest level of unhiddenness. It is a painful, but not a coercive or violent process imposed on the prisoner by the agents of truth, but rather a self-discovery:

> [Socrates]: Whereas, our present argument shows us that there is a faculty residing in the soul of each person, and an instrument enabling each of us to learn;

> and that, just as we might suppose it to be impossible to turn the eye round from darkness to light without turning the whole body, so must this faculty, or this instrument, be wheeled round, in company with the entire soul, from the world of becoming, until it be enabled to endure the contemplation of the world of being and the brightest part thereof, which, according to us, is the idea of the good. Am I not right?
> [Glaucon]: You are.
> [Socrates]: Hence, I continued, there should be an art of this turning around, involving the way that the change will most easily and most effective be brought about. Its object will not be to produce in the person the power of seeing. On the contrary, it assumes that he possesses it, though he is turned in a wrong direction, and does not look towards the right quarter—and its aim is to remedy this defect.
> [Glaucon]: So it would appear.
> [Socrates]: Hence, on the one hand, the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to resemble those of the body, inasmuch as they really do not pre-exist in the soul, but are formed in it in the course of time by habit and exercise; while the virtue of prudence, on the other hand, does, above everything else, appear to be more divine, which never loses its energy, but depending on which way it is turned, becomes useful and serviceable, or else remains useless and harmful…. (Plato, Republic, 255)

In Plato's dialogue, then, it is the "art of turning around" that is central to the discussion of achieving truth, and it is worth repeating that Socrates states: "its object will not be to produce in the person the power of seeing." Indeed, "the power of seeing," the consciousness and capacity to perceive one's own truth, is, according to Plato, inherent *within* every living being. The subject is simply "turned in the wrong direction," and, thus, the art of turning around "seeks to remedy this defect" and the "other so-called virtues of the soul." The usage of the word "defect" implies that Socrates, and thus Plato, sees fault in beings who are turned the wrong way, and, consequently, readers may be led to believe that Socrates then endeavors to *coerce* his subjects. However, this notion is inconsistent with Socrates' own principles as a philosopher, who never imposes truth-seeing by force; instead, his teaching of philosophy ends in self-sacrifice, rather than the imposition of violence on the others. This difference between Plato's rendition of "turning" and Heidegger's "third stage" may appear somewhat subtle (a similar subtlety of

approach is characteristic of Plato's other writings, which this paper will shortly address). Nonetheless, this difference acquires an immense significance when it is approached as a prescription for a political action. We will see this prescriptive understanding of the philosophical path even more clearly in Heidegger's final stage which appears in the German philosopher as a turning around that *must* be violent and, by necessity, carried out by force.

Heidegger's Fourth Stage:

Heidegger introduces the occurrence of a *fourth* stage, which Plato never implicitly categorizes but rather hypothesizes as the potential outcome of a return to the cave. Thus, Plato poses only the *possibility* of the philosopher's descent into the cave: "And now consider what would happen if such a man were to descend again and seat himself on his old seat?" (Plato, *Republic* 253). Moreover, Plato's philosopher, in returning to the cave, experiences great confusion and ridicule, which Plato carefully emphasizes:

> And now consider what would happen if such a man were to descend again…And if he were forced to form a judgment again, about those previously mentioned shadows, and to compete earnestly against those who had always been prisoners, while his sight continued dim, and his eyes unsteady, and if he needed quite some time to get adjusted—would he not be made a laughing stock, and would it not be said of him, that he had gone up only to come back again with his eyesight destroyed, and that it was not worthwhile event o attempt the ascent? And if anyone endeavored to set them free and carry them to the light, would they not go so far as to put him to death…? (Plato, *Republic* 253)

However, Heidegger reasons that because the philosopher's hypothetical return to the cave results in death, the allegory demonstrates that Plato did not place this proposition as a mere potentiality, afterthought, or decision that only implies a personal choice. Far from this, Heidegger, in fact, believes that the return to the cave in order to disseminate philosophy within a violent confrontation is a crucial and purposeful way to end the allegory. Heidegger states: "If

the fate of death is not something unimportant in the occurrence of man, then we must see what is here finally presented as something *more* than a harmless addition or poetically painted conclusion" (Heidegger, 59). By providing this reasoning, Heidegger opens the floodgates for a dangerous dogma of "imposing truth upon others," a manner of teaching that is backed by a philosophical necessity. The returning philosopher is unable to see in the darkness of the cave; he becomes alienated from the community of men who live in obscurity. The shadows are unfamiliar and foreign because of the philosopher's previous exposure to the light and, without becoming accustomed to the darkness, he attempts to educate the cave dwellers. As Heidegger's explanation now becomes explicitly violent, one is struck by his authoritative tone: "Now we see that the liberator is someone who has become free…has the illuminating view, and thus has a surer footing in the ground of human-historical Dasein. Only then does he gain power to the violence he must employ in liberation" (Heidegger, 59). He *must* employ this *power to violence*—Heidegger's word choice is of utmost importance. Indeed, throughout Heidegger's explanation of the cave and the association of beingness with unhiddenness, we can sense that he believes there to be a changing level of legitimacy to a being, in regard to how unhidden he perceives the world around him. By granting this changing level of legitimacy, he lends the philosopher a *right* to power, and a superiority to the philosopher's perception. This belief in ultimate truth utterly destroys any common understanding of equality and respect. What Heidegger has done is place the philosopher in a *new cave* where the notion of humility lies utterly outside the realm of self-guaranteeing intellectual violence that the philosopher believes he must exert.

What the returning philosopher ought to realize is this crucial issue: the third stage is never prescriptive or the same for everyone. It is utterly impossible to fathom a universal

agreement of ideas, a problem that is found in Heidegger's notion of unhiddenness itself—it is based on how truth exposes itself to us, and to this perception there is no hard rationale or formula. Heidegger himself claims: "The truth of the statement about the essence of man can never be scientifically proven. It cannot be established by reference to facts, nor can it be derived from principles in a formal-logical manner" (Heidegger, 56). Indeed, ultimate truth cannot be explained in words, nor can it be proven. That anyone should try to liberate another being with an undeniable or infallible truth is explicitly contradictory with the very idea of a personal turning. The philosophical endeavor of understanding one's own essence and truth is a highly individual journey. Freedom and liberation is a distinctly *individual* phenomenon and thereby a *nonviolent* one—at no point should coercion or force factor into genuine liberation. Yet Heidegger does explain that the process of escaping the cave and of ripping through the layers of unhiddeness is violent.

While it may appear that the liberator is first dragged out of the cave, Plato does not explicitly state that the dragging of the prisoner into the light is imperative, nor does he characterize the philosopher's journey as an explicit right to drag cave-dwellers into the light. Heidegger himself claims: "Liberation is only genuine when he who is liberated thereby becomes free for himself, i.e. comes to stand in the ground of his essence" (Heidegger, 28). Man is *only* genuinely liberated when he becomes free *for himself*! Not long after, Heidegger states true liberation to mean: "*to be a liberator* from the dark." More specifically, the descent back into the cave "is the only manner through which freedom is genuinely *realized*" (Heidegger, 66). Whether or not Heidegger saw the contradiction within his own reasoning is less important than the fact that this inconsistency is a part of his thought and, thus, a part of his "doctrine" of truth. His explanation of the cave is consequently relevant in this paper's discussion of nonviolence,

because it elucidates the arrogance and self-righteousness that may come with harbingers of any ideology.

It is thus important and natural to discuss the cave allegory and Heidegger's own interpretation in the context of Plato's teacher, Socrates, and his own trial against the State of ancient Athens. Specifically, in efforts to place the cave allegory in this political context, this chapter will focus on comparing Hannah Arendt's reading of Plato and Socrates' understanding of philosophy with Heidegger's interpretation. It is important to examine not merely her understanding of the cave, but more generally all the dialogues that deal with the trial and death of Socrates, namely, the *Apology, Crito* and *Phaedo*. In dissecting these dialogues, Arendt is emphatic in her view that no philosopher should impose his or her views upon others; nor does she think that the philosopher should enter political life, as Plato expects of his philosopher-kings in his *Republic*. Whether or not her distinction between Plato's understanding of the philosopher's path and that of Socrates is precise remains a major question for the students of philosophy today. What is indisputable, as the remainder of this chapter will show, is the fact that Arendt's contrast between Plato and Socrates is insightful as criticism of Heidegger, whose "doctrine of truth" she examines and finds alien to the path of the authentic philosopher.

The Return to the Cave—The Philosopher on Trial and Arendt's Support of Socrates:

What is initially most apparent in Socrates' trial is the ineffectiveness of the authentic philosopher's attempt to impose his view upon others, even when his own life depends upon his ability to persuade. Socrates addresses his persecutors in a manner identical to the dialectical questioning he has exercised in the public sphere of Athens. Socrates does not use rhetoric in attempts to garner a victory, as such a tactic would be contrary to his own principles as a

philosopher. Certainly, to utilize rhetorical persuasion with flair would be equally as oppressive as the behavior of the liberated prisoner who returns to the cave in Heidegger's fourth stage. Hannah Arendt's explanation exposes the inherent violence in coercive persuasion and its distinct break from truth; in fact, she does not even think that it is the work of the philosopher to persuade others about how they ought to lead their lives: "…persuasion does not come from truth, it comes from opinions; and only persuasion reckons and knows how to deal with the multitude. To Plato persuading the multitude means forcing upon its multiple opinions one's own opinion; thus persuasion is not the opposite of rule by violence, it is only another form of it" (Arendt, 13). Socrates' method may have been useful for his pupils but hardly for himself at his trial, for he neither won his trial nor made any effort to escape his death sentence, as many had advised him to do. Nevertheless, Socrates held that because he knew nothing of what lay beyond death, life after death could not be definitively cast as an evil thing. In his dignified and unwavering position, the philosopher became symbolic both as a martyr and an uneasy reminder of the potential violence that lies beneath the conversation between politics and philosophy – in which he, a questioner, rather than a coercive proselytizer, becomes a victim.

What the court did not ultimately recognize was that Socrates ever sought to impose any of his wisdom upon the citizens of Athens; he merely desired to improve the state of his beloved city. As Arendt states, the "polis did not understand that Socrates did not claim to be a *sophos*, a wise man" (Arendt, 11). Indeed, the court had already predetermined their position in regard to Socrates' guilt; no manner of defense or pleading on Socrates' part could alter the court's agenda to condemn him. The legal process of the court was a convenient formality; it was a legitimate way to silence permanently the gadfly of the State. Arendt captures impeccably this seemingly inevitable "disconnect" in the following passage:

> As soon as the philosopher submitted his truth, the reflection of the eternal, to the polis, it became immediately an opinion among opinions. It lost its distinguishing quality, for there is no visible hallmark which marks off truth from opinion. It is as though the moment the eternal is brought into the midst of men it becomes temporal, so that the very discussion of it with others already threatens the existence of the realm in which the lovers of wisdom move. (Arendt, 12)

In this description of the philosopher in the polis, however, she does not merely think of Socrates, but also of Heidegger, for we see that the notion of unhiddenness returns. In Socrates' trial, the philosopher, upon returning to the cave, attempts to communicate with the cave dwellers, but he finds that they scorn him and wish his death. However, the philosopher's truth becomes only another variation of unhiddenness, providing no distinguishing quality in the sea of opinions. In the obscurity of the cave's reality, as Arendt shows, the entire realm of philosophy is threatened when the philsopher is brought back into the shadows. But what exactly, according to Arendt, threatens the philosopher's existence and his love of the eternal? It is precisely the manner in which the philosopher's way of understanding is received by the cave dwellers. They perceive the philosopher's truth to be colored by his desire for power—a wish to control and impose upon others by means of his own truth. Thus, this perception, intertwined with violence and competitive views of reality, can only end in violence.

The Philosopher's Nonviolence:

The manner in which Socrates behaved in the public eye as a philosopher was very much in line with the path of non-violence; he sought truth and virtue as a method of constant self-improvement, which in its sharing of its own problems affects others, and yet he never endeavored to indoctrinate any of his pupils, much less accept any monetary compensation for his wisdom like the early Greek sophists. Indeed, when the Oracle of Delphi claimed that there was no man wiser than Socrates, the philosopher did not understand, and he sought to discover

the meaning behind the god's statement (Plato, *Trial* 22-23). Socrates examined many a rank of reputable and wise men, yet he found that they truly knew nothing at all: "I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better" (Plato, *Trial* 23). Throughout his search, and indeed throughout his life, Socrates maintained that he "neither knows nor think that he knows" (ibid). It is this latter statement in particular that differentiates him from Heidegger's philosopher who returns to the cave, as it differentiates him from the early sophists. It is here that one can place a dividing line between the Socratic philosopher and the tyrant. There is a sense of humility, humor and respect for each Athenian youth that places Socrates among the first great proponents of nonviolence, long before celebrated modern leaders of nonviolent movements, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi. Nowhere is his spirit of nonviolence more poignant than in *Crito*, where Socrates shows no malice towards his persecutors:

> "[Socrates]: Are we to say that we are never intentionally to do wrong…is doing wrong always evil and dishonorable…? …are we to rest assured, in spite of the opinion of the many, and in spite of consequences whether better or worse, of the truth of what was then said, that injustice is always an evil and dishonor to him who acts unjustly? Shall we affirm that?
> [Crito]: Yes.
> Soc: Then we must do no wrong?
> Cr: Certainly not.
> Soc: Nor when injured injure in return, as the many imagine; for we must injure no one at all?
> Cr: Clearly not.
> Soc: Again, Crito, may we do evil?
> Cr: Surely not, Socrates.
> Soc: And what of doing evil in return for evil, which is the morality of the many—is that just or not?
> Cr: Not just.
> Soc: For doing evil to another is the same as injuring him?
> Cr: Very true.
> Soc: Then we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to any one, whatever evil we may have suffered from him. But I would have you consider, Crito, whether you really mean what you are saying. For this opinion has never been held, and never will be held, by any considerable number of persons; and those

> who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ. Tell me, then, whether you agree with and assent to my first principle, that neither injury nor retaliation nor warding off evil by evil is ever right…
> Cr: You may proceed, for I have not changed my mind" (Plato, *Trial*, 49-50).

In this exchange, Socrates' ultimate truth, his unwavering stance for goodness and justice, becomes unmistakably clear. As Arendt explains, Socrates genuinely hoped for the goodness of Athens, attempting to "bring forth truth *not* by destroying *doxa* or opinion, but on the contrary by revealing *doxa* in its own truthfulness" (Arendt, Socrates 15). His role as the gadfly was never fueled by a political agenda or yearning for power; he simply desired to "make citizens more truthful" and more self-questioning. Ultimately, his dialectical tool was political; this manner of questioning himself and others was how he engaged in political life; it was "a give-and-take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality, the fruits of which could not be measured by the result of arriving at this or that general truth" (ibid). Through this exchange, therefore, there is hope that some virtuous deduction might be achieved, but, unfortunately, such a conclusion was not always realized by those who knew Socrates. Therefore, where Socrates's failure to awaken the desire for truth in others is an inalienable aspect of his own journey, Heidegger ensures that the philosopher's truth, above all, is disseminated.

<u>The Philosopher's Dilemma—Truth in Face of Oppression:</u>

The problems that arise for the nonviolent philosopher are twofold: the truly wise philosopher must, in some manner, experience the reality of the violent *doxa* of the historical community of his or her time (the weapon of this doxa is the law of the State) and the questionable value the peaceable philosopher offers to politicians. The manner in which the philosopher yields to the politics of his time foreground the importance of conscience, for if to

relent, it is preferable to do so by ways of the body, while it disastrous to sacrifice one's soul. We see this in Socrates' willingness to relinquish his physical life in order to uphold his individual virtues, just as the previous chapter explored a similar emphasis on conscience in the case of Henry David Thoreau, the 19th-century American author and philosopher.

As to the second dilemma, namely, the foundational question "whether conscience can exist in a secular society and play a role in secular politics" (Arendt, 22), every individual answer depends upon whether or not philosophy serves to impede action and to culminate in inactivity. In the eyes of governing men, what begins as a serious demand for ethical guidance in political conduct eventually separates into two opposed processes: philosophical questioning as contrasted with political execution, while the former is viewed as an impediment to the State and the latter—its express and highly laudable duty. This is why the State of Athens ultimately rejects the involvement of philosophy, for Socrates' questioning manner of life threatens the power of the State. Indeed, Arendt notes that Plato's earlier dialogues, written in the Socratic tradition, do not seek to offer a firm conclusion, and she acknowledges the dangerous outcome implicit in the philosopher's *destroying* opinions of others (Arendt, 25). If the job of a political body is to govern and to act in an effort to improve the welfare and function of society, then the constant presence of a gadfly creates an obstacle for the State. The philosophical questioning finds itself stalled, and yet it is at this point that societal progress is halted: "Truth therefore can destroy *doxa*; it can destroy the specific political reality of the citizens" (Arendt, 25). Even worse, in the philosopher's dialectical search for truth, opinion can be destroyed with no conclusive truth to stand in its place.

In Arendt's view, therefore, the philosopher who seeks truth is inherently in opposition to any form of government, as by the very manner of the philosophical path he or she avoids

imposing opinions upon others and would likewise logically oppose ruling or governing over them. The philosopher's difference is that "he remains always ready to endure the *pathos* of wonder and thereby avoids the dogmatism of mere opinion holders" (Arendt, 36). Yet this willingness to tolerate wonder, *thaumadzein*, cannot sustain a role of a political leadership, for the entire business of politics and governing are "identified and both considered to be a reflection of the wickedness of human nature" (Arendt, 37). But to keep philosophy relevant, philosophy cannot ignore a political role, and indeed politics can neither exist nor succeed without a philosophical foundation. In a divergence now from Heidegger, whose forceful "doctrine of truth" transforms philosophy into a violent weapon of oppression, and Arendt, who believes the philosopher ought to separate from directly engaging political affairs, we will now propose for the nonviolent philosopher an alternative solution in the form of art in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Three
Carnival as the Interior Form of Freedom: Bakhtin and Bulgakov

Mikhail Bulgakov's seminal text, *The Master and Margarita*, is a novel that has long been analyzed by scholars from a wide range of disciplines. Since its debut in 1967, the novel's critics have hailed its literary power, and yet it is a text that is arguably impossible to judge on any definitive basis; indeed, the work is as vast as the homeland of its author's native Russia. Nonetheless, a victim of Soviet literary repression, Mikhail Bulgakov weaves bold themes throughout his novel that possess significant correlations to his own position as a writer living under a totalitarian regime. Such conditions color his novel with a tone critical of Stalin's regime and pose the question: how does an author battle the forces of the state while remaining alive and yet adhering to his own creative vision? Inevitably, this question returns us to the philosopher in Plato's allegory, for the images of the cave emerge, albeit with subtlety and artistic evasiveness, through various settings and themes of *The Master and Margarita*. This thematic connection to Plato's cave needs to be analyzed prior to an examination of Bulgakov's life in relation to his text, his employment of carnivalesque (which corresponds to Bakhtin's famous theory) and, thus, the grave problems that surround the philosopher, who initiates an escape from Plato's cave, as well as a philosopher who may want to return to the repressive world of Stalinist Russia.

Thus, the covert employment of the cave allegory in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* requires explication before we move on to the crucial notion of carnivalesque throughout the novel. There are three notable scenes in *The Master and Margarita* which establish the overtones of the cave. It is important to note that two of these three scenes come at the very beginning of Part One and Part Two, thereby presenting a cave-like setting whose

stifling atmosphere endures for the entirety of the novel unless it is dispelled by Woland and his travelling companions. The third scene concerns Woland's crucial decision about the fate of the Master and Margarita, a choice which cements his position as the novel's true philosopher.

The Master and Margarita begins with its first chapter entitled "Never Talk to Strangers," which immediately alludes to the looming arrival of a foreign and unwelcome visitor to the Moscow of Bulgakov's novel. Bulgakov paints the setting of the scene as an immensely stifling spring evening with darkness already on the horizon; the relentless heat and haze create an oppressive atmosphere for Berlioz and Bezdomny, two writers who soon find themselves in the presence of a mysterious and highly annoying stranger. Until his arrival, the writers are somewhat unnerved by the stifling and somewhat unreal atmosphere of the darkening city: "One hot spring evening, just as the sun was going down…Absolutely no one was to be seen…no one, it seemed, had the strength to breathe, when the sun had left Moscow scorched to a crisp and was collapsing in a dry haze…no one came out to walk under the lindens, or to sit down on a bench, and the path was deserted" (Bulgakov, 3). Here, the scene is starved of light, life and even a momentary escape from the suffocating atmosphere (comically reflected by the only paltry relief that Berlioz and Bezdomny can find at the refreshment stand: warm apricot juice). Indeed, the scene, in its desolate landscape and impending darkness, reflects the underground world of Plato's cave, in which the return of the disoriented philosopher is introduced through the annoying interference of the disobedient liberator Woland, whose eerie arrival results in a wholly outlandish encounter between him and the atheistic writers. Berlioz, who is representative of the State as an editor and critic, feels particularly strongly this uncanny sense of anxiety and terror – in fact, he has a premonition of sorts the moment Woland arrives in Moscow. It is no mistake that this encounter inevitably ends in Berlioz' death, an impending fate that foreshadows the

chaos and misrule of Part One that baffles the other bureaucratic and administrative figures of society and utterly shatters the normalcy of everyday life.

Part Two opens with a new character, a woman mentioned in the novel's title. We meet Margarita, who has absolutely everything in life and yet is undeniably miserable. Bulgakov describes her reality to be full of good fortune: she is beautiful and bright; has a doting husband who is kind and handsome; and she leads a wealthy lifestyle in a charming home. And yet, she is oppressed by this materiality of good fortune, and is miserable from her imprisonment in a life of comfortable monotony. Her only savior is the unhappy and unsuccessful Master, whose disappearance causes her to plummet into an everlasting bout of desperation for months. It is no coincidence that only on the very day that Woland and his retinue unleash chaos on the streets of Moscow does Margarita experience a reawakening through her dream of the Master. It is here where Plato's cave imagery becomes most apparent; the surreal environment of the cave itself is embodied by Margarita's dream, in which her seemingly happy reality is in fact represented by a shadowy and bleak world. Bulgakov describes the setting of her dream as coarse and hellish:

> Margarita had dreamed about an unfamiliar locale—a bleak and dismal place, under an overcast, early-spring sky. Beneath a cover of patchy clouds there was a flock of noiseless rooks. A rough bridge crossed a turbid, swollen stream. Dismal, scrubby, half-bare trees. A lone aspen, and beyond that, amidst trees and past a vegetable garden, was a log hut that could have been an outside kitchen, a bathhouse, or the devil knows what. The whole setting was so dead and dismal that it made you want to hang yourself on the aspen by the bridge. Not a breath of wind, not a cloud moving, not a living soul. A hellish place for a living being! (Bulgakov, 187)

Amid the cave-like imagery, Margarita's liberator, the Master, though weary and tattered, appears—the philosopher figure—*returns*, concurrently with Moscow's disarray, after being not only physically absent but also absent from her dreams. Almost immediately upon seeing the Master, Margarita, "choking in the dead air," wakes from her sleep, and her spirits are instantly

lifted as she is rejuvenated with hope. It is no surprise, then, that Azazello, one of Woland's retinue, comes to summon Margarita, beginning her journey out of the shadows.

In Woland's character, we realize Bulgakov's understanding of the nature of the true philosopher: such a figure must be expressly *disobedient*, a notion that is central and definitive to carnivalesque spirit of freedom, celebrated in the novel. In his disobedience, however, Woland is also ultimately an understanding figure, who does not seek to impose his philosophical views (we never actually know what they are), but rather acknowledges that light can only exist alongside the shadows. Woland, a disobedient eternal traveller, berates Levi Matvei, whose own conceited belief in his absolute goodness renders him somewhat ignorant if not discriminatory. Their brief verbal exchange focuses, in fact, upon the images of Plato's allegory and Levi's inability to function in the world of shadows is contrasted with Woland's unquestionable experience of directing his own journey between the shadows and the light: "After all, shadows are cast by things and people. Here is the shadow of my sword. But shadows also come from trees and from living things. Do you want to strip the earth of all trees and living things just because of your fantasy of enjoying naked light? You're stupid" (Bulgakov, 305).
Thus, when Woland speaks of shadows in the aforementioned passage, he speaks of the reality of things which cannot be ignored in favor of an idealized utopia, a so-called vision of truth that is, as we have stated in this thesis through Heidegger's notion of the returning philosopher, often imposed and turned to violence. In short, Woland's verbal duel with Levi Matvei alludes directly to the debates that arise from Plato's cave, in which the philosopher cannot despise the inhabitants of the cave, nor does he drag them by force in his efforts to vanquish the shadows. In fact, the cave cannot be abolished, as the loyal disciple Levi Matvei believes. Thus, Bulgakov brings his own fundamental belief to the perennial conversations surrounding Plato's allegory;

the philosopher who enters the cave cannot be an obedient thinker, for the shadows will defeat him; the philosopher must be a trickster who can play with light and darkness.

Bulgakov's own experience as a writer (and the complex genre what he chooses for his novelistic discourse) is thus intrinsically linked to Plato's cave and the question of liberation for the philosopher who moves between shadows and people imprisoned in this shadowy world. Starting from the mid 1920s, Bulgakov endured heavy creative limitations imposed by the state, though he remained free from any direct physical harm because of particular favor from Stalin. By the end of the New Economic Policy, all the major cultural figures had been scrutinized and attacked for promoting ideologies unaligned with those of the proletariat. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) disparaged Bulgakov, preventing him from leaving the country and publishing any works within Russia (Bushkovitch, 413-414). Although he was allowed to work at the Moscow Art Theatre (a piece of fortune viewed as particular goodwill from Stalin), Bulgakov nonetheless never received permission from the dictator for a visa to go abroad, despite his many letters and entreaties. As Lesley Milne observes, "[Bulgakov] had expressed fear that he would, to the end of his life, never see foreign lands, would be deprived of the 'higher literary education' of foreign travel; this fear had inculcated in him a 'prisoner's mentality'" (189). This fear inevitably found its way into the Master's character, a partially autobiographical character, whose hopes to travel abroad are never realized.

It is well documented that Bulgakov spent his last decade in internal turmoil. Even though Stalin favored the writer and granted him relative comfort in his post at the Moscow Art Theatre, the security of this job did not necessarily amount to artistic protection. Bulgakov encountered all sorts of barriers in publishing his plays and other works and ultimately focused his final efforts on perfecting his masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*. As a result, he

suffered financially, fearing throughout that he might "turn into a factory producing cigarette lighters." This fear makes implicit reference to the machine-like writers of the Soviet literary community during the 1930s. But Bulgakov was steadfast in his dedication to Russian literary culture; his "chosen path of 'brilliant work' had led him to that other symbol of Soviet literature in the 1930s: the great glow of the sunset novel was locked away in 'the darkness of the drawer'"(Milne, 225). His terminal illness, as well as the discouragement that resulted from doubting that his "sunset novel" would ever be published for the Russian people, prevented him from finishing the work. He died in March of 1940.

Challenging the game of literary tiptoe played by the rule-abiding writers of his time, Bulgakov abolishes traditional Russian narrative style and offers a refreshing, often hysterically funny, method of expressing creative freedom. Through elements of the carnivalesque, among others, the novel dispels the fetters of bureaucratic repression and upsets the passive order of society. This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, with particular attention to the novel's carnivalesque elements, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, and will explore thereby his dynamic critique of the Stalinist regime. As Bulgakov's work is undeniably a product of the social and political environments of his time, inextricably linked to the very essence of the writer's everyday existence, I will also try to provide a condensed explanation of the existential turmoil under Stalin's regime. By so doing, the study of the carnivalesque will be rooted in a foundation of necessity; that is, the literary technique of carnivalesque will be understood as emerging alongside an imposed system of oppression or, in other words, the carnival becomes yet another startling instance of non-violent resistance against the oppressive shadows of the cave.

Prior to this analysis of the carnivalesque as such, however, it is necessary to examine the encounter between the philosopher and the state itself, found in the second layer of Bulgakov's novel—a novel within the novel—written by his author-protagonist, the Master. In the Master's imagined Jerusalem, these two opposing forces are introduced through the meeting between the Christ-like Yeshua Ha-Nozri and the bureaucratic middleman Pontius Pilate. Thus, along with the explosive satire and laughter ensured by Woland and his retinue in Stalin's Moscow, the novel includes, as a central focus, a most grave and radical interpretation not only of Christ's death at the hands of the Roman government (as well as through the machinations of the traditional religious establishments of his time), but also of the inevitable reality of the philosopher being misunderstood by the very masses he endeavors to teach.

Yeshua emerges as a thoroughly awkward and, at times, even ridiculous figure, much like the philosopher in Plato's cave. Drastically contrasted with the severe and world-weary Pilate, the gentle Yeshua seems altogether out of place when interacting with the procurator of Judea. For instance, Pilate shows that there is absolutely no room for Yeshua's juvenile wisdom, not matter (and indeed in spite of) how compassionately it is communicated. Yeshua, in response to Pilate's annoyance at his repeated use of the phrase "good people," states that certainly everyone is good—that "'there are no evil people in the world'" (Bulgakov, 20). Pilate merely laughs at such foolishness and is not moved, as is indicated by his prompt condemnation of Yeshua.

It appears that Yeshua, in a single statement, communicates a simple truth that is eternally difficult for those consumed by the shadows of the cave to realize: "'I said that every kind of power is a form of violence against people and that there will come a time when neither the power of the Caesars, nor any other kind of power will exist. Man will enter the kingdom of truth and justice, where no such power will be necessary'" (Bulgakov, 22). Yeshua is not so

much indisputably convinced (for such conviction is dangerous) as he is hopeful, and naively so, that this understanding—this light—is achievable for human beings. Once they lift their heads to the light, the shackles that ensnare them in Power's chains suddenly crumble. Yet Pilate, incorrectly understanding this claim as a literal threat to Caesar's regime, swells with coarse loathing and fear for his own survival were he to show any mercy, and Yeshua's death sentence for his criminal teaching is consequently ensured.

Despite having made no critical impression on Pilate, Yeshua nevertheless awakens in him, if only fleetingly, moments of clarity through simple factual truths that are humble and practical—not necessarily overtly philosophical. Therefore, in contrast to Heidegger's emphasis on the violence associated with the philosopher's fight for truth, Bulgakov's (and his Master's) emphasis on the liberating aura surrounding the philosopher is so sincerely unconditional that it is therapeutic. In fact, in a rare moment, Yeshua's presence and frank words are capable of having a poignant, softening effect on Pilate. Yeshua first, with acute perception, challenges Pilate's understanding of himself and offers him a simple, almost commonplace, path of escape:

> I would advise you, Hegemon, to leave the palace for a short while and take a stroll…The walk would do you a lot of good, and I would be happy to accompany you…I would be especially happy to share them [my ideas] with you since you strike me as being a very intelligent man…The trouble is…that you are too isolated and have lost all faith in people…Your life is impoverished, Hegemon. (Bulgakov, 18)

His words, simple and kind, cure, however briefly, the procurator's persistent headaches, as Yeshua's speech brings about an atmosphere of new lightness and acceptance. The transformative powers of Yeshua are immediately reflected in Pilate's eyes, a most truthful indicator of one's feelings: "Pilate looked probingly at the prisoner from beneath his brows, and his eyes, no longer dull, gave off their familiar sparkle" (ibid). The effects of Yeshua's speech are not limited merely to the person with whom he speaks. The oafish and cruel secretary,

recording the conversation between Yeshua and Pilate, abandons his normal impassive comportment in a sudden comical reaction as he, aghast, "turned deathly pale" at Yeshua's frank (yet completely remarkable given the context) and sympathetic words. The effects extend even to nature as Bulgakov comments on the surrounding scene, describing a bird's ascent into the sky: "The swallow's wings whirred above the Hegemon's head, the bird made a dash for the basin of the fountain and flew out into freedom" (21). In contrast to these ephemeral liberating moments, Yeshua's ability to invoke lucidity though his humility also causes Pilate pain. In fact, Yeshua possesses all the wise and therapeutic speech reminiscent of the holy fool, an archetypal character embodied by Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, likely an influential source for Bulgakov (Milne, 231-232). Yeshua is also able to read with acute accuracy Pilate's inner turmoil and, in his declarations of truth, he ascends to a position of influence over Pilate, causing him bodily distress merely with his spoken word. After Yeshua addresses Pilate with, 'Hegemon, the temple of the old faith will fall and a new temple of truth will be created,' Pilate retaliates with his famous question: 'What is truth?' At this pointed question, Pilate becomes fatigued and puzzled, and he envisions a cup of poison to terminate his current misery. His head is overcome with unearthly pain, exacerbated by the scorching heat of Nisan. Thus, Yeshua's words evoke a spiritual yearning within the procurator, but such human emotion belies his duty to Caesar's uncompromising regime. It can be said that Pilate's pain represents an intruding conscience, one that is unwelcome under the prevailing rule. In short, Yeshua's honest and practical words are liberating in the prevalent atmosphere of repression and strain in Pilate's court, and yet, in spite of Yeshua's non-threatening nature, it is precisely because of his idiosyncrasies that the potential to upset the balance of Caesar's regime emerges—not because of Yeshua himself, but rather because of how his words are understood.

Consequently, as far as Yeshua's teaching is concerned, his uttered words result in a host of misinterpretations that endanger the philosopher. Yeshua is entirely aware of this flawed understanding even by the most loyal of his disciples, introduced by the figure Levi Matvei, who follows him and scribbles away at his every word. Yeshua explains to Pilate that he desired no such disciple and that he has begged Levi Matvei to stop the distortion of his words: "There's someone who follows, follows me around everywhere, always writing on a goatskin parchment. And once I happened to see the parchment and was aghast. Absolutely nothing that was written there did I ever say. I begged him, "For God's sake burn your parchment!" But he snatched it out of my hands and ran away" (Bulgakov, 16). Indeed, Yeshua suspects that Levi Matvei will not be the last to misconstrue his teaching, and yet his compassion does not allow him to exert any force to stop the very act that threatens his life. As indicated by Yeshua's words, he must simply accept this reality: "Those good people…are ignorant and have muddled what I said. In fact, I'm beginning to fear that this confusion will go on for a long time. And all because he writes down what I said incorrectly" (ibid). To be sure, Yeshua refers to the blindly injudicious act of turning his non-coercive teachings into a doctrine imbued with violent overtones, which, by committing this misinterpretation and inscribing it in the written word (and thus into a material document that later on cannot be explained or disputed), perpetuates the cyclical undertaking by his ever-present disciple. In Bulgakov, then, the philosopher only becomes progressively more vulnerable as his following of passionately compliant and obstinate followers increases and their loyal, servile and yet oppressive self-righteousness swells.

In fact, the very emphasis of *The Master and Margarita* centers upon this trouble with the ostensibly obedient disciple, for in the narrative world of the novel obedience to the state or to *any* teaching is a sign of weak-mindedness and ignorance. This notion of the blindly dutiful

disciple emerges with further clarity when compared to its rebellious opposite, represented by the character of Woland, whose thoughts and actions are distinctly his own. Levi Matvei, who is always a follower, appears in Moscow to present a rather pathetic foil to Woland, an unruly and otherworldly angel, who falls much more closely in line with the blissful freedom surroundng Yeshua precisely because of Woland's spirit of noncompliance. Thus, as far as the world of *The Master and Margarita* is concerned, upon this earth the liberating forces of Yeshua are only implemented through non-compliant citizens—that is, those who separate themselves from the state and its prevailing ideologies. Therefore, all the compliant children of the state, who have inherited and accepted obediently the "liberating" ideology of Marxism-Leninism in Bulgakov's Soviet Union, are portrayed in his novel as the very people who, by way of their *own* enslavement, disseminate slavery as well as the cancerous corruption that cripples society.

It becomes clear, then, that apart from Yeshua the true philosophers of Bulgakov's novel are in fact Woland and his troupe—a totally insubordinate group that descends into the human world and upsets the normality of everyday Moscow. A strange collection of individuals, *what* they are becomes less important insofar as they are distinctly disobedient and subordinate to no one. Never warranting any label of "disciples," this group of unruly artists-jesters harbors a truth that is all their own, unaffected by the foolish and apathetic people who are caught in the bureaucratic and societal machine. That they are aware of the light is also so unmistakably Platonic, for it is in one of the final scenes of Bulgakov's novel where we truly gain a lucid understanding of the allegory of the cave. As Woland and his retinue prepare to ascend from the city enveloped in fog and thick shadows, a clearly Platonic reference, the disciple Levi Matvei (for whom Woland harbors extreme distaste) comes to send a message from the enlightened philosopher Yeshua. Levi Matvei relays to Woland that the Master "has not earned light, he has

earned peace" (Bulgakov, 305). It is perhaps one of the most important moments in Bulgakov's novel that the Master is not "dragged" into the light, but rather, assisted by Woland and his companions, he goes to his path of peace while they ascend higher. That "he does not deserve light" serves as an intentional dialogue with Plato, and it is significant that in leaving the cave, nobody is coerced towards the light. Indeed, though the Master and Margarita were killed and taken from the city, they have "earned peace" in that they move not towards the light but towards nature and art, where their path becomes distinctly personal and explorative, for the Master and Margarita might have a chance to move towards the light of their own accord.

In short, the notion of the liberating philosopher who returns to the cave, such as the Master returning from the mental institution or Woland with his troupe returning to Moscow, is presented by Bulgakov as an intentional carnival—the only public space where discipleship calls for rebellion and misrule as a means of undermining the confines of the cave. Indeed, the elements of carnival need to be traced back to Menippean satire, which can be classified by its "strong elements of laughter…combined with freedom of philosophical and literary invention...designed to create exceptional situations in which philosophical ideas could be provoked and tested" (Milne, 229). It is not difficult to apply such a theory to Bulgakov's novel, as its elements of carnival are bold and definitive of the work. However, the precise moments in which these philosophical ideas are tested are more intricate than a cursory reading could parse. To be able to differentiate the various elements of the carnivalesque, we must first gain a better understanding of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "carnivalization" in literature as well as the origins of the carnival itself. In other words, this chapter will show that Bulgakov and Bakhtin, both of them unwilling citizens of Stalinist Russia, understand the liberating act of the philosopher in society as impossible without laughter and misrule, for these create a real, liberating joy, not

externally imposed but emerging from the inner, awakening, insubordinate self. It is for this reason that the history of carnival will serve as the precise backdrop for a further analysis of the applicability of Bakhtin's insight to Bulgakov's understanding of the only liberating movement possible for Soviet Russia.

The carnival arose as a "syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort," complex and chameleonic in its many forms, which are based upon the particular people and period of celebration (Bakhtin, "Carnival" 250). Its expression through literature is a hopeful, though incomplete, medium for its ability to apply an element of permanence and to contain, if only on the written page, what is an explosive and extravagant festivity when practiced. However, of all arts, literature is deemed as perhaps most apt to express the "language of carnival," as Bakhtin describes it, and its root in the "primordial order and thinking of man, its development under conditions of class society, its extraordinary life force and undying fascination" (ibid). First and foremost, all the conventions of social identification, such as holiness, veneration, fear, decorum, etc., are abolished in the carnival, and the socio-hierarchical inequality among people, or any discrimination for that matter, is shattered (Bakhtin, "Carnival" 251). There are no spectators or performers in the carnival. Rather, all players exist in the space of the carnival as a collective organism, each acting both individually and contributing to the greater spectacle, where standards of normality are nonexistent., and it is for this reason that all the major elements of the carnival function as liberating forces in Bulgakov's literary technique.

First, we see this destruction of normalcy and rigid social structure in the presence of Woland, who is recognized by the reader early on to be Satan because of his "foreign" appearance: "He was dressed in an expensive gray suit and wore foreign made shoes. A gray beret was cocked rakishly over his ear…Slightly crooked mouth…Right eye black, left—for

some reason, green. Black eyebrows, but one was higher than the other. In a word—a foreigner" (Bulgakov, 6). Woland, a distinctly non-Russian name, upsets two main elements of normalcy. After the revolution, in the 1920s to 1930s, during which Bulgakov was writing *The Master and Margarita*, Russia began its destruction of the relationship between church and state, spreading heavy anti-religious propaganda and persecuting religious officials. Woland rejects present day atheism and insists upon Jesus' existence, despite the writer, Berlioz, and the poet Bezdomny's objections that their society is liberated in order to be atheistic. Prior to the appearance of Woland, Berlioz, playing the role of the so-called enlightened and educated philosopher, criticizes Bezdomny's "anti-religious" poem for its realistic portrayal of Jesus; the poet had painted Christ as a sinister character, full of human faults that proved much too life-like. Berlioz disregards the question of Jesus as good or bad, but rather wishes to prove the mythical nature of all stories concerning Jesus. He continues to reject Kant's sixth constructed proof of Jesus, which Woland eagerly agrees with, even to the point of concurring with Berlioz's poorly-timed joke that Kant ought be to sent to Solovki, a Russian prison camp, for such a jest.

To be sure, Woland's comical tone sways the readers to his side, allowing them to enjoy all the devilish tricks and banter he employs throughout the narrative. Woland's second rejection of the everyday reality of Soviet Russia comes in his "seventh proof," a confirmation that man's fate lies not in his own will but rather in that of a greater power. Woland accurately, of course, prophesies Berlioz's impending death, where Berlioz is to be beheaded by a streetcar in mere moments after their conversation. From this moment onward, Bulgakov's narrative becomes rife with confusion for its characters and bristles with fun as comedic entertainment for the reader; reality has been turned on its head and bouts of insanity strike those who staunchly reject Woland's world. Woland is able not only to abolish his status as an alien or foreigner by

challenging the intellectual Bezdomny and Berlioz; he also defies their very understanding of the universe that surrounds them through his fearsome predictions and bold assertions as well as the reality of unrestrained humor that he and his companions generate.

A ceremonial aspect of the carnival comes in its "*mock crowning* and subsequent *de-crowning of the king of carnival.*" Bakhtin describes the act of crowning and de-crowning as an "ambivalent ritual expressing the inevitability and creativity of change and renewal, the *jolly relativity* of every system and order…All carnivalistic symbols include within themselves the perspective of negation (death), or its opposite. Birth is fraught with death, and death is fraught with birth" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 102). This ceremonial aspect of the carnival, as well as the event of the carnival itself with violence at its center, is set by Bulgakov not among the living. The violence is played out among the dead, for it is nowhere more prominent than in Bulgakov's imaginative chapter of Satan's grand ball, where death and life indeed unite in a grand celebration. As the rules of the carnival demand, Margarita is crowned queen of the ball and takes to the supernatural world of Woland and his entourage almost seamlessly. If the events of Margarita's arrival at Woland's residence (including a magical cream that turns her into a witch) do not constitute carnival sufficiently, then the rituals held both prior to and during the ball render the process of crowning Margarita a bizarre amalgam of comedic diablerie and chilling imagery. As Margarita undergoes her transformation into Queen Margot, her crowning is treated with utmost respect for the evening, representing a new birth. But as Bakhtin states, birth is countered with death, and, as noted above, Woland's depraved ball welcomes only those who have died (the deceased arrive in coffins) and who have committed unspeakable crimes during their lifetimes. It seems that the grand ball is rife with contradictions, as the frightening attendees are all perfectly likeable, presentable, and deferential to Queen Margot. Bulgakov

describes the first guest's entrance as follows: "There was a loud crash in the enormous fireplace…and out popped a gallows with a dangling corpse half turned to dust. This dust shook itself off the noose, fell to the ground, and out jumped a handsome black-haired fellow in tails and patent-leather shoes" (Bulgakov, 226). The gory images of the dead and wicked are countered by the humorous antics of Woland's retinue: Behemoth, an oversized, talking black cat who often plays the comedic fool, and Korovyov, a more tactful and eloquent companion than the foolhardy cat. Both welcome the guests with eager delight as Margarita strains to greet her fawning visitors. A particularly interesting aspect of this ritual is Margarita's inability to endure the death that surrounds her; she tires after greeting so many deceased guests and needs to be rejuvenated. Hella, another of Woland's servants, washes her in blood, just as she had done earlier to prepare Margarita. In this too, normalcy is suspended. What is normally understood as gruesome and off-putting is now used as a revitalizing life-force. Such a reversal is only permissible in the state of carnival and is true to the ambivalent nature of carnival imagery, representing both life and death.

As Bakhtin explains, the coronation element of the carnival is absolutely inseparable from the de-crowning stage, and it is exactly this de-crowning that dictates the transitory nature of carnival in that the authority it grants is inevitably and ultimately stripped away. Bakhtin describes this specific process of discrowning as follows: "the ceremonial of the ritual of discrowning is counterposed to the ritual of coronation: the regal vestments are stripped from the discrownee, his crown is taken off, the remaining symbols of authority are removed, and he is ridiculed and beaten" (Bakhtin, 103). These particular elements of discrowning do not explicitly form Margarita's removal from authority, though the variation of her conditions can be applied to Bakhtin's theory. The splendor of the grand ball effortlessly disappears and all is returned to

normal; Margarita no longer possesses great authority and again returns to her somewhat timid and respectful behavior toward Woland. Though she is not beaten or ridiculed, she is disrobed (she feels her nakedness after the carnival ends) and thus tested by Woland. The humiliation that would have resulted from a beating or ridicule comes in her subsequent feeling of loss and resentment. Margarita had expected to be reunited with the Master, Bulgakov's semi-autobiographical hero who composes the tale of Yeshua and Pontius Pilate. The Master, out of fear of the state, had stopped fighting and writing: he had fled from his basement apartment and entered an insane asylum after his work had been denied publication. Since Margarita's participation in Woland's carnival was aimed at serving the Master, she is dejected. Bulgakov describes her indignant disposition in the following way: "Black anguish immediately threatened to engulf Margarita's heart. She felt cheated. No one, it seemed, had any intention of rewarding her for her services at the ball, nor did they wish to stop her from leaving" (Bulgakov, 240). Her spite thus functions as the ritualistic derision incurred by the discrownee. However, true to the ever-shifting nature of carnival, the atmosphere immediately changes when Woland reacts to Margarita's respectful departure. Woland exclaims: "'Bravo! That's the way! We've been testing you. Never ask for anything! Not ever, not for anything, especially from someone who's more powerful than you are. They will offer and grant everything themselves. Sit down, proud woman" (Bulgakov, 214). In this passive dialectical power struggle, which is always a play-acting, it is important to note that Woland is perpetually the ringleader of all diablerie and that he holds ultimate control. This is contradictory to the carnivalesque theme of destroying *all* social hierarchy, but notwithstanding this, it is indisputable that Woland abolishes the conventional hierarchy of the *everyday*.

The central agent in these reversals is the accompanying laughter, a "logical" product of the topsy-turvy world of carnival. While carnivalistic laugher is "itself deeply ambivalent" and connected to "ritual laughter," the act of mocking higher powers is seen in a rejuvenating light, as the symbol of authority dies in laughter and is reborn from it as well. Moreover, laughter embodies the "very process of change." Bakhtin describes the two poles of laughter: "In the act of carnival, laughter, death and rebirth, negation (ridicule) and affirmation (joyful laughter) are combined. Thus, the laughter is "profoundly ideological and universal" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 104). In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin comments further on the history and essence of laughter where his discussion of historical laughter's occupancy of both low and high status in literature is of particular relevance to the carnival's ambivalent nature in Bulgakov.

Historically, in seventeenth century European Renaissance literature, laughter was not yet "a universal, philosophical form," where "that which is important and essential could not be comical." Ultimately, "the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 67). However, the exact opposite was said to be true of laughter in the theories that stemmed from ancient sources. Bakhtin describes laughter in the "Hippocratic novel" as a therapeutic power: "laughter…had a philosophical character, being directed at the life of man and at all the vain fears and hopes related to the gods and to life after death. Democritus here made of his laughter a whole philosophy, a certain spiritual premise of a man who has attained virility" (ibid).

While laughter does not serve merely one clearly identifiable purpose in Bulgakov's novel, nor does it hover near only one of the aforementioned theoretical poles, it does function as a form of inner liberation and as a joyful complement to the absurdities of Woland's world. Satires indeed do better to illuminate truth and maturity of philosophical or existential thought.

To be sure, a variety of themes within *The Master and Margarita* can be understood in a satirical light, but Bulgakov's laughter is "free and festive," not "tight and satirical" (Milne, 261). However, I would like to emphasize the shifting nature of the carnival and to demonstrate humor's ability to disrupt or alter the atmosphere. Behemoth is known to be the main source of comedic relief in Bulgakov's novel as he often serves as a dramatic fool, making light of serious situations. For example, after all the havoc that Woland and his entourage have wreaked on Moscow, investigators are sent to search for the culprits of this black magic. They finally manage to break into apartment No. 50, where Behemoth and Korovyov are finishing their breakfast, and fire bullets at the large black cat, a self-proclaimed "ancient and inviolable creature." As Behemoth is struck by bullets, which, of course, do not actually wound him because of his supernatural composition, he embellishes his dramatic demise with poetic speech, producing an appreciative laugh from the reader. Bulgakov depicts the melodramatic scene as follows: "'It's all over,' said the cat in a weak voice, as he stretched out languidly in a pool of blood. 'Let me bid the earth farewell. O, Azazello, my friend!' groaned the cat, his blood streaming out. 'Where are you?...I was outmatched and you did not come to help me. You abandoned poor Behemoth, forsaking him for a glass of admittedly very fine brandy!'"(Bulgakov, 291). The reader understands Behemoth's comical theatrics and continues to feel a somewhat delicious amusement in the cat's immediate revival upon taking a swig of kerosene, "the only thing that can save a mortally wounded cat" (ibid). It is important to note that the comedic antics occur as quickly as the scene progresses, reflecting the "very process of change" in Bakhtin's theory on laughter. Our laughter coincides with Behemoth's "death" and, quite literally, follows his kerosene-induced "rebirth."

Thus, for all the serious philosophical and theological themes associated with this meeting between the philosopher and the state, the carnivalistic element joins the two fictional worlds of the novel—both Moscow and Jerusalem are equally unbalanced by these intrusions. Yeshua, in his earnest kindness and forgiving disposition, is capable of undoing the order seen within Pontius Pilate's court. While not comparable to the blatant display of diablerie that often characterizes carnival, such as Bulgakov's chapter on Satan's grand ball, the Master's story of Pilate and Yeshua poses an even more effective role reversal. While Yeshua does not concretely resemble the biblical Jesus Christ, Yeshua's image nonetheless recalls the figure of a peaceful martyr. The story of Pontius Pilate and Yeshua then can be likened to countless instances of the arrested and tormented people during the Stalin purges, where innocent figures were labeled as counter-revolutionaries and enemies of the state. It is in seemingly hopeless situations such as these that the individual seeks to reclaim agency through a distinctly personal phenomenon: laughter. Laughter can neither be imposed nor unnaturally produced; it is indeed a marvel that is ultimately inexplicable – "an interior form of truth", as Bakhtin called it in his work on the carnivalesque:

> Laughter is essentially not an external but an interior form of truth; it cannot be transformed into seriousness without destroying and distorting the very contents of the truth it unveils. Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. It unveils the material bodily principle in its true meaning. Laughter opened men's eyes on that which is new, on the future …This is why laughter could never become an instrument to oppress andblind the people. It always remainded a free weapon in their hands. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 94).

The meetings between Yeshua and Pilate generate little laughter, but they are carnivalesque; they awaken the spirit of the biblical text not because Bukgakov's pages are obedient followers of the Gospel; the spirit of joy lives in these pages because the story, like its carnivalesque heroes, is

disobedient and irreverent and, because of this, it partakes in the liberating spirit of the carnival. Bulgakov's humor, his rebellion against dogma, be it ideological or religious, liberates without violence in the sense that it is able to provide a window of relief, even if it is but a fleeting reprieve, to both the writer and his reader through his creative work. And when the immediate historical period which the story parodies passes out of existence, the story and its humor continue their carnival-like life of civil and religious disobedience.

Indeed, as Lesley Milne claims, "the full significance of laughter as a liberating agent only emerges in conditions of ideological repression and the laughter in *The Master and Margarita* partakes of this enhanced significance, generated by intellectual freedom and courage" (Milne, 260). *The Master and Margarita* is a testament to the existential conflict that arises when the writer, whose purpose is often justified by his or her ability to publish ideas, opinions, and stories, encounters the ultimate obstruction: the imposed limitations on his or her creative liberties, and, thus, the conflict between a talented visionary and the enchained citizens of a repressed country begins. There seem to be no winners in this conflict, and it might be that Bulgakov, like his Master, "suffered much before death, and without regret he left the dark "mists of the earth, its swamps and rivers, with a lighter heart," giving himself over "into the hands of death" (Bulgakov 379). And yet the manuscripts did not burn and, after their writers, both Bulgakov and his Master, abandoned a virtuous battle for creative freedom (Bulgakov, 357), their manuscripts were read with great interest, and their works, rather than the authors themselves, had the power to bring freedom and solace to other places where writers seemed to have lost the battle. For *The Master and Margarita* is a text that is fettered by neither time nor place. Its celebratory and free-flowing elements of carnival, precisely because of their unrealistic nature, provide a boundless outlet of joyous happiness even in the face of repression.

As Bakhtin noted in his works, "…laughter does not build stakes… laughter creates no dogmas and cannot be authoritarian, laughter is a sign not of fear, but of consciousness of strength…" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 95).

Conclusion

The compelling imagery of Plato's cave allegory presents the individual's process of achieving knowledge and of coming to liberation, yet, in the mind of the dialogue's readers, the progression of the events in the cave provides at least two distinctly different paths, in which the philosopher's choice will show whether he or she has truly grasped light or become illuminated in its most liberating and authentic form. These two paths—despotic imposition of ideology upon the masses, on the one hand, and authentic enlightenment, on the other—are also differentiated by the need to employ violence in the former path as a necessary part of the battle for enlightenment. As the 20th century and religious histories of the word have shown, tyranny's most formidable manifestations come from those people who believe they know the truth and who seek to liberate others into sharing their vision. Indeed, so "noble" a cause proves difficult to combat and when such ideologies takes the place of critical conscience, self-righteous and totalizing confidence parades as enlightenment and knowledge. It is against this principle of tyranny that the Socratic phrase "I know that I do not know" remains the foundation of the authentic philosopher's teaching. This means that the state of *aporia*, perplexity that is "without a way" or "without passage," endures. The ridiculous uncertainty and awkwardness of the philosopher never disappear from the picture.

In La Boétie, this irreconcilable uncertainty is evident in the strange disparity between his life and his writing, where his adherence to a repressive monarchy, characteristic of his professional life, belied the very foundational principles of individual freedom in his treatise "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude." By contrast, Thoreau, in seeking inner freedom, chose the path of total isolation during his *Walden* years, himself only too aware of his incompatibility as a philosopher with the common person. His choice is not readily imitated, nor was it intended to be

understood by others as a guide to living. It is something that worked for Thoreau and remains a challenge, memory and measure when we ourselves are confronted with disillusionment and alienation from the contemporary world or when we aim to speak with confidence about American exceptionalism. It is perhaps in Thoreau that the spirit of nonviolent resistance (a concept that is seemingly contradictory) is most prominent in his strong mastery of self. Socrates' insistence on the overriding importance of being true to oneself in all actions finds in Thoreau the most ready understanding: the philosopher, for both, seeks to teach not through words but through example. Arendt shows this agreement with one's conscience to be a defining characteristic of the true philosopher and the foundation of ethics, and she cites Socrates, for whom "it is much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than *being one* to be in disagreement with myself" (Arendt, 21).

Certainly, Arendt's complexity and tortuous development of thought is closer to the spirit of Plato than Heidegger's philosophical certainty. Heidegger, in misinterpreting and insisting upon a fourth stage to Plato's cave allegory, errs in his attempts to impose his role as a philosopher upon the political world of human affairs. His unrepentant support of Nazism is a product of this grave error, and, as history has told us, this self-righteous defense, one with a "validating" philosophy of ideas, only grows more grim as it gains the staunch support of men who, knowing nothing about beholding light in its primordial form, too readily see and enjoy the image of themselves as philosophers. Therefore, Arendt's insistence that the philosopher should never be a politician, for all the impractical nature of this advice, remains a challenge to any philosopher who wants governmental security and desires the positive influences such security might provide human beings. And yet it seems that the philosopher must distance himself not only from the group but also from his own body in order to come truly into the light of

philosophy. We understand in Socrates' trial that he does not yield to his persecutors but rather looks to the realm of all that is valuable and important to the philosopher—the realm of the soul. It is merely his body and physical existence that is to be sacrificed, and, for Socrates, such physical surrender is of lesser importance. As Arendt shows, "the more a philosopher becomes a true philosopher, the more he will separate himself from his body" (Arendt, 28). Indeed, this is a notion we find most directly in the *Phaedo*, a dialogue filled with grief for the alienation the philosopher must experience if he is to truly embrace the nonviolent concept of "I know that I do not know." And yet this decision between action and inaction—between going back into the cave and remaining in the light—is one that, despite its pointed tensions, is perpetually in search of a new and more satisfying answer. And it is in the role of the writer and his literary fiction that we might find the most arresting solution. Certainly, the written word serves as an inquisitive spark that fuels the ascent from the cave. It provides a foundation from which an individual grows, yet the character of the individual actions that follow upon this newfound knowledge is ultimately the choice that the philosopher must make independently, and it is this essential problem that nevertheless endures with the passage of time.

In this uncertainty and awkwardness of the true philosopher in the everyday world, literature serves as a friend who, with open arms, accepts the writer and reader. Mario Vargas Llosa, one of the most prominent Latin American writers of the 20th century, describes the liberating possibilities within literature: "It is a reality where man can happily empty the obscure recesses of his spirit, giving free rein to his worst appetites, dreams and obsessions, to those demons that go hand in hand with the angels inside him, and which, if they were ever materialized, would make life impossible" (Llosa, 9). Perhaps without even realizing it, Llosa describes in this thought the very world and freeing nature of the carnivalesque—"those demons

that go hand in hand with the angels"—in which Bakhtin's view serves as a protector against the tyrannical liberators of Bulgakov's lifetime. To be sure, the carnivalesque functions as a healing force against the prevailing sociopolitical and hierarchical confines and is a world so powerfully portrayed by Bulgakov in *The Master and Margarita*. The rewriting of the Biblical story of Pontius Pilate as well as of Plato's cave allegory in the style of the carnivalesque causes the eternal jesters of Woland and his retinue to come to Stalin's Moscow as a new form of liberator—one who hails from the light. The cave-like imagery within the settings of Bulgakov's novel are subtle, but, with attentive reading, they create not only a rich parallel to Plato's eternal allegory but present also definitively original portrayal of the philosopher figure.

Under the tyranny of the new philosophers-ideologues, Bakhtin and Bulgakov hold to the reality of laughter and play as the only liberating force that truly awakens the freedom of the individual self. Laughter cannot be imposed; both externally and internally, it is distinctly individual or personal. Laughter cannot be argued with; it cannot be contained or repressed. And it is through laughter that an indescribable thread of truth runs free and infinite, and in its experience laughter holds the potential to turn one to the light. Sergei Averintsev, a Russian scholar, argues that this too is only a Utopia, "for its concept [is] born of extreme and consistent idealization." Nonetheless, how else can an individual approach a political, seemingly indisputable, utopian construct, one that promises prosperity and happiness yet whose execution is expressly in the hands of a tyrant, if not with equally powerful and, more importantly, hopeful carnivalesque laughter? What Averintsev misses is that the "idealized" laughter is no such utopia as those promised explicitly by 20th-century ideologies, because laughter acts not as a savior or liberator (indeed Bakhtin's theory does not claim any of these roles). Rather it provides the

individual with the opportunity, however temporary or imperfect, to reclaim his or her own personal freedom.

In the effort to catch some of the boundless nature of laughter and carnival, Bulgakov releases a mayhem of misrule in literature, showing thereby that fiction, in particular, for its many methods of interpretation, offers the carnivalesque as an apt medium of expression. Ultimately, the writer does not actually return to the cave in this life, nor does he ever seek to forcibly liberate the cave dwellers. However, as his works pass into the next life and, indeed, into others' lives, the writer-philosopher is able to return to the cave by way of his own words, a constant source of brightness that might compel the shackled prisoners to turn around of their own accord. Fictional literature is therefore nonviolent insofar as it does not use force in its arguments with the reader. The writer's work—his manuscript—thus provides an eternal opportunity in which others may behold and obtain some form of understanding in a manner that is distinctly their own. Therefore, Bulgakov's immortal phrase, "manuscripts don't burn," asks us to return bravely to the cave, in which literature serves as a ray of light that, one can only hope, might illuminate a long-deserted corner that houses a world of shadows. In these shadows the prisoners, unaware of their bondage, are entertained by illusory images, and yet the potential to turn around and face the light, under any hardship, remains nevertheless a hope and integral possibility of their own freedom.

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