



## The White Guard

*Mikhail Bulgakov, Michael Gleeny (Translator)*

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Drawing closely on Bulgakov's personal experiences of the horrors of civil war as a young doctor, "The White Guard" takes place in Kiev, 1918, a time of turmoil and suffocating uncertainty as the Bolsheviks, Socialists and Germans fight for control of the city. It tells the story of the Turbins, a once-wealthy Russian family, as they are forced to come to terms with revolution and a new regime.

## The White Guard Details

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### Kerry says

A trip to Kiev cannot be complete without a little Bulgakov. A museum dedicated to the master lies just off of St. Andrew's Descent, a cobblestone street passing from St. Sophia's cathedral down to the Dneiper. The museum is contained in House No. 13 where, at one time, Mikhail Bulgakov and his family lived. While "The White Guard" is not as widely known as "The Master and Margarita" (which Salman Rushdie drew upon heavily for "Midnight's Children"), it provides a better sense of Ukraine and, particularly, Kiev.

House No. 13 in Kiev provides the place, while 1918 and Ukrainian civil war provides the setting. The story is about the survival of the Turbin family in the midst of this upheaval. Bulgakov's writing is transcendent:

For many years before her death, in the house at No. 13 St. Alexei's Hill, little Elena, Alexei the eldest and baby Nikolka had grown up in the warmth of the tiled stove that burned in the dining-room. How often they had followed the story of Peter the Great in Holland, 'The Shipwright of Saardam', portrayed on its glowing hot dutch tiles; how often the clock had played its gavotte; and always towards the end of December there had been a smell of pine-needles and candles burning on evergreen branches.....But clocks are fortunately quite immortal, as immortal as the Shipwright of Saardam, and however bad the times might be, the tiled Dutch stove, like a rock of wisdom, was always there to radiate life and warmth. (p.10)

The tiled stove, upon which many political and apolitical messages are written, is nearly a character in its own right. The life it gives is not only comfort, but humor too:

Then printed [on the stove:] in capitals, in Nikolka's hand:  
I herby forbid the scribbling of nonsense on this stove. Any comrade found guilty of doing so will be shot and deprived of civil rights. Signed: Abraham Goldblatt,  
Ladies, Gentlemen's and Women's Tailor.  
Commissar, Podol District Committee.  
30th January 1918.

Bulgakov's mastery of these slices of life make this an ideal book for reading while in Kiev. The city comes alive with a personality that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Reading how things were, while seeing how things are makes both the past and the present striking.

This book has not only history, but action too. The stakes are incredibly high. Characters are shot, they are robbed; characters live, they die. The politics of the novel provide a roiling backdrop, though I do not think politics is the point. The intersection of politics and daily life, particularly when politics has brought war, is a fascinating topic and one that Bulgakov explores, but never in a heavy-handed manner. The political is merely backdrop to the personal:

Something had settled in Alexei's chest like a stone and he whistled as he breathed, drawing in through bared teeth a sticky, thin stream of air that barely penetrated to his lungs. He had long ago lost consciousness and neither saw nor understood what was going on around him. Elena stood and looked. The professor took her by the arm and whispered:  
'Go now, Elena Vasilievna, we'll do all there is to do.'

Elena obeyed and went out. But the professor did not do anything more. (p. 275)

This moment, to me, was perfect. Bulgakov has captured the essence of this type of situation. The only thing the professor could do for Alexei was to reassure Elena.

Bulgakov brilliantly sketches even minor characters. Outside of House No. 13, a war is raging. Several family members are involved and, in this way, the reader is provided a view of the wider world and the characters that inhabit it. Perhaps my favorite is this troubling scene in which the janitor, drafted into service as coroner, is helping Nikolka, the younger brother, find Colonel Nais-Turs, Nikolka's fallen comrade-in-arms.

Moving carefully in order not to slip on the floor, Fyodor grasped Nais-Turs by the head and pulled hard. A flat-chested, broad-hipped woman was lying face down across Nai's stomach. There was a cheap little comb in the hair at the back of her neck, glittering dully, like a fragment of glass. Without stopping what he was doing Fyodor deftly pulled it out, dropped it into the pocket of his apron and gripped NaiTurs under the armpits. As it was pulled out of the pile his head lolled back, his sharp, unshaven chin pointed upwards and one arm slipped from the janitor's grasp. (p.271)

Bulgakov keeps the plot taut and the reader engaged. This book requires little suspension of disbelief. The White Guard is realist, unlike the much more fanciful "The Master and Margarita." Bulgakov does, however, add a touch of the supernatural. And while the book is political enough to have been suppressed by Stalin, the question of which of the three sides fighting the war is "right" is never really posed, much less answered. The interesting questions all pertain to the individual and, more, to a family trying to survive a civil war. The primary loyalties are personal which, in Ukraine as elsewhere, reflects reality. The book is ambivalent toward political loyalties and the revolutions borne of having putting those loyalties before the personal. The author, as surely as the characters, must have had little enthusiasm for revolutionary politics.

In the end, perhaps the highest praise I can give is that it would be difficult to read "The White Guard" without becoming attached to the Turbin family. Perhaps, this, more than any overt politics, is why the novel was banned in the Stalinist Soviet Union.

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### **Bruno says**

Bulgakov coniuga abilmente romanzo storico e saga familiare narrando le vicende dei tre fratelli Turbin, la cui vita viene stravolta dai sanguinosi eventi di cui fu protagonista la Kiev degli anni 1918-20.

Sebbene l'elemento paranormale, che ha reso famoso Bulgakov ne Il Maestro e Margherita, faccia solo una breve comparsa, lo stile dell'autore è immediatamente riconoscibile.

Meravigliosa e unica la parte in cui Bulgakov descrive gli stati d'animo di Elena, Nikolka, Anjuta e Lariosik esclusivamente attraverso le posizioni delle lancette di un orologio!

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## Leah says

### **“Blood is cheap on those red fields...”**

It is 1918, and Kiev in the Ukraine is at the swirling centre of the forces unleashed by war and revolution. The three Turbin siblings live in the house of their recently deceased mother in the city. They are White Russians, still loyal to the Russian Tsar, hoping against hope that he may have escaped the Bolsheviks and be living still. But there are other factions too – the German Army have installed a puppet leader, the Hetman Skoropadsky, and the Ukrainian peasantry are on the march in a nationalist movement, under their leader Petlyura. This is the story of a few short days when the fate of the city seems up for grabs, and the lives of the Turbins, like so many in those turbulent times, are under constant threat.

*Great and terrible was the year of Our Lord 1918, of the Revolution the second. Its summer abundant with warmth and sun, its winter with snow, highest in its heaven stood two stars: the shepherds' star, eventide Venus; and Mars – quivering, red.*

I found the beginning of this book rather difficult because I had no idea who all the various factions and real-life characters were, nor what they were attempting to achieve. But I soon realised that in this I differed less from the fictional characters than I first thought. This is a book about confusion and betrayal, shifting allegiances, chaos and fear. Bulgakov takes a panoramic approach, following one character and then panning off to another. This gives it an episodic feel and adds to the sense of events moving too quickly for the people involved ever to fully grasp. The Turbins actually aren't in it a lot of the time, but they provide a thread for us to catch at in the maze, and a human side to the story for us to care about.

One of the early episodes tells the story of the soldier Victor, a friend of the Turbins, who with 39 companions is ordered to defend the city from the approaching forces of Petlyura. Ill-equipped and insufficiently clothed for the extreme cold, two of the men die of frostbite and the rest are lucky to survive. They achieve nothing. While reading this, I was simultaneously reading the beginning of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, where he talks of the mass mobilisation of workers and peasants into the Russian army to fight against Germany in WW1. His description of the ill-trained, poorly-equipped troops dying needlessly in vast numbers is chillingly similar and I found that each book lent verisimilitude to the other.

Although the Turbins are on the side of the Tsar, the book itself doesn't seem to take a political stance. If anything, it paints an equally despicable picture of all the various faction leaders, as cowards hiding behind the men they send carelessly to their deaths. As senior officers on all sides run into hiding, middle-ranking officers are left to decide whether to make a stand or disband their troops, many of them no more than young boys in cadet corps. It gives an only too credible feeling for the chaos in the city, for people not knowing what's happening, and for each new rumour spreading like wildfire. Amidst all this, we see odd glimpses of life continuing – boys out playing in the snow, workers making their way to their jobs, people shopping. Through the Turbin brothers, Nikolka and Alexei, we see the battle each man must individually face between fear and heroism, while Elena, their sister, must wait at home, praying for their safety.

In the gaps between scenes of extreme brutality, Bulgakov lets us glimpse his love for the city. He describes the streets his characters pass through, the alleyways they use to escape, the ancient cathedral, the huge statue of Saint Vladimir on the hill above the city. But we are never allowed to forget the approaching threat...

*But the brightest light of all was the white cross held by the gigantic statue of St Vladimir atop*

*Vladimir Hill. It could be seen from far, far away and often in summer, in thick black mist, amid the osier-beds and tortuous meanders of the age-old river, the boatmen would see it and by its light would steer their way to the City and its wharves. In winter the cross would glow through the dense black clouds, a frozen unmoving landmark towering above the gently sloping expanse of the eastern bank, whence two vast bridges were flung across the river. One, the ponderous Chain Bridge that led to the right-bank suburbs, the other high, slim and urgent as an arrow that carried the trains from where, far away, crouched another city, threatening and mysterious: Moscow.*

As the chaos worsens, so we see the atrocities that are never far from war – the criminals jumping on the lack of order to terrorise an already demoralised citizenry, the bodies left unidentified and unclaimed in the City's morgue, the wounded frightened to seek help for fear of capture. Not quite knowing who every faction was made it even more unsettling, though I wondered if Bulgakov's first readers would have known, and so might have read it differently.

A truly brilliant book that, while concentrating on one small city, gives a brutal and terrifyingly believable picture of the horrors unleashed in the wake of bloody revolution. And here we are, one hundred years later, with Moscow again invading the Ukraine – this troubled and divided territory still fighting what is essentially the same war...

*The snow would just melt, the green Ukrainian grass would grow again and weave its carpet over the earth... The gorgeous sunrises would come again... The air would shimmer with heat above the fields and no more traces of blood would remain. Blood is cheap on those red fields and no one would redeem it.*

*No one.*

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**Hesam Ghaeminejad says**

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**Janet says**

Bulgakov's elegant first novel about the unfolding of the October revolution in Kiev--referred to as The City in the novel--has been rereleased by the wonderful independent publisher Melville House this year, in the Michael Glenny translation. Outstanding. Told through multiple points of view, the book centers upon two days in the Russian Civil war, December 13 and 14, 1918, when the city of Kiev, up to then controlled by the Ukrainian Hetman Skoropadsky, a German puppet and ally of the Monarchist Russians, falls to the armies of Petlyura, a Ukrainian peasant nationalist, a figure of mystery and rumor. The enemy of the Whites, Petlyura's

troops especially target the Russian officers who have supported the corrupt Skoropadsky and the Russian imperialist presence.

As Faulkner said, the past is not over. It is not even past.

The heart of the novel is the family of the Turbins, Alexei, a doctor returning from WWI, his little brother Nikolai, 17 and a cadet at the Russian military academy, and their sister Elena, the muse of a circle of Alexei's officer friends, each quickly but masterfully drawn, as well as the Turbin's comic foil, Vasily Lisovich, known as Vasilisa (after the folk heroine Vasilisa the Beautiful) an almost Doestoyevskian idiot who is the Turbin's downstairs neighbor.

Admirably told, the novel reveals the hand of Bulgakov the dramatist as well as that of the prose artist. I especially admired the skill in passing the story from one point of view to another, the brilliant timing. The dreams and Alexei Turbin's delirium in a fever from typhus very much herald the arrival of the surrealist Master and Margarita, as well as recalling some of the more feverish moments of *The Magic Mountain*.

The *White Guard* beautifully portrays the chaos of a civil war, in which rumor is only contradicted by actual shooting, in which someone's giving you orders one minute and in the next, jumps on a train heading for Germany, or simply disappears. There is no clearcut 'good' or 'bad' in this book, except for loyalty itself. Although it describes the taking of Kiev from the White side, it shows that the real loyalty in this world lives in one's family (the Turbins) and friends (the officers), a total stranger who saves your life, or a superior who holds his ground in the face of a dissolving defense. Bulgakov, it was said, had a very happy home life growing up, and the affection and mutual aid of the three Turbins and their household definitely reflects that.

The prose work was published in 1925 as a magazine serial, but the magazine folded before the serial was complete. The popular play based on this story ran in Soviet Russia from 1926 to 1941--though the book did not appear until 1966. Stalin was said to have seen the play many times, and it probably saved Bulgakov's life. *The Master and Margarita* was far more politically questionable and never saw the light of day in Bulgakov's lifetime.

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### AvvαΦ says

Altro che romanzo minore, romanzo d'esordio bello ma che non eguaglia "Il Maestro e Margherita"! Io l'ho trovato un romanzo perfetto, nel perfetto stile unico di Bulgakov. Trattasi di un romanzo storico (le sorti della Rivoluzione russa vissute nell'estremo lembo dell'ex impero, Kiev, Ucraina), narrato in uno stile sempre cangiante, ora ironico, ora Gogolianamente onirico, spesso semplicemente realistico e tragico, come tragico fu il periodo che racconta e come è enunciato nel bellissimo e giustamente famoso incipit: *Grande fu, e terribile, l'anno 1918 dopo la nascita di Cristo, il secondo dall'inizio della rivoluzione. Fu ricco di sole in estate, ricco di neve in inverno, e due stelle stettero particolarmente alte nel cielo: la vespertina Venere, stella dei pastori, e il rosso, fremente Marte. Ma come frecce, negli anni di pace e negli anni di sangue, volavano i giorni, e i giovani Turbin non si erano accorti che nell'intenso gelo già era giunto il bianco, arruffato dicembre..* I protagonisti sono i tre fratelli Turbin, Elena, Nikolka - un cadetto militare - e Alekseij, il maggiore, medico militare in cui non è difficile scorgere lo stesso Bulgakov. Allo scoppiare della Rivoluzione si trovano orfani (il romanzo si apre con il funerale della madre che, a me pare, simboleggi anche la fine della Madre Patria russa), alle prese con l'orrore pubblico e privato che ogni rivoluzione porta con sé: Elena viene abbandonata dal marito, un ufficiale Bianco, che fugge all'estero, al seguito dello Stato

Maggiore, lasciandola al suo destino. Il fratello maggiore Aleksej si trova lontano, a combattere con i Bianchi. In quell'anno, il 1918, a Kiev si succedettero ben 14 o più prese di potere e capovolgimenti di regime, un in caos sanguinoso e in una girandola grottesca tra bianchi e bolscevichi, atamani e cosacchi, tedeschi e nazionalisti. Bulgakov visse questi eventi in prima persona, ne fa un resoconto preciso, cruento, descrivendo tanto i massacri di ex ufficiali bianchi che venivano cercati casa per casa dai bolscevichi, ammazzati a sciabolate per strada, come anche i pogrom contro gli ebrei messi in atto dai nazionalisti di Petljura. Il tono spesso ironico, onirico, sperimentale con tocchi di mistico, non tolgo nulla alla tragicità degli eventi. Stranamente il libro fu molto amato da Stalin, mi chiedo se ne abbia colto fino in fondo il senso, o forse lo colse e ci passò sopra, grazie alla fascinazione che Bulgakov, certo involontariamente, aveva sempre su di lui. Famosa la telefonata con cui lo tempestava spesso: «Ma davvero lei vuole andarsene all'estero? Le siamo venuti tanto a noia? Noi però dobbiamo vederci di persona, vorrei scambiare due parole a quattrocchi, le auguro per il momento ogni bene». P.S. Il genialmente sperimentale Bulgakov, non presta orecchio solo a Go'gol, ma omaggia anche la più pura tradizione narrativa russa. sì, sto parlando di Tolstoj, non solo viene espressamente citata "Guerra e pace", ma un personaggio, l'ussaro Naj che muore tragicamente mentre fa fuggire tutti i suoi cadetti, ha le caratteristiche di un altro ussaro, di Tolstoj in Guerra e Pace, e anche l'erre moscia, come Denisov. Mi è sembrato bello questo piccolo cameo con cui un giovane - all'epoca - scrittore, ha reso omaggio a un grande scrittore russo del passato.

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### **Ioannis Anastasiadis says**

Σε λ?γες μ?ρες συμπληρ?νονται εκατ? χρ?νια απ? την Οκτωβριαν? εργατικ? επαν?σταση (1917) που επακολο?θησε αυτ?ς της Φεβρουαριαν?ς των αστοδημοκρατων η οπο?α ε?χε ως αποτ?λεσμα την πτ?ση της Τσαρικ?ς Αυτοκρατορ?ας, την ?μεση κ αναπ?φευκτη παρα?τηση του Νικ?λαου Β κ τον τερματισμ? της δυναστε?ας των Ρομανοφ ?πειτα απ? 300 χρ?νια. Με την εγκατ?σταση κ την μετ?βαση της εξουσ?ας στα Σοβι?τ ως ?ργανα λα?κ?ς εξουσ?ας, την σταδιακ? κατ?ργηση παλι?ν οργ?νων και Διοικητικ?ν θεσμ?ν, την ?μεση εφαρμογ? των περ?φημων 'διαταγμ?των της Γης και της Ειρ?νης' δημιουργ?θηκε η εντ?πωση της προσδοκ?μενης Αλλαγ?ς. Τον Ιανου?ριο του 1918 ο Τρ?τσκι αναλαμβ?νει την αναδι?ρθρωση του Στρατο? κυρ?ως με την στρατολ?γηση εργατ?ν και χωρικ?ν -υποχρεωτικ? που οδ?γησε ακ?μη και στην παραδειγματικ? εκτ?λεση ελ?χιστων που αρν?θηκαν να συνεισφ?ρουν στην υπερ?σπιση της Ιδ?ας-. Και εγ?νετο ο Κ?κκινος Στρατ?ς.

Η αντ?σταση στο ν?ο εργατικ? καθεστ?ς του Λ?νιν, το ?ποιο αν?λθε στην εξουσ?α εν μια ιστορικ? νυκτι στην Πετρο?πολη, αρχ?νισε απ? την επομ?νη κι?λας ημ?ρα .Παλιο? μοναρχικο?, αντικαθεστωτικ?, η καταργηθε?σα Δουμ? με τα αστικ? πολιτικ? της κ?μματα, η απελθο?σα μεσα?α τ?ξη εναντι?θηκαν, εξεδ?λωσαν π?στη στην Προσωριν? Αστικ? Κυβ?ρνηση της Φεβρουαριαν?ς Επαν?στασης και η ?ναρξη εν?ς οδυνηρο? πολ?πλευρου Εμφυλ?ου Πολ?μου υπ? τις ευλογι?ς των Ευρωπα?κ?ν Δυν?μεων -που ανησυχο?σαν απ? την μερι? τους για την εξ?πλωση των σοσιαλιστικ?ν ιδε?ν- ε?ναι γεγον?ς. Απ?τοκο της ?νας ν?ος στρατ?ς, με διαφορετικ? χρωματισμ?, με διαφορετικ? επιδι?ξεις και διεκδικ?σεις αλλ? παρ?μοιες νοσηρ?ς ματαιοδοξ?ες, η Λευκ? Φρουρ?. "Ερυθ?ς Οφθαλμον αντ? Λευκο? Οφθαλμο?" για μια ακ?μη πολιτικ? κ ιδεολογικ? επικρ?τηση.

Δεκ?μβριος του 1918, βρισκ?μαστε στην παγωμ?νη κ ντυμ?νη στην καταχγι? Ουκραν?α, στην γεν?τειρα Π?λη του Μπουλγκακωφ, στο Κ?εβο που δοκιμ?ζεται και απ? τον δικ? της Εμφ?λιο π?λεμο μεταξ? ακρα?ων Ουκραν?ν εθνικιστ?ν/συμμοριτ?ν και ?να συνονθ?λευμα απ? Λευκοφρουρους, αντιμπολσεβικικο?ς, μοναρχικο?ς, Γερμανο?ς κτλ. Ειρ?σθω εν παρ?δω, σ?μφωνα με την συνθ?κη που ?μεινε γνωστ? ως 'συνθ?κη ?νευ προσαρτ?σεων-αποζημι?σεων' και υπεγ?φη

στο Μπρεστ-Λιτοφσκ, τον Μ?ρτιο του 1918, μεταξ? των Μπολσεβ?κων κ των Κεντρικ?ν Δυν?μεων, η Ουκραν?α διοικε?το απ? Ουκραν? στρατιωτικ? διοικητ?, τον περιβ?ητο Γκετμαν, εγκ?θετο και ?νθρωπο των Γερμαν?v.

Κεντρικ?ς πρωταγωνιστ?ς του ?ργου ε?ναι η οικογ?νεια και η αφ?γηση της ζω?ς των αδελφ?v Τουρμπιν που μ?λις ?χουν κηδεψει την μητ?ρα τους . Ο μεγαλ?τερος γιος, στρατιωτικ?ς ιατρ?ς, ταλαιπωρημ?νος απ? τις κακουχ?ες εν?ς ταπεινωτικο? π?λεμου, επαναπατρισθ?ντας στην Π?λη με ?νειρα και φιλοδοξ?ες Αλεξει -στου οπο?ου το πρ?σωπο διακρ?νουμε αρκετ? στοιχει? απ? τον β?ο του Μπουλγκακακωφ- η ?μορφη, στοργικ? και προστ?τρια πλ?ον Γιελενα και ο μικρ?τερος Τουρμπιν ο Νικολκα, δ?κιμος αξιωματικ?ς, πατρι?της με ?να βλ?μμα αγν?, με ?να νεανικ? αυθορμητισμ? και με μια κιθ?ρα συντροφ? να γρατζουν?ει στρατιωτικ?ς σκοπο?ς, ?λοι αυτο? λοιπ?ν αλλ? κ η Ανιουτα την οπο?α μεγ?λωσε η μαμα-Τουρμπιν διαβιο?v σε ?να δι?ροφο κτ?ριο στην ?νω Π?λη ?που η θαλπωρ?, η τρυφερ?τητα της οικογενειακ?ς εστ?ας, η διαπαιδαγ?γηση και η μ?θεξη σε ?λες τις Τ?χνες κυριαρχο?v στην καθημεριν?τητα. Το παν?μορφο γωνιακ? κτ?ριο με κ?ριο χρ?μα την κ?τρινη ?χρα και τις λευκ?ς αποχρ?σεις στα πολυ?ριθμα μπροστιν? κ λιγ?τερα πλα?ν? παρ?θυρα του δεν ε?ναι δημιο?ργημα μυθοπλασ?ας, ξεχωρ?ζει αμ?σως για την αρχιτεκτονικ? του δομ? και μορφ? και λειτουργ? ως 'Μουσε?ο του Μπουλγκακακωφ', οικ?α ?λλωστε κ της ενηλικ?ωσης του.

<http://images.guidetrip.com/images/up...>

Μ?σα απ? τον πολυτ?ραχο προσωπικ? β?ο των αδελφ?v Τουρμπιν κ των αγαπημ?νων τους παιδικ?v φ?λων παρακολουθο?με ταυτ?χρονα κ την μ?χη μεταξ? των Ουκραν?v Εθνικιστ?ν του Αρχ?γγελου της καταστροφ?ς Πετλιουρα και των συνασπισμ?νων δυν?μεων της Λευκ?ς Φρουρ?ς γ την κατ?ληψη της Π?λης. Μιας μοναδικ?ς Ιστορικ?ς π?λης που βρ?χεται απ? το τρ?το μεγαλ?τερο ποταμ? της Ευρ?πης, τον Δνε?περο, στης οπο?ας κουδουν?ζουν ευχ?ριστα στους πλακ?στρωτους τα περ?φημα τραμ με τις κ?τρινες φουσκωτ?ς θ?σεις, φωνασκο?ν λαλ?στατα οι αμαξ?δες προς ?γρα πελατε?ας, που ?χει τα περισσ?τερα και τα πιο δαιδαλ?δη π?ρκα στο κ?σμο, ?που ?χει γ?νει το τελευτα?ο καταφ?γιο προσφ?γων απ? την Μ?σχα κ την Πετρο?πολη διαφορετικ?v προσωπικο?των και επαγγελματι?ν δ?νοντας ν?α ?θηση στην πολεοδομικ?, οικονομικ? και πολιτισμικ? ανθηση, που 'καπν?ζει σαν πολ?εδρη κηρ?θρα'.

Ο φιλαλ?θης συγγραφ?ας απεικον?ζει ρεαλιστικ? τις καταστροφικ?ς διαστ?σεις που μπορε? να λ?βει ?νας π?λεμος. Σε ?να ?θνος ακαλλ?ργητο, αμ?ρφωτο, εξαθλιωμ?νο απ? συνεχε?ς πολ?μους και απ? την διχοστασ?α, ο κ?νδυνος να εξαρτηθε? η μο?ρα εν?ς λαο? απ? εγκληματικ?ς στρατηγ?ς και απ? φυγ?πονους οκνηρο?ς αξιωματικ?ς ?που η τιμ? κ η ευσυνειδησ?α ε?ναι περιτ? β?ρος ε?ναι νομοτελειακ?ς. Η οξε?α δριμ?τητα με την ?ποια καταγγ?λλονται οι πολιτικο? κ οι στρατιωτικο? ?ρχεται σε εμφαν?ς αντιδιαστολ? με την ηρωισμ? που δ?νεται απ? μερικο?ς κατο?κους της Π?λης, τους ρομαντικ?ς συνταγματ?ρχες σαν τον Ναι Τουρς, τους ?βγαλτους δ?κιμους σαν τον ανυπ?τακτο Νικολκα Τουρμπιν που μ?χονται μεταξ? ?λλων και για την οικογ?νεια τους κ το σπ?τι τους το μοναδικ? χ?ρο που μπορε? κανε?ς να νι?σει θαλπωρ? και ζεστασι?. "Ο κ?σμος ?ξω ε?ναι βρ?μικος, αιματοβαμμ?νος, ?νευ νο?ματος"

Για τον Μπουλγκακακωφ 'τα ?πλα ο ?νθρωπος τα δημιο?ργησε χωρ?ς να το ξ?ρει για ?να μ?νο σκοπ?- να προστατε?ουν την ανθρ?πινη γαλ?νη και εστ?α. Για τ?ποτα ?λλο δεν πρ?πει να πολεμ?ει κανε?ς'.

Υ.Γ. Οι εκδ?σεις Ερατ? αποφ?σισαν να μας δ?σουν το πρ?το μυθιστ?ρημα του σπουδα?ου Μπουλγκακακωφ σε ν?α μετ?φραση δ?δοντας το δ?σκολο ?ργο της σε μια ?μπειρη μεταφρ?στρια Ρωσικ?v εμβληματικ?v κειμ?νων, την Ελ?νη Μπακοπουλου . Στην ?κδοση συνυπ?ρχει ?να

χρονολογίο με προσωπικ?ς φωτογραφ?ες και αναφορ?ς στα σπουδαι?τερα γεγον?τα που στιγμ?τισαν την ζω? του Μιχαηλ Μπουλγκακωφ.

Ακ?μη σπουδαι?τερης σημασ?ας ε?ναι το επ?μετρο εν?ς κριτικο? Λογοτεχν?ας, του Ιγκορ Μπελζα ο οπο?ος μ?σα σε τρι?ντα σελ?δες βομβαρδ?ζοντας μας με ουσι?δεις πληροφορ?ες και ε?στοχα σχ?λια (κυρ?ως απουσι?ζουν παραληρηματικ?, επιτηδευμ?να, δυσαν?γνωστα ευφυολογ?ματα ?λλων αντ?στοιχων Ελληνικ?ν εκδ?σεων) δ?νει ν?α πνο? και καταν?ηση στο επικ? κε?μενο και την συγγραφ? του Μπουλκακωφ, η οπο?α ε?ναι τ?σο πλο?σια σε καλλιτεχνικ?ς εικ?νες, σε ποιητικ?τητα, εν?ντια στον β?ναυσο κ ωμ? πολεμικ? ρεαλισμ? και πλουσια σε αναφορ?ς σε ?λλους μεγ?λους συγγρ?φεις -στον μ?ντορα του Πο?σκιν, στον Γκ?γκολ που ανακ?λυψε ?ταν ?ταν εννι? χρον?ν, στον Γκαϊτε αλλ? και στην αγαπημ?νη του 'Αποκ?λυψη' του Ιω?ννη που γρ?φηκε στο παν?μορφο νησ? της Π?τμου και η επ?δραση της ε?ναι πανταχο? παρ?ν- πρ?γμα που αν μη τι ?λλο επιτ?σσει στον γοητευμ?νο αναγν?στη την επαν?γνωση του ?ργου, κ?τι που συμβα?νει μ?νο με σπουδα?α κ απολαυστικ? ?ργα.

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### **Susan says**

I've just finished *The White Guard* and I think it will stay with me for some time.

I have the 2009 edition from Yale University Press which includes an introduction by the translator Marian Schwartz, as well as an introduction by Russian history professor Evgeny Dobrenko, who explains the historical and political context of the novel. I would encourage readers to seek out this edition, and to read the two introductions first.

While *The White Guard*, Bulgakov's first novel, doesn't have the same surreal or supernatural elements as his later works, such as *The Master and Margarita* or *Heart of a Dog*, those qualities are presaged in the dream sequences and lyrical descriptions of the city of Kiev.

This is a heart-breaking, profound and very Russian novel.

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### **Rosemarie says**

This book does an excellent job portraying the confusion and chaos in Kiev in December 1918. The White Guard defending the city are woefully outnumbered by those who are going to attack the city-- the Bolsheviks.

The leaders of the Whites flee the city, leaving few instructions to those left behind, mostly Cadets. Many of the Cadets and officers are killed but some are able to flee.

The Turbin family, two brothers and their sister, show how this confusion and disaster affected the people of Kiev on a more personal and emotional level.

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## **Becky says**

After I finished reading the first time I went to the Introductions and read them. The one by the translator, Marian Schwartz, is very nice, informative - she did this in 2009. But the one by Evgeny Dobrenko is totally marvelous, thoughtful and informative, giving background information on Bulgakov as well as the Ukranaian War of Independence (Russian Civil War). In fact, I was so taken by Dobrenko's introduction I went back and reread the entire work - very carefully - and was stunned.

This time I followed all the action, family or not. I took notes (see the link). I googled for more specific info. I was mesmerized.

The writing is beautiful, lush, sensual. Everything has meaning and I know that no matter how much I studied it in this day and age, 2010 - California - there is no way I could possibly understand the nature of all the symbolism, the dream sequences, the characters and their ideas.

I understand how Stalin could let the play be staged and love it, but ban the book because in the play and the book the Petlyiura forces are made to look seriously bad but in the book it's complex, in the play that part is simpler. Apparently Bulgakov had conflicting feelings about the Revolution - although I didn't catch that - Dobrenko did.

The narrative gives off a strong bit of nostalgia for the old Russian Kiev - that's where Bulgakov was from and the book is semi-autobiographical. Kiev is the religious center of Russia - where Prince Vladimir accepted Christianity in 988. His statue and hill play a central roll in White Guard.

But Bulgakov also wrote the book as a kind of commentary on the meaningless, violent, stupidity of war.

Also important in the book are the themes time is moving on and running out (so many clocks) and that everybody is running away. There seem to be lots of ways of running away but the physical act is important here. Lampshades color, dim, hide the truth of the situation while religion seems to distance it.

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## **Silvery says**

4,5 estrellas

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## **Pavel says**

Ukraine. Kiev. Times of turnmoil (1918). Revolution. German troops are leaving Kiev to Petlura, controversial leader of Ukrainian nationalists, the one who tries to gain his power through stirring a conflict between Russians and Ukrainians and Jews. Pogroms are on their way. Bolsheviks are going in just in a few weeks. Big family of Turbins, Russian intelligent people and their friends. Whole world of their is collapsing right in front our eyes.

Bulgakov is best-known for his "Master and Margarita", but I actually prefer "The white guard", it's a masterpiece of Russian realistic prose. He himself did not afraid to compare it to the "War and piece". Indeed it's a "War and piece" of Russian clerisy, their tragic fate and inadaptability and idealism. Bulgakov came

from this environment, he was from Kiev himself, all the main characters: Alexey Turbin, Nikolenka, Lariosik, Mushlaevsky, Shervinsky, Talberg have their prototypes in Bulgakov's real life. And not only Ukrainian turnmoil reflects with our times, but this difficult situation for intellectuals, when they are caught between own notions of events and the fear of political purges. Love and death and defeat of all hopes, everything is in there.

Play based on this novel - "Days of Turbins" was a huge MXT success, Stalin saw it at least 15 times and didn't allow to ban it.

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## Dvd (**VanitasVanitatumOmniaVanitas**) says

Dopo aver adorato *Il Maestro e Margherita* e molto apprezzato *Cuore di cane*, avevo molte aspettative su questo romanzo, che sono state - alla prova della lettura - almeno in parte tradite.

Questo è senza dubbio, fra ciò che ho letto di Bulgakov, il più russo dei suoi romanzi. Con tutto quel che ne consegue a livello di apprezzamento e di lettura. Non aiuta l'ambientazione, che è a dir poco caotica: il romanzo narra la storia dei tre fratelli Turbin (Aleksej, medico e ufficiale zarista; Elena, insegnante di piano; Nikolka, cadetto dell'accademia militare) durante l'incredibile biennio 1917-19 nella Kiev prima presa dai bolscevichi dopo l'abdicazione dello Zar, poi dai nazionalisti ucraini e dai tedeschi dopo la sconfitta russa nella Grande Guerra, poi dai socialisti guidati da Simon Petljura e infine di nuovo dai bolscevichi (una volta per tutte). I tre fratelli, monarchici convinti, vivono e sopravvivono a questa caotica staffetta mentre intorno il loro mondo crolla, assediati nel loro appartamento in compagnia di altri rappresentanti delle élites intellettuali della vecchia società borghese zarista. L'ultimo ridotto di resistenza monarchico in una città continuamente assediata da tutte le parti e da tutta una serie di contendenti con una sola caratteristica in comune (l'avversità al regime zarista): il titolo fa chiaramente riferimento alla contemporanea guerra civile che si stava combattendo ferocemente su tutto il territorio russo (i giovani monarchici che resistono come i controrivoluzionari dell'Armata Bianca di Kerenskij contro l'onda rossa comunista).

La trama ripercorre un biennio incredibilmente caotico, e questo non aiuta il lettore; a peggiorare le cose subentra il fatto che i riferimenti alla cultura russa sono moltissimi e continui, e che gli stessi non sono facilmente digeribili per noi europei occidentali (aiutano in questo le ottime - e numerose - note in fondo al libro e l'altrettanto ottima e sintetica introduzione - che consiglio di leggere prima di immergersi nella complessa trama).

Inoltre, alcuni personaggi e frammenti del romanzo non si capisce che senso abbiano. Paradigmi sociali utilizzati in maniera di sineddoche per rappresentare, con un solo personaggio tratteggiato magistralmente, tutto un frammento del tessuto sociale: certamente c'è questa intenzione, tipica di Bulgakov. Qui purtroppo riesce in parte, alcuni personaggi sono poco più che macchiette; di altri non riesco a comprendere l'utilità narrativa.

Così come di certe porzioni di racconto, completamente inutili ai fini della trama.

Un guazzabuglio insomma. Tuttavia, siccome ci troviamo di fronte a un vero e assoluto genio della letteratura mondiale del Novecento, si riesce comunque a rimanere - a tratti - estasiati.

Straordinarie su tutte le pagine dedicate alla missione del giovane Nikolka all'obitorio, il racconto della guarigione di Aleksej, il resoconto della disperata difesa di Kiev da parte dei cadetti all'assalto delle truppe di Petljura. Splendide, nella loro fortissima carica mistica e emotiva, le parti oniriche (fra cui il finale). In generale, magistrali le descrizioni a volo d'uccello della città di Kiev e dei suoi orizzonti.

Tutti pezzi di bravura mostruosa che troveranno piena maturazione nel *Maestro e Margherita*, che continua imperterrita a ritenere il miglior romanzo mai scritto nel secolo scorso. Qui, ne *La guardia bianca*, ci sono abbozzi, che lasciano però intuire la grandezza che sarà in futuro. E i lampi di genio sono sempre molto apprezzabili (pur con tutte le perplessità sopra menzionate).

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## Steven Godin says

After graduating from Kiev University, Mikhail Bulgakov would go on to decide his future lie in literature rather than practicing as a doctor, during which he witnessed the horrors of the Russian civil war. Bothered though by the censors and political unrest, Bulgakov would write to Stalin asking to be allowed to emigrate, if he couldn't make a living as a writer in the USSR. And the word goes Stalin actually phoned him up offering a job in the Moscow Arts Theatre instead. Similar to that of revolutionary writer Victor Serge, Bulgakov's work only saw the light of day posthumously.

Safe to say, thank god it did.

Not as well known as his most recognizable 'The Master and Margarita', *The White Guard* is certainly closer to non-fiction, and built on Bulgakov's own experiences during the turmoil and unpredictability of conflict. The story takes place in a snow covered Kiev, 1918, turning the spotlight on the once wealthy Turbin family. After their mother passes away, the three children of, doctor Alexei, the oldest, Elena, twenty four, and seventeen year old Nikolka face up the fact of a new regime, as Bolsheviks, Socialists and Germans fight for total control over the city. Elena's husband Captain Talberg would leave for battle, as the household enters a fragile and worrying time.

The city itself is vivid to the eyes, as confusion grows on the streets as to who is fighting with who?, through all it's unorganized chaos, Bulgakov does a grand job of showing just that, the chaos.

Nothing is ever perceived clear as to what is actually going on, in terms of leadership.

Bulgakov asserted that Kiev changed hands some 14 times in little over a year, and could have written an epic Tolstoyish novel that covers more ground, but this is more of a snapshot, a panoramic view, moving from character to character at regular intervals, and it's length pleased me fully. The departing German Imperial Army lead by the Hetman of Ukraine are replaced by opportunist leader Petlyura's supposed rise to power, whilst the Ukrainian nationalist movement along with the 'The White Guard' (supporters of the Tsar) jostle in the background. Both brothers Alexei and Nikolka are White Guard officers who place their lives in danger as change takes shape. There is no doubt Bulgakov pokes fun at both Petlyura and Hetman for their weak inabilities, and the sheer waste of life, youth and energy sacrificed in fighting. And Bulgakov seems to foresee tribulations yet to come.

The novel is very military. Regarding the narrative, not all the time, but when things get going in terms of the different forces involved, Bulgakov clearly knows his stuff, corruption in rife, anti-Semitism is high, and the various armies struggle with personnel and supplies during some seriously cold weather. But the household of the Turbins still remains central to the story, which provides the humane touch, although it doesn't feature as often during the middle third, Elena waits for news on husband and one of the brothers who failed to return home, whilst friends of the family come and go, each with their own problems.

The Turbins do side with Tsar, but there isn't any real political stance from Bulgakov's viewpoint, as normal life is trying to continue, people get up for work, mingle out shopping, kids play out in the snow little realizing what's happening around them, and folk gather to talk rumours that spread like wildfire.

There are gaps in between the conflict where Bulgakov clearly shows his love for Kiev, the ancient cathedral

sits graceful, the huge statue of Saint Vladimir overlooks the city holding aloft the cross, whilst a blanket of snow wistfully settles on the homes and buildings below, creating a whiteness through dark times. Bulgakov presents a glimpse of the fear, confusion and death that faced so many, and he does it exceptionally well.

The snow would melt, the grass would grow, and the sun would rise to dry the blood of battle....but sadly one hundred years on, not much has changed, divided territories are still the recipe for disaster, where loved ones will not be returning to loves ones, and all for what?

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### **Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says**

I wasn't sure if Bulgakov's first novel, described as a historical novel about the fortunes of the city of Kiev in the year 1918, as the repercussions of the Russian revolution and the tail-end of the first world war play out, would be as good as his satirical masterpieces, *The Master And Margarita* and *Black Snow*.

It certainly is.

Bulgakov was a literary genius, that's the only conclusion I can draw. Not only does he maintain complete control over a narrative that segues constantly from the panoramic to the personal, he keeps finding memorable motifs and metaphors to bring his tale to life. There is an entire section where he describes people's expressions and states of minds in terms of clock-hand positions. It seems like a subjective, potentially opaque conceit, but Bulgakov makes it work brilliantly. A good deal of his tale is told through dreams - again something potentially confusing and tedious that he does incredibly well. His talent for invoking the truly fantastic was evident in *The Master*, as was his facility with conjuring the bad numinous. Here, in an early vision of heaven, he brings us face to face with an equally convincing vision of divinity, both comforting and chilling. There are numerous bravura scenes of crowds and action, and of the thoughts and experiences of his focus characters. This novel is also amazingly well structured, casting out a bewildering array of narrative threads that are all woven together into a tight, immaculate narrative tapestry. The novel ends with a virtuoso display of oneiric head-hopping which culminates in a passage which shows where the true strength of this novel lies - not in its many technical merits and literary flourishes, amazing though they are - but in its strong sense of the pathos of human destiny.

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### **Moon Rose says**

The horrifying cadence of a revolution that swept Russia in the early part of the 20th century; which replaced the seat of the governing aristocracy with the austerity of the intense power of the collective plebeian regime that gave rise to an ideal that cried for justice and equality, breathing life to a series of senseless violence causing the untimely deaths of the many in its wake showed in full daylight the unobtrusive intention beneath the noble purpose, forfeiting its essence by its opposite virulent results, a clear manifestation of man's inconsistency, showing the immature state of his consciousness that still governs his soul as part of his ongoing path towards the evolution of the mind.

*Mikhail Bulgakov* captures this violent and endearing past of Russia, its pivotal point in history that centers on its transition state, written with such poignancy as he vividly describes the sudden disintegration of the Russian society that existed for half a millennia, the demise of the Tsarist regime and the fall of the aristocracy in the hands of the revolutionary commoners as prophesied by Fyodor Dostoyevsky in *Demons* ,

which parallelism with *Pyotr Verkhovensky* seems evident in *Bulgakov*'s unseen moving character of *Petlyura* in *The White Guard*, hovering like a dark cloud over a horizon that signals only an impending doom.

The style of writing is different from his more famous novel, *The Master and Margarita* which is filled with profound comicality that hides the inner truths in the depth of his masterful utilization of magical realism. At first glance, it seems that the two novels are penned by two different authors, as *The White Guard*, on the other hand, there are only misty streaks of profundity emitting from it, as it gears towards descriptive realism, encapsulating a specific period in time, as it describes the physical aspects of circumstances rather than delving into its underlying meaning. It is written in an almost straight forward way, except during *Bulgakov*'s bouts of lucid imagery in between and at the last part of the novel, displaying his keen grasp of the surreal through the symbolic dream sequences that foretell his genius as a writer. Furthermore, the novel in its entirety appears more like a stage play rather than a novel, as its deliberate compactness has this kind of effect in visualization to the reader.

*The White Guard* is the story of the *Turbin* siblings, mainly *Alexei*, *Elena* and *Nikolka* living in Ukraine at that time during the critical period in the Russian revolution. The narrative is told from the different angles of their viewpoints, as their experiences intertwined into the hellish change that is about to take shape in Russia. It untangles their lives caught in the grim prospect of death, as they all struggle to survive amid the sea of uncertainty. The novel opens with a bleak metaphor, the gloom of death at hand, as the death of their adored mother appears as a symbolic gesture of their own fate or more aptly the fate of the whole of Russia, as they all become a living witness to the death of their own society that keeps them safe and intact, as it gives them a preview of the vicissitudes that would come out of it as a repercussion.

In terms of character development, there are minor appearances of interesting personas that are just left hanging in mid air without further elaboration on the part of *Bulgakov*. They seem to appear like bubbles out of nowhere that burst immediately into thin air, which if their development has been taken into consideration, it could have made the novel more intense, keeping the audience riveted on its pages as it will allow them to go deeper into the depths of the situation, giving contrast to the humanitarian efforts of the *Turbin* siblings against the psychological implications a tragedy can cause to other people. For instance, the sudden appearance of the *syphilis* infected *Ivan Rusakov* by the middle of the novel, whose sexually transmitted disease made him remorseful, turning him away from his wicked past, as it turns him into a religious fanatic enclosed into the rigidity of an ascetic belief. His character is actually loosely detached from the lives of the main protagonists with the exception of a brief encounter with *Alexei* in the end, but in his character, which is only abruptly mentioned by *Bulgakov* lies the psychological depth that exists in all of humanity, especially those on the verge of transformation.

Same goes with the other minor characters who flutter fleetingly within the novel, leaving their hidden implications to the imagination of the reader, like the inconsistent behavior of the depraved character of *Mikhail Shpolyansky*, or the bravery displayed by the tragic character of *Colonel Nai-Turs*, his own unquestionable heroism leading him to his own demise. These are just few of the several instances within *The White Guard*, surrounding the lives of the *Turbin* siblings and their friends, as they pop out disconnectedly from the whole, yet congenial to the rest of the novel. Perhaps, it is *Bulgakov*'s own demonstration to imply the sheer uncertainty of that particular period in time. ?

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**Tony says**

## THE WHITE GUARD. (1923). Mikhail Bulgakov. \*\*\*.

This was the author's first novel, and became better known by means of a play based on the book. It is the story of the battles of the Russian Revolution as they occurred in around the city of Kiev. Little is known about the battles on the Eastern Front during WW I, and about as much about the Revolution in the Ukraine region. This novel focuses on the adventures of one family in Kiev, the Turbins, in the year 1918. What Bulgakov did was to tell his tale using a variety of characters – either from the Turbins or from other organizations, including various branches of the military from all sides – but having each character tell his piece from his own point of view. This takes a little while getting used to, as each new narrator simply just appears and begins to tell his piece. The only other work I've read by Bulgakov was "The Master and Margarita," which was much more accessible. In this work, it took me about one-third of the way into the book before I began to catch on to what the author was doing. Once past that, it was only a matter of keeping all of the characters straight. Looking over other reviews after I had read the work, I found that there were many comments about this book being a masterpiece. If it was, I missed something. It is a good book, but I have my reservations about using the word masterpiece.

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## Laura says

*From BBC Radio 4 Extra:*

*1/2: Kiev is protected by an uneasy alliance. Two brothers discover it's a bad time to be Tsarist. Stars Paul Hilton and James Loye.*

*2/2: The Turbin brothers find their survival skills tested, and Elena is driven to intense prayer.*

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00761h8>

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## GiannisKlados says

Ο Bulgakov ε?ναι, πλ?ον, αγαπημ?νος μου συγγραφ?ας, τ?χη μεγ?λη να π?σουν στα χ?ρια κ?ποιου τα βιβλ?α του, α?ρας ελευθερ?ας στην ψυχ?

Το βιβλ?ο: Μια περιγραφ? των θηριωδι?ν και της ανεξ?γητης τρ?λας του πολ?μου που κανε?ς δεν μπ?ρεσε να προβλ?ψει. Η ιστορ?α της Ουκραν?ας συμπυκνωμ?νη στην αιματηρ? αναλαμπ? των δειν?ν του 1918-19. ?λα δοσμ?να μ?σα απ? την π?να του πεζογρ?φου-ποιητ? που κεντ?ει την ομ?χλη του Δνε?περου ?λλοτε με ρεαλισμ? και ?λλοτε με αλληγορικ? αυθεντ?α.

Γιατ? ξεχν?με να στρ?φουμε το βλ?μμα στα ?στρα;

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## Malacorda says

Bulgakov in versione inedita, dal ritmo un po' lento e non proprio scoppettante come siamo abituati a conoscerlo: in realtà qui è un po' Bulgakov e un po' Tolstoj. Un Bulgakov insolito anche nella descrizione delle scene amorose. Ma in ogni caso la grande madre Russia ci regala sempre splendide pagine di letteratura.

La narrazione procede a ritmo di valzer, e protagonisti della lenta e maestosa danza sono la storia, la città, i suoi cittadini e i contadini, le masse volubili che con le loro voci ne fanno un romanzo corale (a proposito: i cittadini che invocano un etmano qualsiasi in nome dell'ordine e della governabilità... queste voci mi ricordano un qualcosa già sentito...). La molteplicità delle voci, dei luoghi e delle sfaccettature tematiche rende fin troppo banale il paragone con un grande affresco. Quel che però manca è la lucentezza tipica di Bulgakov: la scrittura rimane un po' avvolta in quella stessa caligine che più volte viene descritta quando cala sulla città

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