



METAPHYSICAL TOPOGRAPHY AS A FORM OF ARTISTIC WORLD MODELING IN M.A.BULGAKOV'S NOVEL «THE MASTER AND MARGARITA»

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MAQOLA HAQIDA/ О СТАТЬЕ	ANNOTATSIIYA/ АННОТАЦИЯ
<p>Qabul qilindi: 16-iyun 2026-yil Tasdiqlandi: 18-iyun 2026-yil Jurnal soni: 18-C Maqola raqami: 34 KALIT SO'ZLAR/ КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА metafizik topografiya, badiiy makon, xronotop, chegaraviy holat (liminallik), ontologik ierarxiya, M.A.Bulgakov, "Usta va Margarita"</p>	<p>Zamonaviy adabiyotshunoslikda makon tushunchasi endilikda faqat tasviriy yoki estetik kategoriya sifatida emas, balki badiiy olamni modellashtirishning muhim shakli sifatida talqin qilinmoqda. Mazkur maqolada badiiy matndagi makoniy tuzilmani tahlil qilishning nazariy asosi sifatida metafizik topografiya tushunchasi ko'rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqotda M.M.Baxtin, Y.M.Lotman, M.Heidegger, M.Eliade va G.Bashlyar kabi olimlarning ilmiy qarashlariga asoslanib, metafizik makon ontologik, aksiologik va ekzistensial ma'nolarning ierarxik tizimi sifatida tahlil qilinadi.</p> <p>Mazkur nazariy model M.A.Bulgakovning «Usta va Margarita» romanidagi makoniy tashkil etilish jarayoniga tatbiq etiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, asardagi makon tuzilishi ma'no hosil qilishning asosiy mexanizmlaridan biri bo'lib, Moskva, Quddus va g'ayritabiiy olam qatlamlarini yagona falsafiy modelga birlashtiradi. Ushbu makoniy tizim borliq mohiyati, axloqiy mas'uliyat va insonning erkin tanlov muammolarini yorituvchi ko'p bosqichli metafizik topografiyani shakllantiradi.</p> <p>Tadqiqotning ilmiy yangiligi shundaki, Bulgakovning makoniy modeli faqat sujjet va kompozitsion tuzilma sifatida emas, balki ontologik ierarxiya hamda inson ruhiy kechinmalarini birlashtiruvchi yaxlit metafizik tizim sifatida talqin etiladi.</p>
ABOUT THE PAPER	ANNOTATION
<p>Accepted: 16 June 2026 Approved: 18 June 2026 Volume: 18-C Paper number: 34 KEYWORDS Metaphysical topography, literary space, chronotope, liminality, ontological hierarchy, M.A.Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita</p>	<p>In contemporary literary studies, space is no longer understood solely as a descriptive or aesthetic category but is increasingly interpreted as a fundamental form of artistic world modeling. This article examines the concept of metaphysical topography as a theoretical framework for analyzing spatial organization in literary texts. Drawing on the ideas of M. M. Bakhtin, Y. M. Lotman, M. Heidegger, M. Eliade, and G. Bachelard, the study explores metaphysical space as a hierarchically structured system of ontological, axiological, and existential meanings. The theoretical model is applied to M.A. Bulgakov's novel «The Master and Margarita», where spatial organization functions as a key mechanism of meaning production. The analysis demonstrates that the novel constructs a multi-level metaphysical topography integrating Moscow, Jerusalem, and otherworldly dimensions into a unified philosophical model of being, moral responsibility, and freedom of choice. The novelty of the study lies in interpreting Bulgakov's spatial model not merely as a narrative structure but as a coherent metaphysical system that integrates ontological hierarchy with psychological reality.</p>

Introduction. In contemporary literary theory, the category of space has long transcended its purely descriptive and aesthetic function and is now regarded as one of the key forms of artistic world modeling [1]. A special place within this system is occupied by metaphysical topography – a concept that integrates philosophical, cultural, and poetic interpretations of space as a carrier of ontological, axiological, and existential meanings. Within the theoretical discourse, metaphysical topography is understood not as a set of geographically localized places but as a hierarchically organized system of «spaces of meaning» reflecting the author's vision of being, good and evil, freedom and predestination, life and death.

Ontological approaches to binary oppositions treat them as a fundamental structure of both being and cognition, organizing reality through pairs of opposing concepts such as *light/darkness*, *life/death*, and *culture/nature* [4]. These oppositions function as essential mechanisms of meaning formation, in which one element affirms and the other negates, creating a structured semantic field.

The problem of artistic space as a specific form of reality representation was fundamentally articulated in the works of M. M. Bakhtin, primarily through his concept of the chronotope. According to Bakhtin, literary space is always value-laden and «absorbs time, condenses it, and makes it visible» and thus functioning not as a neutral background but as an active participant in meaning production [2]. Although Bakhtin does not employ the term «metaphysical topography», his theory provides a methodological foundation for interpreting spatial models as bearers of philosophical content. Y. M. Lotman further developed this approach by demonstrating that artistic space is structured through systems of oppositions such as *center/periphery*, *one's own/alien*, and *upper/lower* levels [3].

The purpose of this article is to examine the spatial organization of Bulgakov's novel through the concept of metaphysical topography and to demonstrate how spatial transitions correspond to transformations in the ethical and existential status of the characters.

Literature review. The study of artistic space has become one of the central directions of modern literary criticism, especially within structural poetics, semiotics, phenomenology, and cultural studies. Contemporary researchers increasingly regard space not merely as a background for narrative events but as an active semantic category that participates in the construction of artistic meaning and philosophical worldview. Within this context, the concept of metaphysical topography has emerged as a productive analytical framework for examining literary texts in which spatial organization reflects ontological, ethical, and existential structures.

One of the earliest systematic approaches to artistic space belongs to M. M. Bakhtin, whose theory of the chronotope established the inseparable unity of time and space in literary works. According to Bakhtin, literary space is never neutral; rather, it embodies ideological values and determines the development of characters and events. Space absorbs historical time, making abstract philosophical concepts visible through concrete artistic images [2, p. 121]. Bakhtin's theory became the methodological basis for later investigations into symbolic and metaphysical dimensions of literary space.

A significant contribution to spatial semiotics was made by Y. M. Lotman, who interpreted artistic space as a structured system of binary oppositions. In his model, categories such as center and periphery, upper and lower, sacred and profane function not only as geographical distinctions but also as semantic mechanisms organizing the internal structure of literary texts. Lotman demonstrated that movement across spatial boundaries frequently corresponds to transformations in the moral or existential status of literary characters [3]. His structural approach substantially influenced contemporary theories of artistic world modeling.

Philosophical interpretations of space also provide an essential theoretical foundation for metaphysical topography. Martin Heidegger viewed space as an existential dimension inseparable from human existence. In *Being and Time*, he argued that space is experienced through human presence in the world rather than through objective physical

coordinates. Spatial relations therefore express modes of being and reveal the individual's ontological position [4, p. 61]. Heidegger's ideas significantly broadened literary interpretations of spatial symbolism beyond descriptive functions.

Similarly, Mircea Eliade examined the opposition between the sacred and the profane as one of the universal principles organizing human perception of reality. Sacred space, according to Eliade, represents the center of existence where transcendence becomes accessible, whereas profane space remains fragmented and ordinary [5, p. 22]. This theoretical perspective is especially relevant for analyzing literary works in which spatial transitions symbolize moral purification, spiritual transformation, or encounters with transcendence.

The phenomenological dimension of artistic space was further developed by Gaston Bachelard, who focused on the psychological experience of spatial images. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argued that houses, rooms, staircases, and other architectural forms function as repositories of memory, imagination, and emotional experience rather than merely physical environments [6, p. 39]. His phenomenological approach allows literary scholars to interpret space as an expression of the characters' inner world and emotional consciousness.

The anthropological understanding of liminal space originates from Arnold van Gennep, whose theory of rites of passage introduced the concept of transitional phases separating different states of existence [7]. This concept was substantially expanded by Victor Turner, who interpreted liminality as a state in which ordinary social structures become suspended, allowing transformation and redefinition of identity [8, pp. 94–113]. In literary studies, liminal spaces frequently function as thresholds where characters undergo ethical, psychological, or metaphysical change.

Research devoted specifically to Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* has also emphasized the exceptional role of spatial organization. Lidiya Yanovskaya demonstrated that Moscow in the novel is constructed as a symbolic rather than realistic city, where everyday urban locations gradually acquire metaphysical significance [9]. Her analysis highlights the close interaction between historical reality and philosophical symbolism throughout Bulgakov's artistic universe.

Western Bulgakov scholarship has further developed these ideas. Andrew Barratt interprets the Moscow chapters as a system of moral testing in which ordinary reality becomes inseparable from metaphysical judgment. According to Barratt, Bulgakov deliberately transforms familiar urban spaces into locations where ethical truth is revealed through supernatural intervention [10, p. 84]. Such an interpretation confirms the philosophical function of spatial organization within the novel.

Likewise, Lesley Milne emphasizes that the Jerusalem chapters should not be interpreted simply as a biblical reconstruction but rather as a metaphysical landscape reflecting universal questions of responsibility, guilt, and freedom. Milne argues that spatial imagery serves as a projection of Pontius Pilate's psychological conflict, transforming external geography into an expression of existential consciousness [11, p. 174]. This interpretation reinforces the understanding of Bulgakov's novel as a complex philosophical model structured through spatial symbolism.

Despite extensive research on Bulgakov's poetics, comparatively few studies have examined his artistic space through the integrated concept of metaphysical topography. Existing scholarship generally analyzes chronotope, symbolism, or narrative structure separately, whereas the interaction between ontological hierarchy, liminality, ethical opposition, and psychological space remains insufficiently systematized. Consequently, applying the concept of metaphysical topography makes it possible to unite structural, philosophical, and cultural approaches into a comprehensive model explaining how Bulgakov constructs a multidimensional artistic universe. Such an approach not only deepens the interpretation of *The Master and Margarita* but also contributes to broader theoretical discussions concerning the relationship between literary space, metaphysics, and artistic world modeling.

Methodology. The methodological framework of this study is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining literary theory, philosophical hermeneutics, and cultural anthropology. The research employs structural-semiotic analysis (Y. M. Lotman), chronotopic analysis (M. M. Bakhtin), phenomenological interpretation (G. Bachelard), and philosophical concepts of space developed by M. Heidegger and M. Eliade.

Special attention is paid to the concepts of ontological opposition, liminality, and spatial hierarchy. The study uses close textual analysis to examine how spatial structures in «The Master and Margarita» function as mechanisms of philosophical and psychological meaning-making. This methodology allows identifying space as an active semantic category rather than a passive narrative backdrop, linking spatial organization to both moral and existential dimensions of the text.

Results. The analysis reveals that metaphysical topography in «The Master and Margarita» is realized as a complex, multi-layered spatial

system. The novel's artistic space consists of several interrelated ontological levels: the Moscow space of the 1930s, the Jerusalem (Yershalaim) space of the Gospel narrative, and the mystical-otherworldly dimension associated with Woland and his retinue [10]. These spatial layers are not merely narrative settings but symbolic structures that determine the moral and existential status of the characters.

The Moscow space is presented as a fragmented and profane environment composed of distinct loci such as Patriarch's Ponds, the «*bad apartment*» № 50, *Griboedov House*, and *Professor Stravinsky's clinic* [9]. These spaces form a symbolic map of everyday reality gradually penetrated by a transcendent dimension. According to A. Barratt [10 p. 84], the Moscow chapters create a system of moral testing in which everyday reality becomes inseparable from metaphysical judgment.

The episode at Patriarch's Ponds represents one of the most significant liminal spaces in the novel. At the beginning of the narrative, this location appears as an ordinary urban environment governed by rational explanations and ideological certainty. However, the encounter between Berlioz, Ivan Bezdomny, and Woland transforms the space into a threshold between different ontological dimensions. The liminal nature of this space is emphasized by Woland's enigmatic prediction concerning Berlioz's fate: «*Аннушка уже купила подсолнечное масло, и не только купила, но даже и разлила*» [12, p. 18] («*Annushka has already bought the sunflower oil, and not only bought it, but spilled it as well*») – translated by the author). The prophecy transforms an ordinary urban setting into a space governed by metaphysical causality rather than everyday logic. The sudden intrusion of the supernatural into everyday reality destabilizes the existing order and initiates a process of moral testing that unfolds throughout the novel. In this respect, Patriarch's Ponds function not merely as a geographical location but as a symbolic point of transition where metaphysical reality enters the profane world.

The Jerusalem chapters constitute a distinct sacred space focused on the problem of moral choice and metaphysical responsibility. Yershalaim is depicted not as a strictly historical city but as a metaphysical landscape of guilt, fear, and unfulfilled ethical decision. Pontius Pilate's internal conflict is spatially reflected, turning physical space into a projection of psychological and moral rupture. As a result, spatial organization in the novel functions as a mechanism of ethical differentiation, distinguishing characters according to their moral and existential positions. The psychological dimension of this sacred space is most clearly revealed through the figure of Pontius Pilate.

Particular significance is attached to the spatial imagery associated with Pontius Pilate. The elevated position of Herod's palace, the oppressive heat, and the recurring motif of distance create an atmosphere of isolation that reflects Pilate's inner division. Bulgakov repeatedly emphasizes Pilate's physical and psychological discomfort through the motif of his unbearable headache, which accompanies his moral hesitation. The famous description of «*ненавистная боль*» [12, p. 25] («*the accursed pain*») – translated by the author) becomes a somatic expression of guilt and inner conflict. Spatial separation becomes a visible manifestation of psychological conflict. Although Pilate recognizes Yeshua's innocence, he remains incapable of overcoming the constraints imposed by political authority. As L. Milne observes, the Yershalaim narrative transforms historical space into a sphere of ethical reflection, where individual responsibility acquires universal significance [11 p. 174].

The third ontological level is represented by Woland's domain, which occupies an intermediate position between the sacred and the profane. Unlike traditional representations of evil, Woland's space functions as an instrument of metaphysical balance. The ball, the nocturnal flight, and the supernatural transformations associated with Woland's retinue reveal a reality governed by principles that transcend ordinary moral categories. This dimension exposes hypocrisy, restores hidden truths, and serves as a mechanism of existential judgment. Through Woland's interventions, characters such as Berlioz, Rimsky, and the administrators of the Variety Theatre are confronted with the concealed moral consequences of their actions. Greed, hypocrisy, and cowardice become visible and are subjected to symbolic judgment, revealing the ethical foundations underlying the apparent chaos of everyday life. In this sense, the infernal dimension functions not as a force of destruction but as an instrument of moral revelation. Consequently, the infernal-cosmic space operates not as a realm of chaos but as an essential component of Bulgakov's metaphysical order.

Discussion. The results confirm that Bulgakov's spatial model aligns with major theoretical concepts developed in twentieth-century humanities. The hierarchical and binary organization of space corresponds to Lotman's semiotics of culture [3], while the existential dimension of spatial experience resonates with Heidegger's understanding of being-in-the-world [4]. The *sacral/profane* opposition identified by Eliade [5] is reinterpreted in the novel through a tragic vision of moral responsibility rather than through traditional religious symbolism.

The phenomenon of liminality [7, 8] plays a crucial role in the novel's metaphysical topography. Threshold spaces – such as Patriarch's Ponds, flights, bridges, and the final journey of «The Master and Margarita» – function as zones of transition and transformation. A particularly important example of liminal transition is Margarita's flight. The movement from the confined urban environment to unrestricted aerial space symbolizes liberation from social conventions and existential limitations. During the flight, spatial boundaries cease to function as instruments of restriction and instead become expressions of spiritual freedom. Through this transformation Bulgakov demonstrates that changes in ontological status are inseparable from changes in spatial perception. Margarita's journey therefore represents not only a narrative episode but also a symbolic passage from ordinary existence to a higher level of self-realization. These spaces enable characters to move between ontological levels, emphasizing the dynamic nature of Bulgakov's spatial model.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that metaphysical topography in «The Master and Margarita» constitutes a complex multi-level system organized according to principles of ontological hierarchy. Each spatial layer – Moscow, Jerusalem, and the infernal-cosmic dimension – performs not only a narrative but also a philosophical function, contributing to the author's conceptualization of being.

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Space in the novel serves as a means of expressing metaphysical ideas of freedom, responsibility, and justice, as well as an essential tool for revealing the psychological reality of the characters. The final journey of the Master and Margarita completes the metaphysical structure of the novel. Their movement beyond both Moscow and Yerushalaim leads to a unique ontological realm defined not by reward or punishment but by peace. This idea is explicitly articulated in Woland's final verdict: «Он не заслужил света, он заслужил покой» [12, p. 487] («He has not earned the light; he has earned peace» – translated by the author). The statement reveals Bulgakov's original conception of justice, in which spiritual peace occupies an intermediate position between condemnation and transcendence. This spatial destination transcends traditional binary oppositions between the sacred and the infernal and reflects Bulgakov's original philosophical understanding of redemption and spiritual fulfillment. The analysis of metaphysical topography allows the novel to be interpreted as an integral philosophical-artistic model of the world and provides a theoretical foundation for further research into the relationship between space and inner experience in literary texts. The proposed interpretation may also be applied to further studies of spatial symbolism and metaphysical models in twentieth-century Russian literature.

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