

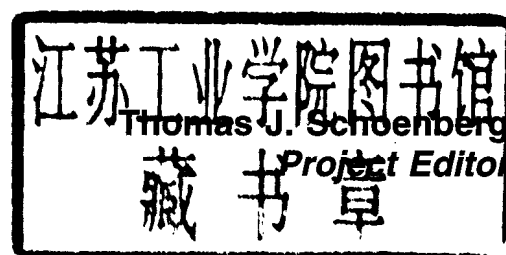
Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 159

Volume 159

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 159

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

Organization of the Book

A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Master i Margarita

Mikhail Bulgakov

Russian novelist, playwright, biographer, and short story writer.

The following entry provides criticism on Bulgakov's novel *Master i Margarita* (1966-67; *The Master and Margarita*). For further information on Bulgakov's life and career, see *TCLC*, Volumes 2 and 16.

INTRODUCTION

Master i Margarita (1966-67; *The Master and Margarita*), composed by one of the foremost writers of post-revolutionary Russia, is a complex narrative that weaves together several stories that, taken as a whole, argue against bureaucratic society's oppression of the artist. Bulgakov recognized the work as his highest achievement, and after burning an early draft of the manuscript, resumed work on the piece late in his life, dictating final revisions on his deathbed. Often likened to Goethe's *Faust*, *The Master and Margarita* is widely considered one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century Russian literature.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Master and Margarita intertwines three stories: one concerning the character Woland; one revolving around the Master, a novelist, and his muse, Margarita; and the third retelling the last days of Jesus. Woland is often considered a devil figure and is generally compared to Goethe's Mephistopheles in his tragedy *Faust*. Woland creates havoc in the lives of the stupid, the scheming, and the avaricious of modern Moscow. The Master and Margarita share a comfortable home in a basement apartment in Moscow, but when the Master's novel is censured and a neighbor covetous of the apartment denounces him as ideologically unsound, their peace is disrupted. Margarita appeals to Woland for aid, and he eventually restores both the home and the manuscript to the Master. Within this narrative Bulgakov embeds the story of the Passion of Christ, which is the subject of the Master's novel. The work, based on a poem by Ivan Bezdomnyi, a schizophrenic, chronicles the last days before the execution of the soft-spoken philosopher Ieshua, depicting the decision of Pontius Pilate, the be-



trayal and murder of Judas of Iscariot, and the anguish of Matthew Levi. The novel is condemned, partially because of its treatment of Ieshua's death as historical fact rather than myth. Through his interweaving of these three stories Bulgakov creates a network of thematic parallels.

MAJOR THEMES

Although separated by more than a thousand years, the events occurring in Moscow and those set in ancient Jerusalem take place during Passover. This temporal relationship creates an overarching context for the philosophical issues at play in Bulgakov's work: the rational versus the irrational, good versus evil, illusion versus truth, the natural versus the supernatural. In Moscow's positivistic society such oppositions lead to the kind of schizophrenia that plagues Bezdomnyi and renders Mus-

covites unable to distinguish between black magic and political subterfuge. Bulgakov suggests a thematic link between the transcendence of these oppositions and the idea of home portrayed in the Master's apartment. Like Bulgakov's portrayal of the devil in Woland, his depiction of Jesus is equally unorthodox; although the character asserts the fundamental beliefs of orthodox Christianity, he complains that Matthew's writings about him are inaccurate. The main theme of *The Master and Margarita*, as presented in the story of the Master, is that of the artist's role in society. Despite Bulgakov's assertion in the novel that "manuscripts don't burn," which affirms his belief that art will endure the vicissitudes of political repression, the novel's metaphysical ending seems to point to Bulgakov's own fears about the artist's ability to survive.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Bulgakov gave copies of *The Master and Margarita* to his wife and a close friend, and they remained closely guarded until Bulgakov's literary rehabilitation during Nikita Khrushchev's cultural thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s. *The Master and Margarita* was finally published in a heavily censored form in two installments in the journal *Moskva* in 1966 and 1967. It caused an immediate sensation and has sustained critical interest through out its history. Much attention has been given to the nature of Woland, Bulgakov's devil figure, who appears less an evil being in opposition to God than as God's counterpart whose task it is to punish the corrupt. Woland's relationship with the Master has been seen as a Faustian pact; indeed, references to Goethe's *Faust* permeate the novel. Two versions of the novel exist: the censored edition printed in *Moskva*, which eliminates much of the anti-Soviet satire, and the complete text. While there has been some controversy regarding their relative merits, both are considered valuable to a reader's understanding of Bulgakov's masterpiece.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Diavoliada* (short stories) 1925
Dni Turbinykh [*Days of the Turbins*] (play) 1926
Zoikina kvartira [*Zoya's Apartment*] (play) 1926
Belaia gvardiia: Dni Turbinykh [*The White Guard*] (novel) 1927
Bagrovyi ostrov [*The Crimson Island*] (play) 1928
Kabala sviatosh [*A Cabal of Hypocrites*; also published as *Molière*] (play) 1936
Zhizn gospodina de Molera [*The Life of Monsieur de Molière*] (biography) 1962

- Zapiski iunogo vracha* [*A Country Doctor's Notebooks*] (short stories) 1963
Ivan Vasilevich (play) 1964
Teatral'nyi roman [unfinished; *Black Snow: A Theatrical Novel*] (novel) 1965
Sobache serdtse [*The Heart of a Dog*] (novel) 1969
**Master i Margarita* [*The Master and Margarita*] (novel) 1966-7
The Early Plays of Mikhail Bulgakov (plays) 1972; second edition, 1994
Manuscripts Don't Burn: Mikhail Bulgakov, A Life in Letters and Diaries [edited by J. A. E. Curtis] (letters and diaries) 1992
Notes on the Cuff and Other Stories (short stories) 1992

*This work was initially published serially, in censored form, in the journal *Moskva*. The uncensored edition was published in 1969.

CRITICISM

Joan Delaney (essay date 1972)

SOURCE: Delaney, Joan. "The Master and Margarita: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp." *Slavic Review* 31 (1972): 89-100.

[In the following essay, Delaney questions the meaning of the Master figure in Bulgakov's novel, arguing against a Faustian interpretation.]

When *The Master and Margarita* first appeared some five years ago in the journal *Moskva* and soon after in the English translations, it caused the sensation appropriate to long-withheld Russian literary works.¹ On all sides it was hailed as a literary event of broad implications. American and British reviewers, introducing Bulgakov to their reading public, stressed the significance of this thirty-year-old novel in relation to progressive tendencies in contemporary Soviet literature. The novel was also generally assessed as a work of major literary importance in its own right. But there were reservations. Rich in conception and striking in form, *The Master and Margarita* seemed to many somehow flawed in the execution. These readers found the book extremely attractive on various levels, yet felt, along with the novel's British translator, Michael Glenny, that the keystone had just missed being slipped into place.²

An explanation was ready to hand in the fact that the author, who labored on this work from 1928 until his death in 1940, left variant chapters and some loose ends. Konstantin Simonov, head of the Commission on the Literary Legacy of Mikhail Bulgakov, wrote that Bulgakov had actually finished the book, but had re-

turned to it again and again to add and revise.³ Simonov's commission was responsible for the form in which the novel appeared in *Moskva* (and was translated into English by Mirra Ginsburg). The additions—passages scattered throughout the text—reached the West just slightly later and were incorporated into the Michael Glenny translation. Yet other passages may conceivably exist. The whole situation to some extent relieves the author of final responsibility in matters of both form and content. It also raises fascinating questions in both areas.

Interpretation of this novel has not been a simple matter for the critics. The first review articles in this country were understandably tentative and—one must admit—faintly puzzled. The reviews fell roughly into two classes—those that were confined to a brief description of content with some background comment on Bulgakov's literary-political significance, and those that ventured also into interpretation and literary judgment. The most frequent conclusion was that there was, indeed, much more here to be unraveled—material for analysis and exegesis for years to come. Within a few months Western critics were distracted by the appearance of Solzhenitsyn's novels—a distraction Soviet commentators did not have to contend with. Unfortunately, the most substantial Soviet article on Bulgakov—the one by V. Lakshin in *Novyi mir* (June 1968)—appeared too late to be included in the first round of comment, and seems to have elicited little response so far in English.

None of the major questions about the novel have been completely resolved. Negative criticism has centered on the three levels of narrative and their interrelation. At the first level, the devil comes to Moscow and chaos ensues. These diabolical pranks account for over half of the book and almost all of the first half. Early in the novel another narrative begins, which later develops into a novel-within-a-novel; it is the retelling and reinterpretation of the New Testament account of Pilate and Jesus. The story of the author of the Pilate novel and his beloved—the Master and Margarita—is interwoven with the other two themes. Bulgakov set himself a tricky problem in integrating these three stories, and few critics will maintain that he has completely succeeded. Donald Fanger, for example, says that the characters are “out of different operas” (*The Nation*, January 22, 1968), and Simonov has admitted that rich though the fabric is, the seams still show. But the main problem is the very size of the task attempted. Once this is acknowledged, the critic must move on to explore other questions, both aesthetic and philosophical, about Bulgakov's novel.

The crux of the puzzlement, I believe, lies in the character of the Master himself. It was common at first to assume without much examination that he is some kind of twentieth-century Faust figure. Gleb Struve's article

in the *Russian Review* (July 1968) suggests other interpretations. Is the Master, he asks, “Bulgakov himself? or a synthetic image of a creative artist?” I should like to pursue this line of questioning, leaving aside the matter of structural unity. Light thrown on the one problem may indeed help illuminate the other.

Who is the Master then? To what extent, if any, is he a Faust figure? One critic not long ago minutely examined *The Master and Margarita* for its Faustian motifs. Elisabeth Stenbock-Fermor, writing in the *Slavic and East European Journal* (Fall 1969), painstakingly established parallels and sources on every level, from the various devils' names to the witches' sabbath, and finally to the whole moral ambience of both works. This much is certainly a useful piece of work. But I find completely unacceptable her conclusion that the Master is a weakling whom Bulgakov punishes by making him share the fate of Pontius Pilate. At any rate, in cases of literary parallels one must proceed with care. The Faust theme is used intermittently and with extreme freedom, even whimsy, in *The Master and Margarita*. At times it seems rather the Mephistopheles theme that is being emphasized. Since this novel was in progress for over a decade, it would be very helpful to have access to the early drafts and notes. Without this help, however, one must work from other printed sources and certain known facts. On this basis it is possible to guess that Mephistopheles entered the plan of the novel well before the Master did. In an afterword to the first installment in *Moskva*, A. Vulis states that even before the novel was conceived in 1928 there were sketches for a satirical tale involving a “Consultant with a hoof.” A variant title was “The Black Magician.” The first conception may have followed the pattern of other Bulgakov works from that period. In the play *Ivan Vasilievich*, Ivan the Terrible and a house manager also named Ivan Vasilievich exchange places for an afternoon, to their mutual dismay. And in the story “The Adventures of Chichikov,” Gogol's hero appears in twentieth-century Russia and finds himself at home in the same old skullduggery. Very likely the question occurred to Bulgakov, What would happen if the devil himself came to Moscow? The thought had obvious satirical possibilities. Nor was the approach unique in its time.⁴

We recall that this novel did, after all, have its genesis in the late twenties, when the picaro was having a comeback in Russian fiction for very good, extraliterary reasons. The NEP period (1921-28), with its temporary return to private industry, was meant to allow the country to regain its balance economically. It turned out also to be a glorious season for profiteering, swindles, and fraud. Evidently the Revolution had not greatly affected human nature, except possibly to stir some of its lower instincts. Writers of the period, as we know, responded with a spate of satire which reached its glittering best in Olesha, Zoshchenko, Ilf and Petrov, Valentin Kataev,

and one or two of Bulgakov's early stories. Together these writers turned loose an uproarious mockery, which in some cases barely covered a profound alienation from the present.

There were certain devices and approaches which they found particularly adaptable. Grotesquery came easily to writers in this vein and of this period. The reinterpretation of Gogol begun by the Symbolist generation was proceeding apace. The Gogolian blend of fantastic and grotesque lay ready to hand for experimentation. E. T. A. Hoffmann also enjoyed renewed vogue among those attracted to the fantastic mode. Recurrent in both writers' works, of course, is the intrusion of diabolical powers into human life. Gogol had seen the devil at work—first the puppet-show devil of his Ukrainian tales, later the more sinister and powerful devil who lurked behind the façades of Petersburg, mocking and torturing mankind with the lure of false appearances. Bulgakov early used the same image as a device to explore the infernal mess left by the revolutionary whirlwind. His collection of short stories published in 1926 was entitled *D'iavoliada*. The title story has many Gogolian reminiscences, including its protagonist—a lineal descendant of Gogol's poor bedeviled clerks.

When Bulgakov began work on *The Master and Margarita* in 1928, he put to use once again the concept of laughter employed to exorcise evil. But in this case the device is reversed: the devil does the exorcising. The novel's epigraph offers the key: "Say at last—who art thou? / That Power I serve / Which wills forever evil / Yet does forever good." The Faust legend is thus announced. Mephistopheles enters the novel on the first pages as Professor Woland (one of the names he used in Goethe's *Faust*). He has come to Moscow as a special consultant in black magic. Pretending to entertain the city, Woland and his picaresque cohort trick it into a display of greed and credulity. Some of their pranks are reminiscent of Faust and Mephistopheles at the emperor's court.

But this is still not the story of Faust. So far it reads more like a later chapter in the adventures of Mephistopheles among humans. In his previous visitation the devil had been given permission to lead astray, if he could, a certain man who stood above his fellows by reason of his questing spirit. Mephistopheles's dim view of human nature was pitted against the Lord's confidence in his servant. Faust was the devil's target, like Job of old. On this later visit Woland seems to have a slightly different mission—investigation, not temptation. Indeed, temptation is unnecessary. In a passage excluded from the *Moskva* version, Woland indicates that he has come to see if the Muscovites have changed inwardly for the better.⁵ He quickly concludes that they have not. In fact, the progress of Woland and his retinue through Moscow turns willy-nilly into a search for

an honest man. Disgust with the state of affairs apparently converts even Satan to supporting good where and if he can find it. The only man in Moscow who positively benefits from Woland's visit is the Master. He, too, is the exception, the lonely searcher after truth—though in a different sense than Faust was. Perhaps a twentieth-century Faust knows that all mysteries are not unraveled through knowledge—nor does happiness lie in touching the distant star. At any rate, the Master's striving is of a different nature. He is the Artist. His search is contained in his book.

Bulgakov's novel is in a basic way a book about a book, a work about art and the artist. This is a feature that it shares with several important representatives of that growing Russian-language genre—works "written for the drawer." *Doctor Zhivago* is a prime example. Siniavsky's *Makepeace Experiment* takes the form of a chronicle, which is consigned by its author to the floorboards on the last page. And of course there are Nerzhin's precious notes in *The First Circle*. It is not surprising that men writing under these circumstances would turn to such devices and themes. The efforts of the literary artist to strive for and transmit some measure of human truth, and his right to search in whatever direction his inspiration takes him—these themes are perennial in art. They flowered with Romanticism. Certainly they have been prominent in Russian literature since the time of Pushkin. Nowhere in twentieth-century Russian literature are they more central than in Bulgakov's novel.

In *The Master and Margarita* the theme of the artist's experience takes a universalized mythological form, but there seems no doubt that it has deep roots in Bulgakov's own immediate circumstances. Vulis remarks that the burning of the Master's manuscripts refers to a "fact from the history" of Bulgakov's own novel.⁶ Again, access to all of the papers would be helpful. However, the link between Bulgakov and his hero can also be studied through certain events in his life during the thirties which are now publicly known. Furthermore, we can throw light both on the conception of the Master and on Bulgakov's technique of sublimating his own experience by making use of another method—by examining the other novel about an artist on which he worked during the later thirties, *Black Snow (Teatral'nyi roman)*. This novel, which was probably begun in 1936 and was never finished, was published in *Novyi mir* in August 1965, and in Michael Glenny's translation in 1967. At one time the author had given it the title "Notes of a Dead Man." It is a novel of much slighter scope, but it has the special advantage for our present inquiry of reflecting some of Bulgakov's own tribulations as a writer in a much less sublimated form. The hero, Maksudov, is Bulgakov in thin disguise. The book's keen satire impales Stanislavsky, his method, and various members of the august Moscow Art Theater. Ostensibly *Black Snow*

deals with the staging of Bulgakov's first novel, *The White Guard*. Actually his frustration and anger were directly related to the fate of his tragedy *Molière*, the vehicle for his rage at Stalin's censorship, which fell victim to more of the same. In fact, the feelings embodied in *Black Snow* were probably cumulative, because Bulgakov's whole career had been marked by repression and official disapproval. Gradually his open literary activity was reduced to preparing adaptations for the stage and doing literary advising for the Moscow Art Theater. It is now evident that for at least a decade his most creative energies went into work which he probably never expected to publish.

With the Bulgakov-Maksudov tie easily established, it is interesting to note the links between Maksudov and the Master. Like Maksudov (and Bulgakov), the Master is a disappointed author, embittered by the treatment that his honest creation has received from editors, fellow artists, critics—in a word, the whole corrupt artistic-political world. Maksudov is a young man working in a very real setting. He is a proofreader on a trade paper. He writes his novel under a dusty little light bulb each night, working sometimes till dawn. The Master, on the other hand, is a middle-aged historian-turned-librarian, who by the fantastic luck of winning a lottery has been able to retire to a basement flat. There he writes his novel and there his eternal love Margarita joins him, to pour her life also into his work. From the start, this basement existence has something otherworldly about it, and the transition to madness and fantasy is not difficult. The entrance of Satan into the Master's affairs is only to be expected, since the archdemon is already turning Moscow upside-down. The Faust-Mephistopheles theme enters *Black Snow* also, but more superficially. Maksudov is driven by failure to a comic suicide attempt, which is at first assisted and then frustrated by a comic-opera intrusion. Feeling for the trigger on his stolen gun, the hero is distracted by a recording:

"Heavens! *Faust!*" I thought. "How timely. I'll just wait for Mephistopheles' entry. For the last time. I shall never hear it again." The orchestra alternately rose and faded, but the tenor shrieked louder and louder, "I curse this life, my faith and all my knowledge!"

"In a moment," I thought, "but he's singing it so fast . . ."

The tenor gave a despairing yell, then the orchestra came in with a crash. My trembling finger lay on the trigger and for a moment the noise deafened me. My heart seemed to fail and the flame of the oil stove seemed to shoot up toward the ceiling; I dropped the revolver.

Then the noise came again. A ponderous bass voice rang out, "It is I!"

I turned toward the door.

Someone was knocking at the door, repeatedly and authoritatively. I stuck the revolver into my trousers pocket and cried weakly, "Come in."

The door was flung open and I collapsed to the floor with horror. It was him, without the slightest doubt. In the twilight there towered over me a face with an imperious nose and beetling eyebrows. The play of shadows made me see a pointed black beard jutting from his square chin. A beret was planted jauntily over one ear. It lacked feathers, it is true, but in a word the apparition before me was—Mephistopheles. Then I looked again and saw that he was wearing an overcoat and shiny blue galoshes. He was carrying a briefcase under his arm. "Of course, that's right," I thought, "how else would he walk around Moscow in the middle of the twentieth century?"

"Rudolfi," said the evil spirit in a tenor, not a bass voice.⁷

The illusion is broken when Maksudov recognizes the visitor to be a Moscow editor who has somehow learned of his novel.

The diabolical motif does not reappear, although Maksudov does eventually commit suicide without interference. Only slightly less self-destructive, the Master burns his manuscript in a fit of despair and stark fear, and after another adventure (which Maksudov does not share), he commits himself to an insane asylum. Other links between the two characters exist. Like the Master, Maksudov suffers from melancholia. One night he whimsically explains his plight to his only listener: "It's the onset of neurosis," I explained to the cat; 'it will get worse and engulf me. But I shan't die just yet.'" Hallucination is never far away.

Parenthetically, this cat is not the same animal who strolls about Moscow as one of Woland's mischief-makers. But Behemoth does appear elsewhere in *Black Snow*, slightly disguised. During Maksudov's excruciating interview with Stanislavsky (Ivan Vasilievich in the novel—an interesting choice of names), a door springs open and "into the room there flew, in a state of satanic terror, a fat tabby cat." Speechless and nameless, the cat makes for the curtains and goes through the same gymnastics that Behemoth performs in Apartment 50 near the end of *The Master and Margarita* when he dodges the bullets of the secret police. In *Black Snow* the cat is terrified by a hysterical actress, but the antics are recognizably the same. The point to be observed is that such recurring coincidences illustrate the criss-crossing pattern of the two novels.

Of the two heroes, Maksudov is occasionally pompous, but droll self-mockery keeps authorial vanity in check. As for the Master, one of the striking features of this would-be Faust is his slightly ridiculous aspect. In the chapter suspiciously entitled "Enter the Hero" the Master enters the room of his neighbor in the madhouse, the

poet Ivan. In answer to Ivan's innocent question, "Are you a writer?" he scowls, shakes his finger at Ivan, and announces, "I am a master." He then produces a greasy black cap with the letter *M* embroidered in yellow silk—Margarita's handiwork. As Bulgakov tells it, "He put the cap on and showed himself to Ivan in profile and full face to prove that he was a master." Self-satire for the moment unites the three authors—the Master, Mak-sudov, and Mikhail Bulgakov. The cap fits all three.

Yet this is only one side of the Master's character. As both his own story and his novel unroll in turn, his stature—and the dimensions of his tragedy—increase. It is just here that Bulgakov's personal experience is elevated and objectified. In *Black Snow* he purges his bitterness through laughter—in many respects it is a very funny book. In *The Master and Margarita* a sublimation takes place through two means. One of these is the subject of the Master's novel. Though Yeshua is Jesus reduced to a ragtag prophet, his goodness gives him a peculiar power, which he exercises over the worldly, skeptical Pilate. Yeshua is done to death by a cabal who hate him and fear his message. Pilate is drawn to his message but lacks the courage to save him. He thereby provokes Yeshua's thematic remark that "cowardice is one of the greatest human sins." The remark haunts Pilate throughout his ineffectual efforts to purge himself of guilt and remorse.

There are threads of identification between the Master and Yeshua—both of them victims of malice and cowardice—as there are between Bulgakov and his creation. (It is a parallel which could be studied further.) In exploring the meaning of both Pilate and Yeshua, the Master somehow involves his fate with theirs: his release from suffering comes simultaneously with Pilate's, and both are freed at the command of Yeshua. Here they part. Pilate goes up the moonlit path with his prophet and savior; the Master remains below with Margarita. This aspect of Bulgakov's novel deserves close attention for other reasons as well. It is mentioned only briefly here as one of the methods of enlarging the Master's meaning. Our main concern is with the other universalizing factor—the play of the Faust-theme against that of the artist.

The Master and his Margarita remain below, under the patronage of Woland. This is as it must be, for there has been a pact with Satan. Its effects have been mitigated through the command of Yeshua, but the bargain is kept. The Master is certainly no Faust in this transaction. He is the passive, broken victim. The active one of the pair is Margarita, because it is she who has sold herself to Satan. And though, like Gretchen, she saves her Master, it is by courage and love, not by penitence. And it is not into the light that they go, but to a twilight limbo of quiet and peace. As far as the actual portrayal of hero and heroine is concerned, then, the Faust story is here honored chiefly in the breach.

Bulgakov is a master of parody and polemic, of variation on a theme. He employs this talent in a dozen minor ways in this novel. It is no surprise to find it governing the presentation of his hero. We have seen that he uses the Faust legend to underline the element of quest. The Master too was a scholar and a searcher, but one who sought his ultimate meanings through the novel in which he reinterpreted the story of Pilate and Jesus. He did not roam the universe testing all experience. Art was the vehicle of his search, and his studio the locale. In the tradition of the Romantic dreamers of the nineteenth century, he searched in isolation, cut off from everyone but his love. True, his quest has come to a dead stop before we meet him in the novel. He has been shattered by his venture into the outside world and by the reception which that world has given his novel and its truth. The truth he has come to—both artistically and experientially—is that cowardice is one of the chief human sins. He explores it in his characterization of Pontius Pilate. He meets it in the time-serving treachery of the Moscow literary world. Then paradoxically he experiences it in himself: he becomes afraid. And with good reason.

In an elliptical and little-noted passage in chapter 13 we learn that the Master has spent some three months under arrest. He tells Ivan that the criticism of his book had risen to such heights that he had sensed a campaign. (This detail is not in the *Moskva* version.) Then, on that fatal October night after he had burned his manuscript, the knock came. The next few sentences of his account are whispered for Ivan's ears alone. But when the narrative continues, the Master describes himself standing in the yard on a *January* evening in his old overcoat but with the buttons torn off—the telltale sign of a sojourn in prison. And now, in total despair and with no place else to go, he consigns himself to the asylum of Dr. Stravinsky.

Only through Margarita and the pact with Woland is he rescued. Vulis says that Bulgakov added Margarita to his plan only in 1934.⁸ One may guess that it was at about that time that the Master also took definite shape. What is Margarita? Certainly she is the antithesis of Pilate: courage is one of her leading characteristics. She is the very embodiment of love that will stop at nothing—that will go through hell for the beloved. In this case the beloved is an artist, and in some miraculous way she is his art. She comes to him at the beginning of his task and spends with him the long days and months of creation. The novel, she tells him, is her life. The novel is destroyed just when she and the Master are forcibly separated, and its restoration coincides with their reunion. Together the novel and Margarita effect his resurrection. Thus, art—abetted by courage and love—struggles with despair for the soul of this artist, which is embodied in his truthful book. The struggle over a human soul recalls the medieval morality tale,

which the Faust story indeed represents. But the roles are allotted somewhat differently. Instead of the traditional angelic and demonic powers, we have a different opposition: Margarita is allied with the devil in her battle against those who would crush the artist's soul. Bulgakov clearly suggests that the real forces of evil in the situation are the latter. Salvation comes through Margarita—no angel indeed. Margarita plucks some remnants of the Master's manuscript from the fire and Satan produces the rest. With Satan's aid, she also plucks the Master's soul from oblivion and his body from the madhouse. Thus Satan gives "virtue" its due and assists it in continuing its quest for truth, knowing full well that that goal can never be reached—at least not below.

The destiny of the two is settled through the intervention of Yeshua. Their reunion was earned through Margarita's daring, but their final reward is earned by the Master's art. Matthew, the disciple, delivers Yeshua's message to Woland: "He has read the Master's writings . . . and asks you to take the Master with you and reward him by granting him peace. Would that be hard for you to do, spirit of evil?" "Nothing is hard for me to do," Woland replies, "as you very well know" (p. 349). The Master has not earned light, but he has earned peace—peace in which to continue his work on his reconstituted manuscript.

Manuscripts never burn, says Satan. But cities do, especially sinful ones. Near the end of the novel the Master and his consort are escorted from Moscow by Satan and his companions. The moment on Sparrow Hills when they turn to say farewell, there is the illusion that Moscow is burning. Indeed fire has preceded their departure, for Behemoth the cat and Koroviev have seen to the destruction of Griboedov House, the headquarters for the literary sycophants who wrecked the Master's hopes. And the basement flat has been left in flames. The departing cries of the Master and Margarita are exultant: "Burn away, past!" "Burn, suffering!" Now for a moment a thousand suns are reflected from the city's windows, and the city exhales smoke and haze. When Margarita looks back in flight, she sees that "not only the many-colored towers but the whole city had long since vanished from sight, swallowed by the earth, leaving only mist and smoke where it had been" (p. 366). One recalls Lot's departure from Sodom—that city destroyed by divine wrath because of a shortage of honest men. Satan is leaving Moscow in disarray—her sins exposed if not thoroughly punished. Her artistic colony especially has suffered from exposure. In all the city Satan has found only one man honest enough to follow his artistic inspiration, even though it led him to an unpopular truth about human nature, to arrest, and finally to the asylum.

Fortunately Margarita, unlike Lot's wife, is not punished for her backward look. Yet despite her courage

and his honesty, it is not salvation and ultimate answers that are granted to this couple. Nor do they expect them. Yeshua has read his novel, Woland tells the Master, and the fate he has begged for them is a peculiarly fitting one. "You are a romantic, Master!" says Woland (p. 371). As such he is to be given his romantic haven, where he can live, dream, and create forever with his Margarita. In their earlier interview the Master had expressed revulsion at Woland's suggestion that he return to his novel: "I hate that novel. . . . I have been through too much because of it." Yet Woland had urged him, "Believe me, your novel has some more surprises in store for you" (p. 286). Art is inexhaustible; who knows to what further discoveries it may lead? Closing the circle of reference, Woland addresses the Master, "O, thrice-romantic Master . . . Don't you want, like Faust, to sit over a retort in the hope of fashioning a new homunculus?" (p. 371). The reward is not in the completion of the task but in the hope and the striving. Once, the Master says, he *had* finished a novel, and on that day his life "came to an end" (p. 143). Now his quest will go on, but in rest and quiet and timeless delight.

Bulgakov's Master is not, after all, the scholar-adventurer Faust. He is an artist seeking artistic truth, and his happiness consists chiefly in the endless, free, peaceful pursuit of his art. This he was denied by Moscow's literary establishment. But the so-called powers of evil grant it to him. In a wonderful final moment, which reminds one of Vrubel's painting *The Flight of Faust and Mephistopheles*, "the black Woland" and his cohort plunge into the abyss. And the Master and Margarita enter their eternity.

To return to the connecting thread of interpretation, it seems eminently reasonable to explain the Master as autobiographical at base. Certain elements in *Black Snow* make this clearer, considering that the writing of this novel coincided with presumably the most important years of Bulgakov's work on *The Master and Margarita*. He had begun the latter at the end of the NEP period, when literature, along with everything else, was being drawn firmly under political control. The satirical buffoonery of its early sections is entirely in keeping with his own tone and that of other satirists of the period. As has often been noted, disillusion with the immediate results of the Revolution stimulated this genre. But a second disillusion came upon these writers and grew more intense as the decade ended: it concerned the possibility of a free art. The problem earlier had in part been one of factional fighting among literary groups. But when it became one of repression from above, the situation seemed to call for a larger genre, at least in Bulgakov's notebook. Retaining some of his earlier style and techniques, he enlarged his scenario, objectified his own plight, and universalized his experience, even finding a myth to suit. He seems to have