



**The Master and Margarita**  
Author unknown

e-Notes on The Master and Margarita

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The Master and Margarita

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov is considered one of the best and most highly regarded novels to come out of Russia during the Soviet era. The book weaves together satire and realism, art and religion, history and contemporary social values. It features three story lines. The main story, taking place in Russia of the 1930s, concerns a visit by the devil, referred to as Professor Woland, and four of his assistants during Holy Week; they use black magic to play tricks on those who cross their paths. Another story line features the Master, who has been languishing in an insane asylum, and his love, Margarita, who seeks Woland's help in being reunited with the Master. A third story, which is presented as a novel written by the Master, depicts the crucifixion of Yeshua Ha-Notsri, or Jesus Christ, by Pontius Pilate.

Using the fantastic elements of the story, Bulgakov satirizes the greed and corruption of Stalin's Soviet Union, in which people's actions were controlled as well as their perceptions of reality. In contrast, he uses a realistic style in telling the story of Yeshua. The holy life led by Christ in this book is more ordinary than the miraculous one told in the Scriptures. Because the book derides government bureaucracy and corruption, the manuscript of The Master and Margarita was hidden for over twenty years, until the more lenient Khrushchev government allowed its publication.

## 2. AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

In his final weeks, as he lay dying of nephrosclerosis, Mikhail Bulgakov continued to dictate changes for *The Master and Margarita* to his wife. He had been working on the book for twelve years, through eight versions, and he meant it to be his literary legacy.

Bulgakov was born in Kiev on May 3, 1891. His father was a professor at the Kiev Theological Seminary, an influence that appears in the novel through mentions of the history and philosophy of religious matters. Bulgakov graduated with distinction from the University of Kiev, and after attaining his medical degree from St. Vladimir's University, he went into the army, which sent him to a small town in the province of Smolensk. It was 1916, and Russia was involved in the First World War. The autobiographical stories in Bulgakov's collection *A Country Doctor's Notebooks* are based on his experiences in Smolensk.

Bulgakov returned to Kiev in 1918, but was drafted into the White Army to fight in Russia's civil war against the communist Red Army. On a train trip home from Northern Caucasus, where the army had sent him, he sat up all night writing his first short story, and when the train stopped he took the story to the local newspaper office, which promptly published it. The following year, 1920, Bulgakov gave up medicine and moved to Moscow to write full time. He had several books published and several plays produced. His greatest success was the play *Days of the Turbins*, which was his adaptation for the stage of his own novel *The White Guard*. The story features a family that suffers at the hands of the Communists during the revolution, a depiction that would earn Bulgakov the suspicion of the Communists, who by then controlled the government. Despite the Communist reaction, Soviet Union audiences would applaud the play. From 1925 to 1928, the author was affiliated with the Moscow Arts Theater, where he had an uneasy relationship with the theater's founder and director, Konstatin Stanislavsky, who is known today for developing the theatrical technique referred to as "Method acting."

In 1929, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers became the official government agency overseeing the political content of literary works. Bulgakov found himself unable to publish because his ideologies did not conform to those of the Communists. In frustration, he burned many of his manuscripts in 1930. He wrote an appeal directly to Joseph Stalin, the secretary general of the Communist Party and leader of the country. Stalin had been a fan of *Days of the Turbins*, and by his order Bulgakov was reinstated into the Art Theater. For the next ten years, Bulgakov wrote, directed, and sometimes acted, and he worked on *The Master and Margarita*.

Upon his death in 1940, he instructed his wife to hide the manuscript of *The Master and Margarita* because he was afraid that it would be confiscated and destroyed by government censors. It was not published for another twenty-seven years, when the government of the Soviet Union had become more open to intellectual differences to the party line. Until the publication of *The Master and Margarita* in an English translation in 1967, few people outside of the Soviet Union had ever heard of Bulgakov. In subsequent years, his other novels, short stories, plays, essays, and his autobiography have been published, as well as numerous publications about his life and works.

### 3. ONE-PAGE SUMMARY

Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* is split into three different, yet intertwined, versions of reality: events in present-day Moscow, including the adventures of satanic visitors, events concerning the crucifixion of Yeshua Ha-Notsri, or Jesus Christ, in first-century Yershalaim, and the love story of the Master and Margarita.

#### Part 1

*Wednesday*

Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, an important literary figure, and Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyryov, a poet who is also known as Bezdomny, which means "homeless," meet at Patriarch's Ponds to discuss a commissioned poem that Berlioz had asked Ivan to pen. Berlioz would like Ivan to rewrite the poem because he believes the poem makes Jesus too real. He goes on to explain why he believes Jesus never existed, providing Ivan with a brief history of religion. Berlioz is eventually interrupted by a mysterious man named Professor Woland, who assures them that Jesus did indeed exist. When Berlioz objects, Woland begins the story of Pontius Pilate, but not before he tells Berlioz he will be decapitated before the day is out.

The story shifts to Yershalaim, where Pilate is hearing Yeshua's case. Yeshua is accused of inciting the people to burn down the temple, as well as advocating the overthrow of Emperor Tiberius. Pilate is forced to try him, and Yeshua is sentenced to death. Back in Moscow, Berlioz is indeed later decapitated by a streetcar. After Berlioz is killed, Ivan confronts and chases Woland and his gang-- a choirmaster, Korovyov, and a huge tomcat, Behemoth--through the streets to no avail. When he tries to relate the happenings of the day, he is taken to the asylum.

#### Part 2

*Thursday*

Styopa Likhodeyev, Berlioz's flat mate and director of the Variety Theater, awakes with a hangover to find Woland waiting for him. Woland apprises Likhodeyev that he has agreed to let Woland make seven performances of black magic at his theater. Likhodeyev does not remember having made this agreement. Contracts do contain Likhodeyev's signature; it seems that Woland is manipulating the situation, but Likhodeyev is bound to the agreement. Once a dazed Likhodeyev realizes that he must allow Woland to perform, Woland introduces the theater director to his entourage--Behemoth, Korovyov, and the singlefanged Azazello--and announces that they need apartment number 50, which has a reputation for being cursed (tenants of the apartment usually end up missing after a while). It is revealed that Woland and his group do not think highly of Styopa; they believe people like him in high places are scoundrels.

Styopa soon finds himself transported to Yalta. The satanic gang spread mayhem throughout the building, and the manager has been planted on him and is taken away by the police. The manager of the Variety Theater, Ivan Savelyevich Varenuvka, attempts to find Styopa, who has been sending desperate telegrams from Yalta. At the same time, he, with the help of others, is trying to ascertain the identity of the mysterious Woland. To prevent inquiries by Varenuvka, Woland sends a new infernal creature, Hella, to Varenuvka, and she turns him into a vampire.

At the Variety Theater, Woland and his entourage give a black magic performance, during which the master of ceremonies is decapitated, and

bewitched money--which later turns into bottle labels, kittens, and sundry objects--is rained over the crowd. Meanwhile, back at the asylum, Ivan meets his neighbor--the hero of the tale, the Master. He tells him about the previous day's events, and the Master assures him that Woland is Satan. The Master then tells him about his own life. He is an aspiring novelist and married, but he reveals he is in love with his "secret wife," Margarita, who is also married. His novel--the Pontius Pilate story--was their obsession, but critics lambasted it after it was offered for publication. Maddened, the Master had burned the manuscript, and ended up at the asylum.

Later, Ivan dreams the next part of Pilate's story: Condemned men are walking to their executions;

Matvei watches them hang and feels responsible. Then he grows angry and curses God. A storm comes, and the prisoners are put humanely to death by a guard stabbing them under the pre-text of giving them water.

### **Part 3**

#### *Friday*

Woland and his group are still wreaking havoc in Moscow, and Margarita is pining over her love, the Master, and she rereads what is left of the Master's novel. She then goes to a park where she sees Berlioz's funeral and meets Azazello, who sets up a meeting between Margarita and Woland. He also gives Margarita some cream, telling her it will make her feel better. After she smears the cream over her body, she becomes a witch. Azazello contacts her and tells her to fly to the river for the meeting with Woland. She flies naked over the city and, on the way, destroys the critic Latunsky's apartment for he had been the one who ruined the Master. Her maid Natasha, now a witch, and Nikolai Ivanovich, now a pig, join her after using the cream. They meet Woland and his followers, and Satan's ball takes place with Margarita as the hostess. A parade of both famous and commonplace evil people attend, and the ball climaxes with the murder of Baron Maigel. Margarita drinks blood, and opens her eyes to find the ball is over. Woland grants Margarita a wish for being the hostess of the ball. She chooses to be reunited with her lover, the Master. He soon appears before Margarita. The Master is confused at first, but he soon realizes that he is reunited with the woman he loves. Woland also has a copy of the Master's entire manuscript even though the Master had burned it, and he gives it to the Master. He then returns the Master and Margarita and other characters, including Nikolai Ivanovich and Varenuksa, back to their lives as they wish. Natasha however chooses to remain a witch.

The Pilate story continues and Pilate meets with the chief of the secret police, Afranius. He pre-monishes that Judas of Kerioth, the man who betrayed Yeshua, will be murdered, and indeed, he is later lured outside of the city and murdered. Afranius reports the murder of Kerioth to Pilate, as well as the burial of the criminals. In a conversation with Levi (who was found to have taken Yeshua's body after the execution), Pilate reveals that it was he who killed Kerioth.

### **Part 4**

#### *Saturday*

An investigation into the strange events incited by Woland and his group begins, while Ivan is possessed by visions of Pilate and the bald hill on which Yeshua and the two other criminals had been executed. A shoot-out occurs in apartment number 50 between the investigators and Behemoth, but,

surprisingly, no one is hurt. Instead, the building burns. Behemoth and Korovyov continue to perform more pranks that leave many areas of Moscow burning.

Levi comes to Woland with a message from Yeshua: he requests that Woland give the Master "peace." Woland agrees, and Azazello gives poisoned wine to the Master and Margarita. Their bodies die and the couple flies off with the infernal creatures, who, as they fly, return to their real figures. They soon come upon a man and his dog. Woland states that the man is the hero of the Master's novel: Pontius Pilate. He claims that Pilate has been sitting in the same spot for the past two thousand years with his dog, Banga. The Master is allowed to set Pilate free from his immortal insomnia by creating and stating the final line of his novel; he yells, "Free! Free! He is waiting for you!" Pilate and Banga are finally able to leave their static existence and be with Yeshua. The Master and Margarita are not given enlightenment, but they are allowed to spend the rest of eternity together in a small cottage.

## 4. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

### Summary and Analysis: Chapter 1

#### *New Characters*

Ivan: A poet writing under the pseudonym "Homeless."

Berlioz: The chairman of the Massolit literary association and the editor of a literary journal.

Professor (also known as "Consultant," and "Woland"): A foreigner recently arrived in Moscow later to be revealed as the devil.

Annushka: The woman who spills sunflower oil and causes Berlioz's death.

Citizen with Checkered Jacket (also known as "Koroviev," "the choirmaster," and "Fagott"): Initially a phantasm seen by Berlioz, he is later to be revealed as Woland's accomplice.

#### *Summary*

Berlioz and Ivan appear at Moscow's Patriarch's Ponds as the spring sun sets and sit down at a food stand along the oddly desolate walk running parallel to Malaya Bronnaya Street. After they drink apricot soda, Berlioz feels a spasm in his heart and perceives "a blunt needle lodged in it," and is gripped with a worrisome fear. A tall, transparent citizen dressed in a short checkered jacket appears briefly, striking further terror in him. But Berlioz calms down to talk with Ivan about the poem about Jesus that Ivan has written for the next issue of a journal edited by Berlioz. Berlioz points out that Ivan, who has adopted the literary pseudonym "Homeless," has concentrated on portraying Jesus as a bad person, whereas he should have focused on portraying the fabricated existence of Jesus as a myth.

As Berlioz starts telling Ivan about other mythological gods with the same characteristics as Jesus, a man who is about 40 years old, of foreign appearance and wearing grey shoes and a matching grey suit, appears on the walk. He is carrying a stick with a black knob shaped like a poodle's head, and his teeth are covered by "platinum crowns on the left side and gold on the right." He joins Ivan and Berlioz's conversation, speaking Russian with a clean foreign accent. As he queries them about religion, both men confirm they are atheists. The foreign man asks more questions, mentioning the inability of man to predict the future and, as examples of this inability, points out to Berlioz that sometimes men get cancer or slip under tram-cars.

Berlioz becomes suspicious of the foreigner, who predicts that Berlioz will be decapitated. He also predicts that Berlioz will not make the evening meeting at Massolit, a Soviet literary association, because Annushka has already bought and spilled the sunflower oil. Berlioz, who is the chairman of Massolit, asks the man, who has a card identifying himself as a professor, who he is. The professor says he is a German and is in Moscow to serve as a consultant. He claims to be using his skills as a polyglot who specializes in black magic to sort through some manuscripts of Gerbert of Aurillace, a tenth-century necromancer. This professor insists that Jesus did exist, and he begins telling a story about Jesus and Pontius Pilate.

#### *Analysis*

The epigram from Goethe's play, *Faust*, that opens *Master and Margarita* suggests that Goethe provided at least some of Bulgakov's inspiration, and indeed, some parallels with that play will appear in this novel.

Bulgakov's novel was written in the 1930s, a time of great repression and hardship in the Soviet Union under Stalin. The repressive and controlling atmosphere of that Communist state, with its extensive use of secret



police, informers, spies, public denunciations, and threats to subdue citizens and coerce them into obeying the government, is evident throughout much of the novel. The novel itself, opening with the two odd and somewhat surreal elements of the vacant walkway and the stand selling only apricot soda, begins on a skewed note. Berlioz's pang of fear and vision of the citizen in the checkered jacket continues the odd feeling, but also adds a sense of foreboding: it seems something is dangerously awry in Moscow.

When the foreigner arrives and begins talking with Berlioz and Ivan about the existence or nonexistence of Jesus and God, he is essentially questioning the official atheism that makes up one of the basic beliefs of the Soviet state. When he points out that men often don't know what they'll be doing in a few hours, he is also questioning the central planning that organized and controlled much of Soviet life. These two factors help explain Ivan and Berlioz's bewildered response to the professor. As the professor begins telling his story, he has already thrown the two men off guard and has effectively begun to undermine two of the principle tenets of the Soviet Union.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 2**

### *New Characters*

Pontius Pilate: The fifth Roman procurator of Judea.

Mark Ratslayer: A Roman centurion.

Yeshua: A philosopher who has been arrested by the Romans for potentially causing unrest.

Matthew Levi: One of Yeshua's followers.

Joseph Kaifa: The high priest of the Jews and president of the Sanhedrin.

Hooded Man (also known as "Aphranus"): A man who meets Pilate; he is later revealed as the head of the Roman secret police in Judea.

### *Summary*

The professor continues his story, which begins with Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, sitting in the "colonnade between the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great" early in the morning on the day before Passover. The weary Pilate is hounded by the smell of rose oil and must confirm the death sentence the accused man, Yeshua, faces. Two legionnaires bring in Yeshua, who is about 27 years old and dressed in an old chiton. Pilate begins interrogating Yeshua but, angered at being called "good man" by him, orders the centurion Mark Ratslayer to teach Yeshua a lesson. Mark Ratslayer whips Yeshua and tells him to call Pilate solely by the name "Hegemon." Yeshua returns to Pilate and tells Pilate his name and that he comes from Gamala, which is in the north of Judea. Yeshua lacks a permanent home, does not know who his parents are, and has no family. Despite Pilate's accusations, Yeshua denies calling for the temple building to be destroyed. He also says Matthew Levi, a former tax collector, ascribes false statements to Yeshua in his writings on his goatskin parchment. Nonetheless, Matthew Levi is Yeshua's faithful companion.

The sick Pontius Pilate briefly longs for poison, then asks Yeshua, "What is truth?" Yeshua responds by saying the truth is that Pilate is sick and thinks of death, but he adds, "[Y]our suffering will soon be over." Yeshua tells Pilate to get out of his palace and go for a walk with him. Pilate orders his hands to be unbound, and as their conversation proceeds, Yeshua denies he is a physician and proclaims, "[T]here are no evil people in the world." Pilate concludes that Yeshua is mentally ill and, instead of being executed, will be put under confinement at Pilate's residence in Stratonian Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea. After reading a document on Yeshua, Pilate's skin turns brown, his eyes sink, and he has a vision of

Yeshua's head being replaced by the head of the former Roman emperor Tiberius. Pilate quickly thinks "I'm lost!" and "We're lost!" He recovers and, looking sharply at Yeshua, asks him if he has said anything against the great Caesar. In response, Yeshua says that he told Judas of Kiriath, just before being arrested, that "all authority is violence over people," and when the kingdom of truth and justice comes, authority will disappear.

An outraged Pilate confirms Yeshua's death sentence. He orders two centuries of Roman soldiers to transport Yeshua, as well as two other condemned men, to Bald Mountain to be executed. They leave, and Pilate meets with the high priest of the Jews, Joseph Kaifa, and informs Kaifa of Yeshua's confirmed death sentence. However, he gives Kaifa the option of releasing Yeshua or another prisoner, Bar-Rabban, in honor of the Passover feast. Kaifa says Bar-Rabban will be released. Kaifa and Pilate then dispute Kaifa's decision and debate the general relations between Romans and Jews. They manage to reconcile though, and Pilate goes up to a platform to tell a crowd of Jews that Bar-Rabban is being released. The three condemned men are taken toward Bald Mountain and, at around 10 A.M., Pilate heads toward the gates that lead into the palace garden.

### *Analysis*

The story of Yeshua and Pilate in Yershalaim, although clearly derived from the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life, departs from the Gospels in many ways, especially in the long focus on Pilate. His weariness, agony, and authority contrast with Yeshua's humbleness, plain speech, and gentleness. Pilate's conversation with Yeshua is punctuated by Pilate's vision of Tiberius' sickly head and a sense of being lost and living an agonizing immortality. Pilate's change after this vision is expressed in his vow to punish Yeshua with death and his denial that "the kingdom of truth will come." Pilate has chosen power over truth, and after dismissing Yeshua he enters into negotiations of power with Kaifa. Pilate proclaims to the public, in a theatrical show of power disguised as mercy, that Bar-Rabban, not Yeshua, will be spared execution. Nonetheless, Pilate is afraid up until the time the condemned men are removed from his sight, and when his sense of anguish recurs, he is overwhelmed by impotence. Pilate's royal powers have done nothing to allay his weariness and fear of death. He is trapped, and rather than prolong his talk with Yeshua, who might have led him out of his trap, he has condemned Yeshua. Yeshua had pointed out that his own hair did not come from Pilate, and Pilate responded by threatening that he "can cut that hair"; in the same spirit, Pilate rejects the arrival of the kingdom of truth and calls out "Criminal!" to his staff in a weak voice "cracked with commanding."

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 3-4**

### *New Characters*

Black Cat (also known as "Behemoth"): A cat who boards the tram-car; he is to be revealed as a member of Woland's retinue.

### *Summary*

The professor has concluded his narrative, and evening has come to the Patriarch's Ponds. He declares that he was present for the entire story he has related to Berlioz and Ivan. Berlioz patronizes the professor, whom he takes for a mad German, but the professor predicts that he will be living in Berlioz's apartment shortly. The three men talk about the existence of the devil before Berlioz heads to the tram-car station at Bronnaya to report the professor to the foreigners' bureau. Before reaching the turnstile at the station, he sees the same citizen he had seen before, only now the citizen wears checkered trousers. A tram-car comes along, Berlioz loses his footing on the cobbles by the turnstile, and his head is

severed by the tram-car when he falls on the rails.

Ivan rushes to the turnstile in response to the accident and hears a woman say that Annushka broke a liter-bottle of sunflower oil on the turnstile. Remembering the professor's prophecy, he rushes back to find him and sees the professor, along with the citizen Berlioz had seen, who is now called "the choirmaster" and wears a pince-nez with a cracked lens. The professor tells an angry Ivan he doesn't speak Russian, and the choirmaster blocks Ivan, then vanishes. Ivan looks into the distance to see the professor, the choirmaster, and a huge whiskered black cat by the exit to Patriarch's Lane. Ivan chases after the trio, but they split up and slip away. Once Ivan realizes he won't be able to catch any of them, he also realizes how little time the chase took. Concluding that he can find the professor in house 13, apartment 47, which is located on a lane near Arbat Square, he goes there and is let into the apartment by a silent little girl. Ivan goes into the bathroom to catch the professor but instead encounters a naked woman in the bathtub. He retreats to the kitchen, where he sees a dozen small primus stoves, two candles, and two icons. Ivan takes a candle and the icon that is made of paper and goes out into the lane. He concludes the professor is at the Moscow River and, upon reaching the river, he begins swimming in it. Not finding the professor there either, he comes out to find his clothes have been stolen by the man he asked to guard them. His Massolit identification card is also gone, and Ivan dresses in a torn Tolstoy blouse and a pair of striped drawers left by the thief. Ivan decides to run to Griboedov's, where he will surely find the professor.

### *Analysis*

The professor's story entrances Ivan and Berlioz despite their avowal that Jesus's existence is made up. Although Berlioz continues to patronize the professor, his bewilderment before having his head cut off by the tram-car again shows that there is something about the professor that cannot be dismissed. The fruition of his prophecy confirms that the novel's characters should not take this man lightly. The checkered man, now called a choirmaster, is also in on the nefarious deed. Although the cat causes Ivan astonishment, the fantastic speed of his chase and assumption that he will find the professor in apartment 47 or Griboedov's are also astonishing. The novel has firmly established its bizarre, surreal atmosphere. Meanwhile, the earlier talk of religion, together with the prophecy's fruition, the Pilate story, and Ivan's inexplicable decision to take the paper icon, hint at a deeper message and an allegorical meaning to this novel.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 5-6**

### *New Characters*

Riukhin: A poet who helps bring Ivan into the psychiatric clinic.

Zheldybin: Berlioz's assistant, who receives and spreads the news of Berlioz's death.

Doctor (also known as Dr. Stravinsky): The head doctor of the Moscow psychiatric clinic.

### *Summary*

Griboedov's, a restaurant on the ground floor of The House of Griboedov, is known as the best restaurant in Moscow. The house serves as a club for Massolit, a Moscow literary organization. The club itself is very cozy and plush, but the restaurant, with its reasonable prices and superb menu, is the club's greatest feature. On this night, 12 writers have gathered for

the meeting Berlioz would be attending if he were not dead. It is nearing

11:00 P.M., and the impatient writers, who had expected the meeting to start at 10 o'clock, grumble impatiently before going down to the restaurant at midnight. Meanwhile, Berlioz's assistant, Zheldybin, is given the news of Berlioz's death and goes to visit the head and body laid out on two separate tables. At midnight, "a handsome dark-eyed man with a dagger-like beard" who looks like a Caribbean pirate enters the restaurant. The news of Berlioz's death spreads through Griboedov's at the same time, and shortly thereafter Ivan runs onto the restaurant's veranda. Ivan, carrying the candle and with the icon pinned to the breast of his blouse, starts looking for the professor and reveals that the professor has killed Berlioz. However, no one believes this story and the diners, concluding he is insane, capture Ivan. The pirate dismisses the restaurant's doorman for letting Ivan in, and Ivan is carried to a truck, which will take him to a psychiatric clinic located on the banks of a river outside of Moscow.

At 1:30 A.M., a doctor arrives in the examining room to meet Ivan. The poet Riukhin, who had helped carry Ivan into the truck, tells the doctor what Ivan has done. Ivan, though, complains that he's been mistreated and is perfectly sane, adding a denunciation of Riukhin as "a typical little kulak." The doctor and Riukhin listen to Ivan narrate the encounter with the professor before Ivan is manhandled by some orderlies. The doctor, suspecting Ivan has schizophrenia, orders Ivan to be put in room 117 and assigned a nurse. The truck takes Riukhin back to Moscow, and a disconsolate Riukhin returns to Griboedov's to drink vodka by himself.

### *Analysis*

The pleasures provided at Griboedov's, the home of Massolit, are a sample of the privileges available to artists who comply with the Soviet authorities. However, the disgruntlement among those waiting for Berlioz indicates that not all Massolit members are equal, and the Soviet ideal of a classless society has not been realized. The refusal to take Ivan's story seriously is not surprising, but it recalls the earlier statement that Berlioz was not used to seeing extraordinary phenomena. It seems either Communism or literary success has dulled the Massolit members' sense of the unusual and inexplicable.

So the only apparent option is to remove Ivan to the psychiatric clinic on the outskirts of Moscow, where he can be treated in isolation. Ivan's statement that the icon scared the professor and his comrades hints that the professor may be demonic, but even Ivan isn't able to consider that possibility. Riukhin, who briefly wonders if Ivan is really quite sane and questions the value of his own poems, weakens and rapidly ages, but he dismisses his trembling and concern for Ivan and instead drinks vodka and forgets his problems. This is in contrast to Ivan, who is shunned by Massolit and must still face his problems alone in the clinic.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 7-8**

### *New Characters*

Styopa Likhodeev: The director of the Variety Theatre, he is also Berlioz's roommate.

Rimsky: The financial director of the Variety Theatre.

Azazello: The third member of the Professor's retinue.

## *Summary*

The chapter opens by introducing Styopa Likhodeev, Berlioz's co-tenant in apartment 50 at 302-bis on Sadovaya Street. Styopa is beset by a raging headache, apparently the result of his drinking the prior night. An aside on the history of the apartment reveals that people began disappearing from it two years earlier. Anna Fougeray, a jeweler's widow, had let out three of the apartment's rooms, but all three lodgers vanished, and in response, Anna left the apartment permanently. When Berlioz, Styopa, and their respective wives moved in, both wives vanished within a month.

Styopa wakes up at 11 A.M. to see "an unknown man, dressed in black and wearing a black beret," sitting in his room. This stranger explains that he had arranged to meet Styopa in the apartment at 10 and has been waiting since then for him to wake up. A bewildered Styopa eats caviar and white bread and drinks vodka from a tray while sipping some vodka served by the stranger, but fails to recall any arranged meeting with him. The stranger identifies himself as Woland, a professor of black magic, and explains that yesterday he arrived in Moscow, met Styopa, who is the director of the Variety Theatre, and signed a contract to put on seven magic performances at the theatre for 35,000 rubles. Styopa is shown the contract but still cannot remember meeting Woland, as the professor will be known for the rest of the novel. He calls up the theatre's financial director, Rimsky, to confirm the contract.

Having done this, Styopa hangs up the phone and sees, wearing his pince-nez, the same man Berlioz had twice encountered before dying, as well as the black cat Ivan has already seen. These two, along with Woland, intend to replace Styopa in the apartment. A fourth figure, Azazello, enters wearing a bowler hat and displaying his fangs and flaming red hair. The cat and Azazello tell Styopa to leave; Styopa gets dizzy and opens his eyes to find himself on a jetty. He asks a man where he is and is told he is in the city of Yalta, which is located in southern Russia. Styopa loses consciousness.

At the same time, 11:30 A.M., Ivan wakes up. He calls for an attendant, who gives him a bath, then he puts on his pajamas. He is taken to an examination room and examined by three people, then returns to his room to eat breakfast. The doctor, whose name is Stravinsky, enters, and his entrance reminds Ivan of Pontius Pilate. Dr. Stravinsky hears Ivan's story about Berlioz's death and the foreigner who saw Pilate and foretold Berlioz's death. However, after reviewing Ivan's actions the previous night, he advises Ivan against reporting the foreigner to the police as a futile idea that will bring Ivan right back to the clinic. Ivan is instead left alone in his room after being given a pencil and paper to write down his story.

## *Analysis*

The strange disappearances from apartment 50 were apparently the work of the secret police, who usually arrived in the night, always arrested people under great secrecy, and did not inform any neighbors of their arrests. In such an atmosphere of secret and unpleasant visits, the professor's presence in apartment 50 perhaps should not surprise Styopa as much as it does. However, Styopa is quick to realize that the wax seal on Berlioz's study door means Berlioz has been arrested. Woland's ability to manipulate the official machinery of Moscow to arrange his magic show without the knowledge of the Variety executives again displays his unusual powers. And Styopa, like Ivan, finds himself transported at stunning speed. Although thus far Woland has not killed anyone, his powers are clearly immense, and one wonders why he is putting on his magic show and what will happen at the show.

The description of Ivan's dawning transformation into a more hesitant,

cautious, and deliberate man seems to show how the experiences that put him in the clinic have served to subdue him. So he meekly accepts Dr. Stravinsky's advice not to go to the police and to start forgetting about Pilate. His spirit is weakening under the influence of authority.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 9-10**

### *New Characters*

Bosoy: Chairman of the tenants' association at 302-bis.

Varenuvka: Administrator of the Variety Theatre.

### *Summary*

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, chairman of tenants' association for Berlioz's former residence, is besieged by requests from people seeking to occupy Berlioz's old apartment. At noon, when he goes up to apartment 50, he sees the choirmaster sitting at Berlioz's desk, dressed in his checkered jacket and wearing the pince-nez. A suspicious Bosoy questions the choirmaster, who says his name is Koroviev. Koroviev says he is the interpreter for Woland, and explains that Woland has been invited by Styopa to live in the apartment for a week while Styopa travels to Yalta. A surprised Bosoy finds a letter from Styopa in his briefcase explaining the arrangement. Koroviev answers Bosoy's request to see Woland by saying Woland is too busy training the cat to see Bosoy. Koroviev adds that Woland's stay will be profitable for the association, and agrees to pay the association 5,000 rubles in cash for the weeklong occupancy of the apartment. Koroviev also slips Bosoy a wad of cash and a pass for the magic show. Bosoy, although pleased with this bribe, also feels anxious about the entire situation. Koroviev promptly calls the authorities to turn in Bosoy for "speculating in foreign currency," testifying that he has 400 American dollars hidden in the vent in the privy of his apartment. Bosoy returns to his apartment, wraps his wad of 400 rubles in newspaper and puts it in the ventilation duct of the privy, and goes into the dining room. The doorbell promptly rings, and two citizens step in, find the wad, which now contains dollars rather than rubles, and escort Bosoy out of the house.

As Chapter 10 opens, it is 2 P.M. and Rimsky and Varenuvka, the administrator of the Variety theatre, are meeting in Rimsky's office trying to sort out the meaning of Woland's magic show. They have also been waiting since 11:30 for Styopa, who had called them at about 11, to arrive, but Styopa has since disappeared from his apartment. A woman comes in to deliver a telegram announcing that a mental case identifying himself as Styopa has been found in Yalta. A disbelieving Varenuvka starts calling people to try to find Styopa, but a new telegram mentioning Woland confirms that the man in Yalta is indeed Styopa. The still disbelieving Rimsky and Varenuvka wonder how this man knows about Woland, and another telegram arrives, confirming Styopa's identity through Styopa's own handwriting. Rimsky tells Varenuvka to take the stack of telegrams to the secret police for them to sort out. Varenuvka calls Styopa's apartment to check if Styopa is home and speaks with Koroviev, who identifies himself as Woland's assistant. Varenuvka decides that Styopa must be at a new tavern in Pushkino called 'Yalta'," whereupon another telegram from Styopa asks them to send 500 rubles. Rimsky gives Varenuvka the money to send to Styopa, and Varenuvka goes to his office. He answers the phone, and the caller warns Varenuvka against taking the telegrams anywhere. Varenuvka thinks someone is trying to play tricks. As he walks into the garden, he feels the urge to go to the summer toilet to see if the wire over its light bulb has been installed. In the toilet he encounters a fat, cat-like man, who fiercely punches Varenuvka's ear, then Azazello gives him a blow on the other ear. The cat-like man points out that Varenuvka was warned against taking the telegrams anywhere, and the two men carry Varenuvka into apartment 50, then vanish and are replaced by a naked, red-haired

girl. The girl kisses Varenuvka.

### *Analysis*

The flood of people seeking to possess Berlioz's living space is the result of Soviet control over an insufficient supply of housing. Bosoy, as chair of the tenants' association, has immense control to grant or deny housing requests, and this control often lets him receive bribes. So, although Bosoy is somewhat uneasy about Koroviev, he happily accepts the payment and bribe. But Woland and his retinue, with their unclean powers, are able to reward Bosoy's deceit by planting the \$400 in his bathroom vent. Upon being discovered, Bosoy's first instinct is to condemn his accuser, somewhat like Ivan condemning Riukhin, but the condemnations do neither one any good.

The story of Varenuvka and Rimsky scrambling to find Styopa displays the helplessness of Soviet authorities when faced with the unexpected element of Woland's unclean powers. Official channels of communication, such as the telephone and telegram, are no help in solving the problem of Styopa's disappearance. In fact, they only serve to make things worse, as in Koroviev's call and the call warning Varenuvka not to take the telegrams anywhere. Rimsky, like earlier characters, grows visibly aged very quickly, in another example of distortions of time and space. Similar distortions are present in the cat's transformation into a cat-like fat man, the two vanishing robbers, and the apparition of the devilish woman. The consequence of her kiss is not known, but it will likely create more problems.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 11-12**

### *New Characters*

Georges Bengalsky: The master of ceremonies at the Variety.  
Sempleyarov: Chairman of the Moscow theatres' Acoustics Commission.  
Praskovya Fyodorovna: A nurse.

### *Summary*

Ivan, who is still in his room at the clinic, has failed in his attempt to write a statement about the professor. Nurse Praskovya Fyodorovna sees him crying and goes to the doctor, who gives him an injection while assuring Ivan he will cry no more. Ivan quickly begins to feel better, and the moon starts to rise as evening settles on Moscow. Ivan, thinking to himself, at first dismisses the death of Berlioz as absurd, but then "the former Ivan" points out to "the new Ivan" that the professor predicted Berlioz's demise. The new Ivan ponders the strange professor and wonders who will replace Berlioz as editor of the journal. A voice that resembles the consultant's calls Ivan a fool, which makes Ivan happy, and he sees a man on the balcony, who tells him to keep quiet.

The scene shifts to the Variety's stage for Chapter 12, as the Guill family's cycling acrobatics form the opening act of Woland's magic show. Meanwhile, Rimsky tries to call Varenuvka at 10 P.M., only to learn that all the building's phones are out of order. He goes down to the theatre's dressing room to meet Woland and is surprised to see Koroviev, along with the black cat, accompanying Woland. The cat's trick of drinking water from a glass astounds everyone in the dressing room. On stage, Georges Bengalsky, the master of ceremonies, starts to introduce Woland, but the introduction falls flat, and Woland, Koroviev, and the cat take the stage. Woland begins by calling Koroviev "Fagott," the name Koroviev will be known by throughout the magic show. He chats with Koroviev about Moscow. After an interruption from Bengalsky, the show begins with Koroviev and the cat flipping a deck of cards back and forth, and Koroviev swallowing

the cards as they are returned to him by the cat. The deck is then found on a citizen named Parchevsky, after which a heckler claims the deck was planted on Parchevsky. Koroviev tells the heckler he now has the deck. This heckler finds ten-ruble bills in his pocket instead of the deck, and when a fat man in the stalls asks "to play with the same kind of deck," Koroviev shoots his pistol up at the ceiling, and money begins raining down.

The audience starts grabbing the bills, but Koroviev stops the rain of money by blowing into the air. Bengalsky steps in to declare that the rain of cash was merely a trick of mass hypnosis and asks Woland to make the notes disappear, but Koroviev and the audience do not like this idea. Someone in the gallery calls for tearing Bengalsky's head off. Koroviev says he likes this idea, and the cat jumps upon Bengalsky and tears his head off with two twists of his paws. An outraged audience asks for the head to be put back on Bengalsky, and the cat puts it back. A crowd rushes to help Bengalsky after he starts moaning, and he is taken away by ambulance. Meanwhile, Woland disappears, and as he does, Koroviev displays ladies' dresses, hats, shoes, and accessories from Paris. After he offers the women in the audience the chance to exchange their dresses and shoes for the Parisian dresses and shoes, one brunette takes up the offer. After she receives a pair of shoes and a dress, women rush the stage to get their new dresses and shoes. When Sempleyarov, the chairman of the Acoustics Commission of the Moscow theatres, calls for the trickery to end, Koroviev exposes his affair with his mistress, "an actress from a traveling theatre. Sempleyarov's wife defends him and, amidst the continuing chaos, Koroviev and the cat, now called Behemoth, vanish from the stage.

### *Analysis*

The chapter title makes Ivan's schizophrenia explicit. He, newly submissive, can no longer make sense of the Pilate story or Berlioz's death and can only be healed by numbing medicine. Although the former Ivan knows that the Berlioz episode is quite disturbing, the new Ivan, unwilling to confront such difficulty, dismisses Berlioz's death as a temporary matter. The appearance of the man on the balcony, though, may mean the man will disturb Ivan's newly forgetful nature.

Woland's magic show employs the basic strategy of manipulating, exposing, and distorting expectations and wishes. The initial conversation between him and Koroviev, rather than playing to the crowd, centers on the character of the Muscovites. When the fat man calls for money, he and everyone else receives it. Bengalsky's attempt to suavely introduce the show and smooth over the surprises is shouted down by the money-hungry audience, and when an audience member calls for his head, the request is granted. The audience takes the briefest notice of this ghastliness before the women are given the chance to pursue their desire for adornment and luxury. When Sempleyarov tries to stop the ensuing chaos, his secret acts are exposed by Koroviev. The mad audience, carried away by all the tumult, fails to notice Fagott and Behemoth are disappearing. The culprits have escaped, and the audience is left to deal with the repercussions of the night's exposures.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 13**

### *New Characters*

Master: Currently in the psychiatric clinic with Ivan, he has written a novel about Pilate and Yeshua.

Master's lover (also known as Margarita): Lives with the master in a basement apartment.



## *Summary*

Ivan's visitor is a dark-haired man, approximately thirty-eight years of age. He explains that he has gained access to the clinic's common balcony by stealing some keys and could escape, but stays at the clinic because he has nowhere to go. Ivan confesses to this visitor that his poetry is bad and promises not to write any more poems. The visitor tells Ivan that Bosoy has arrived in room 119 cursing Pushkin and insisting that "unclean powers" live in apartment 50. Ivan tells the visitor he is in the clinic because of the story about Pilate and Berlioz's death, and the visitor tells Ivan that the professor at Patriarch's Ponds was actually Satan. Ivan, as his former self, tells the visitor they should try to catch Woland, and the visitor informs Ivan he has written a novel about Pilate, which is why he is in the clinic. Identifying himself as "a Master," he tells Ivan he had won 100,000 rubles in a lottery and used the money to rent a basement apartment and write his novel. The master continues telling a story about his past: one day, he met a woman carrying repulsive yellow flowers in her hand on Tverskya Boulevard and fell in love with her. However, both the master and she were married, so they met secretly every afternoon in his apartment. She urged the master to keep working on his novel, but it was rejected by publishers, and two critics wrote articles attacking the manuscript. However, the article by the critic Latunsky was the most savage attack of all, and the master became mentally ill from his struggles. One day in mid-October his lover urged him to travel to the Black Sea. He gave her 10,000 rubles to keep until he departed, and she promised to return to the master the next day. That night, he set out to burn his notebooks and manuscript but was interrupted by a visit from his lover. She rescued one chapter of the novel from the fire, and she vowed to tell her husband about the affair and stay with the master permanently. She also promised him she would return in the morning. After the master retreats to the balcony and tells Ivan room 120 is now occupied by Georges Bengalsky, he continues the story, which has shifted to mid-January. In the intervening three months, the master was held by the police. On a cold night after his release, the master set out on foot for the psychiatric clinic, and was picked up by a truck driver, who took him to it. Having finished his story, the master leaves Ivan's room and says he cannot tell any more of the story of Yeshua and Pilate, which, in any case, would be better told by Woland.

## *Analysis*

The master's appearance provokes Ivan, like Riukhin, to dismiss his poems as worthless, but he, unlike Riukhin, resolves to abandon further poetic effort. Ivan's honesty wins him the master's confidence and advice. As he points out, Ivan's inability to identify Satan shows how odd and illusory life in Moscow is. The populace, which has throughout the novel made the devil part of everyday conversation, is unable to identify Satan when he actually appears.

In contrast to Ivan's meekness and willingness to obey others, the master, as he tells Ivan, firmly set out to write his novel about Pilate by himself and quickly realized he loved the woman with the yellow flowers. Their devotion to each other and the Pilate novel sets them apart from ordinary Muscovites, but the master is punished by the Communist literary establishment for writing his novel. In burning his manuscript, the master submitted to this official judgment, but his lover proved more courageous in her support for him. The master, though, is at least aware of his fear, and is aware that things may still change. It seems his appearance has somehow changed Ivan, though it remains to be seen exactly how and in what ways.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 14-15**

### *New Characters*

Sergei Gerardovich Dunchil Dunchil: A roughly 50-year-old man accused of hiding currency and a gold necklace.

### *Summary*

Rimsky, sitting in his office at the Variety Theatre, hears a policeman's whistle as he stares at a stack of cash from the magic show on his desk. He looks out on the street to see two disheveled, nearly naked women leaving the theatre. The clock strikes midnight, and Varenuvka enters Rimsky's office. An anxious, fearful Rimsky asks Varenuvka about Styopa, and gets the answer that Styopa was found in the tavern in Pushkino. Rimsky is happy with this news, but as Varenuvka tells the story of Styopa's outrageous drunkenness at the Yalta tavern, Rimsky realizes Varenuvka's entire story is a lie. Rimsky, who is aware of some kind of danger, examines Varenuvka and finds he has a large bruise on the right side of his nose, a pale, chalky pallor, and cowardly eyes.

Rimsky rings a bell for help, only to notice the bell is broken but Varenuvka has noticed the ringing. When Varenuvka lies about the cause of his bruise and Rimsky sees that he casts no shadow, Varenuvka realizes he has been found out. He locks the door, and Rimsky goes to the window to see a naked woman pressing her face against it, trying to get in. Just as it seems Varenuvka and the naked woman, who is dead, are about to kill Rimsky, a cock cries three times in response to the dawning of a new day. The woman flies away and Varenuvka floats out the window. A suddenly aged Rimsky runs downstairs and flees on the express train to Leningrad.

Before arriving in the clinic's room 119, Bosoy was taken to the secret police for questioning about the illegal currency. The authorities, concluding he was insane because he claimed Koroviev was the devil, put Bosoy in the clinic. He arrived in the evening and given an injection to quiet him down. Now asleep, Bosoy begins to dream about currency. Bosoy finds himself in a small, elegant theatre which lacks seats, so the bearded male audience sits on the floor. A bell rings and a young, handsome artist emerges and calls Bosoy up onto the stage. When asked by the artist to hand over his currency, Bosoy answers by claiming Koroviev "stuck" him with the \$400. Bosoy goes back to sit on the floor, and after the theatre fills with darkness, fiery red words emerge on the walls telling the audience, "Turn over your currency!" Sergei Gerardovich Dunchil comes on stage, as does Dunchil's wife, and after Dunchil's initial denials of hiding currency or diamonds, Dunchil's mistress emerges bearing a tray with his \$18,000 and diamond necklace. The curtain drops, the artist emerges again, and he brings out an actor to perform excerpts from Pushkin's *The Covetous Knight*, a play about man's terrible fascination with gold and cash. A citizen named Kanavkin goes on stage to turn over his \$1000 and twenty ten-ruble gold pieces, and, after being examined by the artist, reveals that his aunt is hiding some more money for him. The theatre's lights turn on and cooks swarm over the audience to ladle out bowls of soup and rye bread while encouraging the men to hand over their currency. Bosoy is awakened by nurse Praskovya Fyodorovna, and his cries wake up Ivan, the master, and Georges Bengalsky. Ivan falls back to sleep and begins a dream of his own.

### *Analysis*

The magic show's consequences are revealed in the disheveled women wandering outside the theatre. The aged Rimsky feels himself getting frightened, and Varenuvka's appearance makes things worse. The kiss has turned him into some sort of demon, and he and the dead woman converge on Rimsky. Tellingly, the third crowing of the cock, which recalls Jesus's

prediction that Peter would betray him three times before the crowing of the cock, causes the woman and Varenuvka to flee.

The interrogation of Bosoy, presumably done by the secret police, sets the stage for Bosoy's dream. He has recognized the devilishness of Koroviev and in response has turned to religious symbols, but, like Ivan, is not taken seriously by the clinic staff. The dream clearly reflects Bosoy's recent misfortune, but in its focus on the exposure of currency hoarders it recalls the magic show. Here too, private cravings are exposed publicly on an odd stage. The performance of excerpts from the Pushkin play shows how classic Russian literature is used for state purposes by the Communists, who deploy it to pressure the audience into handing over their currency. Ivan's response to the commotion in room 119 is not to think of currency but to dream of the execution at Bald Mountain: perhaps this dream is inspired by the earlier visit from the master.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 16-17**

### *New Characters*

Vassily Stepanovich: The Variety Theatre's bookkeeper.

Prokhor Petrovich: Chairman of the commission on light entertainments.

Anna Richardovna: The secretary to Prokhor Petrovich.

### *Summary*

Ivan's dream begins with the Roman soldiers taking the three condemned men up to Bald Mountain to be executed. They are followed by about 2,000 citizens, who spread out around the hill. As the evening heat beats down, one person is noticed hiding on the north side of Bald Mountain under a fig tree, where he cannot see the execution. He had been tardy in following the procession of soldiers and, after failing to make it to the execution site itself, went off to the north side of Bald Mountain because he would be alone there, apart from the soldiers and the crowd. The man, whose name is Matthew Levi, had thought of taking a knife and killing his companion, Yeshua, and then himself, as the three condemned men were marched to the execution. For that purpose he ran back to Yershalaim and stole a bread knife, but upon running back, realized the procession was too far ahead of him for the plan to be realized.

After Matthew Levi curses God for failing to kill Yeshua quickly, a massive storm cloud swallows the setting sun and rolls westward. The scene shifts to the three condemned men hanging on their posts. Yeshua is faring better than the other two, and he is given a soaked sponge to drink water from. The executioner stabs Yeshua and Dysmas to death, and Gestas, the third man, dies after being given the sponge. Just after the three men are proclaimed dead, lightning and thunder emerge from the cloud, as well as a deluge of rain. The soldiers leave, and Matthew Levi goes up to the posts to cut down the three bodies, then carries the body of Yeshua down from the hilltop. Ivan's dream has ended.

The scene shifts to the Variety Theatre, where a long line of citizens has gathered seeking tickets to Woland's magic show, and the theatre's phones are incessantly ringing. Rimsky's wife comes into the theatre at 10

A.M. looking for Rimsky or information about his whereabouts, and the police arrive at 10:30. Rimsky's wife is sent home, and the investigators arrive with a dog, who is taken away after failing to follow a scented trail. The investigators ask the bookkeeper, Vassily Stepanovich, why the posters for the show have vanished along with the contract, but he knows nothing about either issue. They visit apartment 50, but Woland is not there. With the Variety's directors gone and no sign of Woland, the magic show is cancelled, and Vassily is told to give a report on yesterday's

show and turn in the receipts from it. But when a departing Vassily pulls out a ten-ruble bill to pay his cab driver, he realizes the bill is fake, and the driver says two other fares have paid him with fake ten-ruble bills received from last night's magic show. Vassily pays him with other bills and goes to deliver his report to the commission on light entertainment. There, he encounters tumult: the chairman's secretary, Anna Richardovna, pulls Vassily into the chairman's office, where he finds an empty man's suit. The secretary blames the chairman's transformation on the devil and tells Vassily the black cat had gone into the chairman's office and replaced the chairman, Prokhor Petrovich, with the empty suit. Vassily walks over to the commission's affiliate, where he finds the employees involuntarily singing a song. Vassily learns that Koroviev has come into their offices teaching them the "Glorious Sea" song, hypnotizing them with it. A perplexed Vassily goes on to the financial sector to deposit the box-office money, but when he opens his briefcase he finds stacks of various foreign currency instead of the rubles. Vassily is arrested.

### *Analysis*

Matthew Levi's presence at some distance from the execution site somewhat invalidates his anger at God for failing to give Yeshua a quick death; Matthew Levi has already failed to end Yeshua's suffering, so it hardly seems just for him to criticize God for not bringing about Yeshua's death. However, by framing the execution through Matthew Levi, this chapter emphasizes the simple humanity of those being executed rather than the Roman power that has authorized their deaths. So the three bodies are given to Matthew Levi to release from their posts, and it is he who takes possession of Yeshua's body.

The continuing realism of the Yershalaim narrative is in sharp contrast to the strange, unexpected events in Moscow. The Variety Theatre, still coping with the uproar caused by the magic show, is at a loss as to what to do. The only option is to cancel the night's scheduled show and try to recover, but the show's dispersal of fake money snares Vassily Stepanovich. The government in Moscow continues being overwhelmed by Woland and his retinue continues, as evidenced in the staff's involuntary, hypnotic singing. The more dramatic disappearance of Prokhor Petrovich's body is a rather astounding example of how space and time continue to be played with by the devilish threesome. The city has been turned upside down by these characters, who have only been in town for two days.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 18**

### *New Characters*

Poplavsky: Berlioz's uncle.  
Andrei Fokich Sokov: Barman at the Variety Theatre.  
Kuzmin: A doctor who treats Sokov's ailment.

### *Summary*

Berlioz's uncle, Poplavsky, arrives in Moscow hoping to gain occupancy of his nephew's former apartment. Finding that Bosoy is not in, he decides to head up to apartment 50, where he encounters Koroviev and Behemoth and learns from Koroviev that Behemoth sent the telegram informing Poplavsky of Berlioz's demise. Behemoth demands to see Poplavsky's passport and tells him he isn't allowed at Berlioz's funeral and that he should go back to Kiev and lie low. Azazello enters, hits Poplavsky with a chicken, and throws his suitcase down the stairway. Poplavsky makes his way downstairs and encounters an old, melancholy man. He tells the man where apartment 50 is, watches the man go upstairs to the apartment, then watches the man run back downstairs and out of the building. This man, Andrei Fokich Sokov, is

barman at the Variety. A beautiful, nearly naked woman lets him into the apartment where he meets Woland and Behemoth. He encounters difficulties with them before asking Woland about the fake bills, which have caused Sokov to lose 109 rubles from making change for false bills at the bar. A voice from the apartment's adjacent room reveals that Sokov has 249,000 rubles and 200 ten-ruble gold pieces, and a scared Sokov finds the fake bills have turned back into real ten-ruble notes.

The voice also predicts Sokov will die of liver cancer next February, and Sokov runs out of the house and heads to a specialist in liver diseases. Believing the prophecy is true, he asks Professor Kuzmin for help. Kuzmin dismisses Sokov as a schizophrenic crook, but when a dancing sparrow flies onto his desk, Kuzmin becomes light-headed and dizzy. After seeing a nurse with a man's mouth and a fang at his desk, he goes to bed for some much-needed rest.

### *Analysis*

Poplavsky's base reason for coming to Moscow is another example of how Woland draws out characters' inner desires. He, like the theatergoers, is punished for pursuing his desire. The Variety's barman, Sokov, displays more courage than most of those who have encountered Woland. Perhaps this courage comes from his God-fearing nature, but it does not keep him from being frightened by the exposure of his own currency hoarding, or the prediction that he will die of liver cancer. Sokov, unlike Berlioz, takes the prediction seriously. But the doctor dismisses Sokov's fears as mere phantasms. Kuzmin encounters the same problem of fake magic show money the taxicabs had dealt with, and he, like Varenuvka before him, has a frightening encounter with a dead woman. The meaning of the sparrow's appearance is somewhat obscure. However, sparrows have already appeared in the novel, and it seems plausible that they represent higher powers, whether for good or for bad. Certainly this sparrow only deepens Kuzmin's troubles.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 19-20**

### *New Characters*

Nikolai Ivanovich: Margarita's husband.

*(Note from the webmaster: Nikolai Ivanovich is Margarita's neighbour, and not her husband as indicated by the author of this text)*

### *Summary*

The master's lover, the 30-year-old, childless Margarita, has a comfortable life but does not love her husband. With the master gone and her not knowing if he is alive or dead, she sinks into despair. But on Friday, the same day as the bookkeeper's arrest, she wakes up around noon, sensing that her dream last night of the master calling to her means he is either dead and calling for her to join him, or alive, and they will see each other soon. She listens to her housemaid, Natasha, talk about last night's magic show, but she dismisses the stories as a false rumor. Margarita takes the trolley-bus down the Arbat and hears talk of a corpse's head being stolen from a coffin before getting off and taking a seat on a bench under the Kremlin wall. After watching a funeral procession go by, she says she would "pawn [her] soul to the devil" to know if the master is alive. She wonders who is being buried, and Azazello tells her it is Berlioz. The corpse's head has been stolen, however. He points out Latunsky in the procession in response to her request, then tells her he has come to her with some business, namely, to invite Margarita for a visit to a foreigner that evening. When a disbelieving Margarita dismisses him, he recites some of the master's novel, and an

amazed Margarita asks him if the master is alive. Azazello affirms that he is alive and instructs Margarita to take off all her clothes at home at 9:30 that evening, rub herself with the ointment he will have given her, and wait for him to call her at 10. Margarita agrees and puts the ointment into her handbag. At 9:29 that evening, Margarita spreads the ointment over her body, and, looking in the mirror, sees herself as twenty-year-old woman with naturally curly black hair. She is pleasantly amazed by this, and, when she feels her body become weightless and free, she becomes very happy. She writes a farewell note to her husband, telling him she is now a witch and is leaving him forever. Natasha sees her transformation and helps her pack up for the trip. Meanwhile, her husband, Nikolai Ivanovich, arrives in his car to sit on a bench in the garden outside their home. Azazello promptly calls and tells her to shout "Invisible!" as she flies over the gate. Margarita takes the broom that comes into the house, and she throws off her shift, cries "Invisible! Invisible!" and flies off.

### *Analysis*

Margarita, with her dissatisfaction in the midst of wealth, a superficially happy marriage, and roomy lodgings, is a stark contrast to earlier Moscow characters, who sought after material luxury as though it was the key to happiness. Margarita is instead devoted to her relationship with the master. She also follows the presentiment that arises from her dream: unlike other characters, she follows her intuitions about the supernatural. She also is willing to be able to talk with the absent master on the bench under the Kremlin. Margarita is not superstitious though, as is seen in her refusal to believe Natasha's stories about the magic show. She responds to Azazello's arrival with fresh, uninspired speech, and even reproaches him. Her courage, even audacity, has been matched only by Yeshua. But she does trust Azazello and agrees to visit Woland, seeing it as a chance to reunite with the master.

Woland, who has earlier caused several people to age rapidly, does the opposite trick for Margarita. Her sense of freedom and anticipation also contrasts with the fear so many characters have felt. She realizes that Woland is not dangerous, and embraces her future as a witch who has abandoned her husband. Other characters seem to dread the future, but she thinks it will bring her happiness.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 21-22**

### *New Characters*

Fat Man: A man who Margarita encounters on the banks of the Yenisey River.  
Hella: A witch.

### *Summary*

Margarita's invisible flight is underway. She flies along the Arbat, dodging utility wires as she flies about 20 feet off the ground before coming across the House of Dramatists and Literary Workers. Margarita finds Latunsky's name on the tenants' list, finds his top-floor apartment, and enters through an open window. She turns on the bathtub faucet, smashes the piano with a hammer, and starts smashing Latunsky's windows and other windows on the top floor. Continuing to smash windows methodically, she descends to the fourth floor as the overflowing bathtub water starts to fall through the floor to the apartment below Latunsky's. But she sees a small boy who tells her he is afraid, and she stops smashing windows, puts down her hammer, and quickly flies out of Moscow. Natasha, flying on a pig who is Margarita's transformed husband, joins her and explains that the ointment has enabled Natasha to fly and produced the husband's transformation. Natasha flies on ahead, and Margarita, sensing that her goal is near, slows her flight to land near the Yenisey River.

There, she sees a naked, fat, drunken man, who calls her Queen Margot and falls into the river. Margarita flies to the opposite bank of the river, where musicians are playing a march in her honor, and naiads, naked witches, and a goat-legged figure give her a welcome. The goat-legged person calls for a car on an improvised telephone made from two twigs, and the car, driven by a crow, arrives to take Margarita back to Moscow.

The car drops off Margarita at a deserted cemetery, where she meets Azazello. They fly on the broom to 302-bis. They walk past three men, all of them wearing a cap and high boots, and go into apartment 50. They walk up the dark apartment's stairs to a landing and see Koroviev there, holding a little lamp. He, dressed in formal wear, asks Margarita to follow him as Azazello disappears. She sees that they are in a huge hall before Koroviev explains the huge size of the hall by saying that it is easy for someone acquainted with the fifth dimension to expand space. Koroviev goes on to tell Margarita that Woland gives a ball every year in the spring on the full moon, and he needs her to serve as hostess. The woman must be named Margarita and be a Moscow native, two characteristics she matches. Margarita accepts, and she and Koroviev enters a small room, in which Azazello stands. The witch who had surprised the Variety's barman, and who is named Hella, sits on a rug by an oak bed. Behemoth sits before a chess table holding a knight, and Woland sits on the bed, staring at Margarita and wearing a long nightshirt. He and Behemoth are playing chess. Behemoth is dressed in a bow tie and wearing ladies' opera glasses from a strap on his neck, which he deems suitable attire for the evening's ball.

Woland identifies Behemoth for Margarita, and some of the chess pieces begin moving in their squares, to Margarita's surprise. In a bid for victory, Behemoth gets Woland's king to run off the board, but Woland sees what has happened and gets the cat to give up. Woland shows Margarita his globe, which is a living microcosm of the real world, with wars, fires, and collapsing houses happening on it. He tells Margarita that Abaddon, the Hebrew word for destruction, does excellent work, and Abaddon promptly emerges from the wall, scaring Margarita with his dark glasses. Azazello tells Woland that Natasha and Nikolai Ivanovich are at the apartment door trying to get in, and Woland decides to have her stay with Margarita, but refuses to let the husband into the ballroom.

### *Analysis*

Woland has manipulated space before, but here he grants Margarita control over space in her flight on the broom. She uses her power to gain revenge on Latunsky by smashing his windows and flooding his apartment, but she stops when she notices the little boy's fear. Natasha's transformation into a witch seems to play no important role in the plot, but it does give Margarita the first chance to exercise her new power as witch and queen by letting Natasha remain a witch. Her arrival in the forest seems to be deeply symbolic, especially her encounter with the drunken fat man. Why is she greeted with such a ceremony, and what was the point of having her fly all the way to the forest when she is immediately driven back to Moscow by the crow? Perhaps such a ceremony is required for all those who visit Woland, but it at least serves the purpose of displaying Margarita's new status.

Margarita's entrance into apartment 50 is marked by the strangeness of Koroviev's introductory talk about how easy it is to expand space. This has already been made clear by the depositing of Styopa in Yalta, among other events, but Koroviev merely makes a little joke to prove that space is expandable. He also tells Margarita she was the only suitable hostess for Woland's ball, but does not tell her why she was suitable. The ensuing scene in the room where Woland and the cat play chess gives Margarita a further chance to prove her mettle. Woland's description of his three comrades as "a small, mixed and guileless company" is hard to take at face

value, but here, with Margarita as their guest, they appear very relaxed and unguarded. The sight of the horrors on Woland's globe highlights the agonies of earthly existence, dominated as it is by Abaddon's destructiveness.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 23**

### *Summary*

With midnight looming, the hosts must hurry to prepare for the ball. Margarita is washed in a jeweled pool filled with blood, then with rose oil. Rose petal slippers are put on her feet, a diamond crown is put on her head, and Koroviev hangs an oval picture of a black poodle around her neck. He instructs her to acknowledge every guest, and an empty ballroom appears, adorned with columns, tulips, and lamps, and populated by some "naked Negroes" standing by the columns, and an orchestra of roughly 150 men, conducted by Johann Strauss. Another room has walls of roses and a wall of Japanese double camellias, fountains of champagne bubbling in three pools, Negroes to serve the champagne, and a jazz band. Margarita is put on her throne, from which she can see a huge fireplace in the vast front hall. Just after midnight, the first guests--the counterfeiter, alchemist, and traitor Monsieur Jacques and his wife--emerge from a gallows and a coffin that drop down into the fireplace. Margarita receives them, and more figures emerge from coffins in the fireplace. More and more guests arrive, but Margarita takes particular notice of one woman, who had used a handkerchief to choke her newborn boy to death, and has for thirty years put a handkerchief on her night table, then woken up and found the handkerchief still there. When Margarita asks about the fate of the man who raped this woman and fathered the child, Behemoth, who has gone underneath her throne, says not to bother with him, and Margarita, warning him to say nothing more, rakes Behemoth's ear with her left hand's fingernails. The woman, named Frieda, briefly talks with Margarita, who advises her to get drunk. Koroviev introduces numerous other guests, but Margarita grows tired of them and their stories. Her body feels weary, especially her right knee, which is being kissed by all the guests. After three hours of receiving guests, the last two arrive. Margarita is then massaged in a pool of blood and gains her strength, which she needs to manage the crowd of guests, which is dancing to songs played by a jazz band of monkeys. Margarita and Koroviev leave the pool, and after having a few bizarre visions, Margarita returns to the ballroom and, to her amazement, a clock strikes midnight.

Silence falls upon the guests, and Woland, Azazello, Abaddon, and some men who resemble Abaddon walk in. Azazello holds Berlioz's head on a platter, and Woland tells the head about his prediction of Berlioz's death. He declares that, according to the notion that "it will be given to each according to his faith," Berlioz will pass into non-being. But a new guest, Baron Meigel, "an employee of the Spectacles Commission" charged with showing foreigners around Moscow, has arrived. Meigel had offered to provide his services to Woland, and Woland returned the favor by inviting Meigel to the ball. However, he quickly accuses Meigel of being "a stool-pigeon and a spy" and predicts he will die within a month. Azazello fatally shoots Meigel, and Koroviev, after gathering the blood spouting from Meigel's body in a cup, gives it to Woland to drink. Once Woland has drunk, his patched shirt and worn slippers are replaced with a black chlamys and a steel sword on his hip, and he tells Margarita to drink. She does and the ballroom disappears, replaced by the ordinary setting of apartment 50. Margarita walks through the apartment's door.

### *Analysis*

Margarita's bath in rose oil and blood recalls Pilate's hatred of rose oil and the earlier images of blood. The rose-petal slippers add to the sense



that in this novel, roses do not represent vitality or happiness. The generally sumptuous, even decadent atmosphere of the ball conflicts with its ravaged guests, who, appropriately, begin emerging from the fireplace at the witching hour of midnight. The stories connected with the guests are all grotesque, but there seems to be no point to them. Unlike in Dante's *Inferno*, which apparently inspires this assemblage of the damned, Margarita is not instructed by their stories, she merely endures them. Perhaps her role as hostess is merely a trial of her strength. Berlioz's appearance gives Woland the chance to disprove Berlioz's theory, but he surprisingly shows mercy to Berlioz, condemning him to mere nonexistence, not damnation. Baron Meigel, on the other hand, suffers death for merely doing his job. Woland's reassurance that Margarita is not drinking blood displays once more the curious role played by alcohol thus far, both at the ball and in the novel as a whole.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 24**

### *Summary*

Woland's bedroom is just as it was before the ball. Margarita drinks a glass of pure alcohol and feels refreshed by it. She drinks a second glass and starts to eat caviar. Koroviev confirms her suspicion that the three men at 302-bis were secret police and predicts they will come to arrest him. Margarita, excited by Meigel's murder, prompts Koroviev to say that Azazello can hit any covered-up objects. The company proceeds to play target practice with playing cards. At about 6 A.M., Woland says Margarita can request something in return for serving as hostess. Margarita asks that Frieda no longer be given her handkerchief, and when Frieda appears, Margarita declares that this will be done. Woland says since Margarita granted this wish herself, she can have one more for herself. Margarita asks for her master to come back immediately, and he promptly appears. Margarita, now clothed in a black silk cloak, sees that he looks sick, but when he drinks two glasses offered by Margarita, he gets better. The master and Woland talk about his novel before the master's manuscript is found on top of a stack of manuscripts Behemoth was sitting on.

Margarita asks Woland for her and the master to return to their former life in the basement apartment, and Woland grants this wish. But before the two leave, Natasha wins her wish to remain a witch, and Varenuška successfully asks to return to his life before he became a vampire. After Margarita is given a diamond-studded horseshoe, Woland's retinue escorts Margarita and the master into a black car by the entrance to 302-bis. When Margarita realizes she forgot her horseshoe, Azazello runs up to get it and encounters the Annushka who had spilled the sunflower oil that Berlioz slipped on. She has stolen the napkin-covered horseshoe after the party walked downstairs. Azazello orders her to give it back, and gives her 200 rubles in exchange for preserving the horseshoe. He gives the horseshoe to Margarita and goodbyes are exchanged before the car takes Margarita and the master to their basement. There, Margarita starts reading from the master's Pilate novel.

### *Analysis*

The alcohol given Margarita sparks her vivacity, and this strength, together with Woland's comment that Meigel's blood has given rise to grapevines, calls to mind the Christian belief in transubstantiation. The conversation between her, Woland, Koroviev, Azazello, and Behemoth is striking in its quick turns of subject, its lack of small talk, and its immediacy. Margarita's sacrificing and trusting spirit, rewarded by Woland's granting her multiple wishes, asks first not for the return of the master, but relief for Frieda. This request both brings to mind Goethe's *Faust* and sparks Woland's comments on mercy. This mercy is not within Woland's power, of course, and Margarita is rewarded for her wish

by both having the power to grant it herself and being granted another one.

The drink that had helped Margarita helps the master as well. And he too is treated mercifully by the return of his manuscript. Woland's comment that "manuscripts don't burn" seems to speak to the power of art, especially in overcoming tyranny. The couple, in exchange for enduring their trials, are returned to their basement apartment. The appearance of Margarita's husband and Varenuksa shows how those two men are not capable of suffering the trials the couple endured. The husband merely asks for the proper bureaucratic procedures to be followed, and Varenuksa seems to simply lack the strength to be a vampire. The return of Margarita's diamond-studded horseshoe gives the novel a chance to reiterate Annushka's status as a bad omen and her grubby, materialistic nature. It also again emphasizes the theme of exposure and secrecy.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 25**

### *Summary*

A hurricane has struck Yershalaim, and Pilate is lying on a couch under the columns of his palace. He mutters to himself before seeing the hooded man who had been present at the execution. They greet each other, and as the evening sun starts shining, the hooded man reports that the city's populace is calm, and the Roman troops can leave. They converse about the execution before Pilate raises the issue of Judas of Kiriath. The hooded man, who is the head of the Roman secret police in Judea, confirms that Judas will be paid well for handing over Yeshua. Pilate mentions his fear that Judas will be killed tonight by one of Yeshua's friends. He asks the hooded man, whose name is Aphranus, to protect Judas, and though Aphranus vows to do this, Pilate predicts Judas will be killed. He also asks Aphranus for a report on the burial of the executed men before Aphranus leaves.

### *Analysis*

The weather imagery of the chapter, with its initial hurricane and the sun emerging from that storm to shine its twilight rays on Yershalaim, calls to mind the important role weather has played throughout the novel in setting scenes and highlighting moods. Here, the storm seems to reflect Pilate's unsettled mind as well as provide the appropriate backdrop for the shadowy machinations of Aphranus, the hooded man. The vow that only the power of the Roman Caesar is guaranteed is ironic, given that Pilate has gained no peace from his own power, and the Roman Empire itself will begin its decline not long after Pilate leaves office. Despite the vow about guarantees, Pilate is willing to prophesize Judas's death. This prophecy appears to be read by Aphranus as an order to murder Judas.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapter 26**

### *New Characters*

Niza: A woman pursued by Judas; she betrays him to the Hooded Man.

Judas: The man who betrayed Yeshua; he is murdered by the Hooded Man's henchmen.

### *Summary*

An anguished Pilate calls to his dog, Banga, for comfort. Meanwhile, Aphranus gets three carts loaded with entrenching tools and barrels of water, and the cart drivers, escorted by 15 men on horseback, set off for Bald Mountain. Aphranus leaves as well on horseback and goes to Antonia

Fortress, then to Greek Street in the Lower City. He meets Niza, a young woman, at a house there, and they leave separately after their brief meeting. At the same time, Judas of Kiriath is leaving his dreary house. He goes into Kaifa's courtyard briefly, then heads toward the marketplace of the Lower City, where he sees Niza. Niza tells Judas to go to the olive estate in Gethsemane, following her lead, and meet her in the grotto there. He follows Niza and calls for her in the estate's garden, but instead two men jump out at him. The first man fatally stabs Judas in the heart, and Aphranius appears on the estate's road to tell the two men to leave quickly. They take Judas's purse and its thirty tetradrachmas. Aphranius comes back to Yerushalaim, puts on his helmet and sword, and reverses his cloak into a military chlamys.

On the Passover night, Yerushalaim is celebrating, but Pilate in his palace merely goes to sleep around midnight and begins to dream. In the dream, he, accompanied by Banga, walks with Yeshua in the moonlight, talking about "something very complex and important." Pilate realizes that Yeshua must be alive if he is walking beside him, and Yeshua says both that cowardice is the worst vice and that he and Pilate will always be linked. Pilate wakes to realize Yeshua is indeed dead, and he sees Mark Ratslayer, who tells Pilate that Aphranius is waiting to see him. Aphranius informs Pilate that Judas has died in Gethsemane, but Aphranius claims not to know who killed Judas. Aphranius also tells Pilate the executed men have been buried, and the body of Yeshua was found with Matthew Levi in a cave on the northern slope of Bald Skull. Matthew Levi, who helped bury Yeshua, is now at the palace, and he meets Pilate in its garden. Matthew Levi asks that his bread knife be returned to the shop he took it from. He shows Pilate a parchment scroll with some of Yeshua's sayings. Matthew Levi rejects Pilate's offer for him to serve at Pilate's library in Caesarea and declares that he will kill Judas. Pilate smiles as he tells Matthew Levi he has already killed Judas. Levi leaves after asking for a piece of clean parchment, and dawn breaks with Pilate and Banga asleep once again.

### *Analysis*

Pilate's weakness, weariness and fear are reiterated at the very start of the chapter. Judas, in contrast, is neither weary nor wary thanks to his desire for Niza, and therefore entirely fails to realize that she is leading him into a deadly trap. Her betrayal, together with Aphranius' underhanded act of murder, replay themes of falseness, duplicity, and secret dealings seen constantly throughout the novel.

Pilate's moonlight dream clearly shows his regret at Yeshua's death and his sense of his own cowardice, but Pilate appears to be beyond help. The bloody business of Judas' death is at hand, and Pilate accepts Aphranius' evasive assurance that Judas is indeed dead. Pilate has also predicted that Yeshua's body will be taken, but it is impossible not to compare the subdued story of Matthew Levi helping bury Yeshua with the Gospel accounts of Jesus's resurrection. Here, events take place on a much more mundane level, and the bribe offered Matthew Levi is only a job as a librarian. In another mundane instance, Matthew Levi's murderous desire is quelled by the simple fact that Judas is already dead.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 27-28**

### *New Characters*

Pavel Yosifovich: A guard at the currency store.

### *Summary*

As Margarita finishes reading the chapter, Saturday morning has come to Moscow. The police are busy investigating Woland's appearance. Sempleyarov

was called to the investigation headquarters and questioned about the magic show, and apartment 50 was visited more than once to check for hiding places and occupants without finding anything. There is no evidence of Woland's presence in Moscow. Prokhor Petrovich has returned to his suit but knows nothing about Woland. Rimsky was found hiding in the wardrobe of a Leningrad hotel room and ordered to return to Moscow on Friday evening. Styopa was found to have left Yalta in a plane headed for Moscow, and everyone else but Varenuška has been found. The investigators visited Ivan at the clinic on Friday evening. He answered questions about Koroviev and Berlioz's death, and the man who questioned him decided that Berlioz was hypnotized when he died. At dawn on Saturday, Styopa disembarked and was greeted by investigators, and Varenuška has at last been found in his apartment. Varenuška, after initially lying, talks about being beaten by Koroviev and a fat man resembling a cat, and Rimsky comes in on the Leningrad train but reveals no information. After more questioning of other witnesses, a company of men arrive at 302-bis on Saturday afternoon. Koroviev, Azazello, Woland, and Behemoth are in apartment 50 awaiting their arrest. The company uses skeleton keys to enter the apartment. They find Behemoth holding a primus on the dining room table. He dodges an attempt to catch him with a net, but is shot by a Mauser blast. Behemoth drinks benzene to heal his wound, takes his Browning out, and opens fire. The ensuing shootout wounds no one, and Behemoth, declaring it "time to go," uses the benzene to set fire to the apartment. The company of men escapes, and Woland and his retinue fly out of the apartment. Koroviev and Behemoth make their way to a currency store on the Smolensky marketplace, which serves as a department store selling items in exchange for foreign currency. Behemoth transforms himself into a cat-like fat man, holding a primus, when he is told no cats are allowed in the store. They enter, and Behemoth eats some mandarins, a chocolate bar, and three herrings. After a salesgirl calls for Pavel Yosifovich, he arrives and calls for the doorman to blow a whistle. A crowd surrounds Behemoth and Koroviev, who makes a weak protest. Behemoth's benzene goes ablaze, and the pair escape to the Griboedov House, where a woman asks them for their writers' identification cards, which are required for entrance, but they have none. Archibald Archibaldovich, the restaurant manager, orders her to let them in, and they, together with Archibald, sit down at the best table in the restaurant. Archibald leaves the pair at their table to look after the preparation of the fillets of hazel-grouse being served them and, as some guests talk about the fires set across Moscow, three armed men enter and open fire at Koroviev and Behemoth. The two vanish, and the benzene sets fire to the Griboedov House.

### *Analysis*

Margarita has endured her trials without suffering damage from them, a sign of her strong and resilient character. Meanwhile, the Muscovite authorities, like Aphranius' henchman, have trouble finding the men they're looking for. The parallelism of these searches for criminal culprits cannot be accidental, and seems meant to highlight some underlying similarities between Yershalaim and Moscow. The Moscow investigation leads nowhere, as the earlier successes in exposing currency hoarders are followed by an inability to track down Woland and his retinue, who have brazenly flouted the law. Here, petty criminals are rigorously prosecuted, while large-scale crime goes unpunished. The miserable condition of most of Woland's victims contrasts with Ivan's dreaminess and plain indifference.

The episode of the chase, with Koroviev and Behemoth using their manipulation of time and space to escape, reprises earlier instances of such artifice. This artifice has some similarity with the master's attempt to reach back two thousand years to tell the story of Pilate. In Moscow though, it is simply used to effect a quick, mysterious escape. Archibald Archibaldovich's suave, tactical treatment of Koroviev and Behemoth recalls the ease with which Margarita handled her trial. He, like her, has

the ability to cope with and manage serious and threatening characters.

## **Summary and Analysis: Chapters 29-32**

### *Summary*

Woland and Azazello are sitting on the stone terrace of an old Moscow house, looking over the city as the sun sets. Matthew Levi, who has been sent by Yeshua, appears on the terrace and asks that Woland to give the master and Margarita peace, rather than the light. Woland agrees, Matthew Levi leaves, and Koroviev and Behemoth, who still appears as a fat man, arrive. Woland tells them that one last storm is coming to complete things, and the storm arrives, darkening the skies over Moscow.

As Matthew Levi appears on the terrace, the master and Margarita awake and talk in their basement. She tells a disbelieving master that they were really at Satan's, and she struck a deal with him and is now a witch. Azazello appears to say Woland has invited the couple to go on an excursion with him. They agree to go. Azazello takes a bottle of the same wine Pilate had drunk and pours it into glasses. The wine is poisoned, and upon it both the master and Margarita fall ill and die. Azazello then pours some drops of the wine into Margarita's mouth to revive her. Margarita helps give the master some wine, and he too revives. The couple leaves after Azazello starts a fire in the basement, and the three jump on their steeds and fly over Moscow. The master and Margarita go to the clinic to visit Ivan and say farewell. Margarita kisses Ivan and tells him, "[E]verything will be as it should be with you." The couple leave, and Praskovya Fyodorovna, the nurse, reveals that the master has just died in room 118.

Master, Margarita, and Azazello join Woland, Koroviev, and Behemoth on their horses, on a hill overlooking Moscow. As the master gives one last look on Moscow, Behemoth and Koroviev give their own farewell whistles. Woland cries "It's time!" and the six steeds and their riders depart in the sky, with Margarita looking back to see nothing of Moscow.

The horses tire as evening settles on the earth and night emerges. Koroviev changes into a knight, and Woland explains that the knight is here because he made an unfortunate joke about light and darkness on a night "when accounts are settled." Behemoth is transformed into a thin youth, and Azazello's face turns white and cold, taking on the visage of "the demon of the waterless desert." The master's hair turns white, and Woland's horse becomes "a mass of darkness." Eventually the riders stop their horses near Pilate, who sits in an armchair on a desolate summit, accompanied by his dog, who like Pilate looks up at the moon. Pilate has slept on his chair for 2000 years, but he and his dog, Banga, are overcome by insomnia during full moons. Pilate always dreams that he wants to walk with Yeshua on a path in the moonlight, but can't reach the path, so only talks to himself, cursing his immortality and fame. The master shouts to Pilate that he is free, and Yeshua waits for him. The mountains collapse, leaving just the armchair, and a city arises, with the moonlight path shining on it. Pilate and Banga rush down this path. Woland bids farewell to the master and Margarita, the scene disappears, and dawn breaks just after the midnight moon. The couple walk over a small stone bridge along a path, and Margarita points to the master's eternal home, where he will sleep and she will watch over him.

### *Analysis*

Woland and Azazello's retreat from Moscow indicates that the novel is heading toward its denouement. The crucial events are finished, now it remains to determine characters' fates. So Matthew Levi appears to tell Woland the master and Margarita deserve peace rather than light as a

reward for their courage. The couple may not be angelic, but they are heroic.

The killing of the couple by Azazello is the result of their courage in deciding to stay together and bear their woes together. Again alcohol produces a change in characters, this time for the worse, but it also paves the way for their fate to be resolved. The apartment's destruction by fire serves as a reflection of the death of the couple. It emphasizes that both their home and their past are concluded, and they are beginning a new life. But the farewell to Ivan shows that he too is being given a reward for his trials.

The transformations of Koroviev and Behemoth seems to turn them back into the people they originally were, before being condemned to serve Woland. They, in any case, are a sidelight to the drama of Pilate, who, still a coward, is still alone, weary, and living in a shadowy world. It is not easy to tell why the master is assigned the job of freeing Pilate. Perhaps his artistic paternalism of Pilate, in the form of writing his novel about the procurator, has given him the authority to free Pilate. Yeshua and Pilate are now able to renew their ancient conversation, and the master and Margarita gain their eternal, peaceful life in their new home. The master's sleep seems to be a mark of his redemption, as the suffering he has endured is replaced with a long, restful slumber.

## **Summary and Analysis: Epilogue**

### *Summary*

Back in Moscow, the narrator surveys the aftermath of Woland's appearance. Rumors of unclean powers have spread, but Woland himself has simply disappeared. Many black cats have been killed, and some citizens with names similar to Koroviev and Woland were detained. Most citizens dismiss the entire affair as a case of artful mass hypnosis, but the populace remains on edge. Natasha and Margarita have disappeared, and people generally think Woland's retinue took them because of their beauty. Georges Bengalsky has lost his vigor and retired, while Varenuška became pleasant and kind, and Styopa has grown healthier but keeps away from women. Rimsky has left his post to head up a children's marionette theatre, Sempleyarov is now manager of a mushroom cannery, and Bosoy has stopped going to the theatre. Ivan, meanwhile, appears at the Patriarch's Ponds at every festal spring full moon, which is the first after the equinox. He sits on the bench where he sat on the day Berlioz died, talks to himself for an hour or two, then goes to the Arbat. There, he goes to a Gothic mansion and sees Margarita's old husband sitting on a bench in the house's garden, muttering about his fate. Ivan goes home sick. In his recurring dream on this night, he sees an executioner stab his spear into the heart of Gestas, one of the men executed on Bald Mountain. Then Ivan receives an injection, and sees in his dream Pilate and Yeshua, walking on a moonlight path and talking about Yeshua's execution. Ivan is then led by a beautiful woman to the master, and the woman says, "Everything with you will be as it should be," before kissing him on the forehead. After the moonlight floods Ivan, he begins to sleep with a blissful face.

### *Analysis*

It remains for the epilogue to describe the consequences down in Moscow of Woland's visit. The bungled investigation and general paranoia create many innocent victims, most notably the cats. In becoming anonymous to the authorities, the master has gained oblivion, which is perhaps the rarest gift available in a state that obsessively monitors its citizens. Nearly all those who were in contact with Woland and his retinue are damaged, and the prediction of Sokov's death came true. But Ivan, still haunted by his meeting with Woland, cannot escape from the story of Yeshua and Pilate. He

too, it seems, is rewarded for his bravery by being granted peace, albeit in a temporary form.

## 5. QUIZZES

### Questions and Answers: Chapter 1

#### Questions

1. What is for sale at the stand with the sign "Beer and Soft Drinks"?
2. Why is Berlioz upset with Ivan Homeless' poem about Jesus Christ?
3. What nations do Berlioz and Ivan think the Professor comes from?
4. Who does the Professor predict will kill Berlioz?
5. How does the Professor describe himself?

#### Answers

1. The stand has no seltzer or beer for sale, only warm apricot soda.
2. Berlioz says the poem presents Jesus as a living person when it should present him as someone who never existed.
3. Berlioz thinks the Professor comes from Germany, then France, and Ivan thinks he comes from England, then Poland.
4. The Professor predicts a Russian woman who belongs to the Komsomol will kill Berlioz.
5. The Professor describes himself as a polyglot who knows "a great number of languages," "a specialist in black magic," a historian, and perhaps a German.

### Questions and Answers: Chapter 2

#### Questions

1. Why does Pontius Pilate fear he will have "a bad day"?
2. What happens to Yeshua after he calls Pilate a "good man"?
3. What is Yeshua's reaction to the writings of Matthew Levi?
4. How does Yeshua say he entered Yershalaim?
5. Why does Pilate squint his eyes as he mounts the platform?

#### Answers

1. Pilate fears he will have a bad day because he has been pursued by the smell of rose oil since dawn.
2. Pilate has Mark Ratslayer beat Yeshua with a whip and tell him to call Pilate Hegemon and stand at attention.
3. Yeshua claims he has said none of the things Levi has attributed to him, and he asks Levi to burn his writings.
4. He says he entered Yershalaim "by the Susa gate, but on foot, accompanied only by Matthew Levi" and no one recognized him as he entered.
5. Pilate squints his eyes because he does "not want to see the group of condemned men" being brought to the platform.

### Questions and Answers: Chapters 3-4

#### Questions

1. Who is the last person Berlioz sees before he dies?



2. What is the Professor's reply to Ivan's question, "[W]ho are you"?
3. Who does Ivan think the Choirmaster is?
4. Where does Ivan realize he will find the Professor?
5. When Ivan comes out of the Moscow River, what does he find in place of his clothes?

#### Answers

1. The last person Berlioz sees is the citizen who had formed "himself out of the thick swelter" earlier, a man with checkered trousers, a small mustache, and tiny eyes.
2. The Professor's reply is "no understand no speak Russian."
3. Ivan thinks the Choirmaster is in partnership with the Professor and is trying to keep Ivan from catching the Professor.
4. Ivan realizes he will find the Professor in house 13, apartment 47.
5. Ivan finds "a pair of striped drawers, the torn Tolstoy blouse, the candle, the icon and a box of matches."

### Questions and Answers: Chapters 5-6

#### Questions

1. How is Griboedov's restaurant described?
2. What two things happen exactly at midnight?
3. Where is the psychiatric clinic?
4. What does Ivan denounce Riukhin as?
5. What measure does Ivan take to catch the Professor?

#### Answers

1. Griboedov's restaurant is described as being richly decorated, having a select clientele, and offering top-quality food for reasonable prices.
2. The twelve writers go down to Griboedov's restaurant, and the Griboedov's jazz band starts playing.
3. The psychiatric clinic is "on the outskirts of Moscow by the bank of the river."
4. Ivan denounces Riukhin as "a little kulak carefully disguising himself as a proletarian."
5. Ivan uses a small candle and the icon to catch the Consultant.

### Questions and Answers: Chapters 7-8

#### Questions

1. What began happening two years ago at apartment 50?
2. Why does Styopa have trouble speaking?
3. How much is Woland to be paid for his performances of black magic?
4. Where does Styopa find himself after leaving apartment 50?
5. What does Dr. Stravinsky believe will happen to Ivan if he goes to the police?

### *Answers*

1. Two years ago, people began disappearing from apartment 50 without a trace.
2. Styopa has trouble speaking because "at each word, someone stuck a needle into his brain, causing infernal pain."
3. Woland is to be paid 10,000 rubles up front, "as an advance on the thirty-five thousand rubles due him for seven performances."
4. He finds himself at the end of a jetty in the city of Yalta.
5. Dr Stravinsky believes Ivan will be back at the clinic in two hours if Ivan goes to the police.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapters 9-10**

#### *Questions*

1. Who is Bosoy?
2. How much does Koroviev pay to rent apartment 50?
3. What does Rimsky think of the black magic show?
4. What does Varenuvka hear when he calls the Likhodeev apartment?
5. Why does Varenuvka stop on his way to deliver the telegrams?

#### *Answers*

1. Bosoy is the "chairman of the tenants' association of no. 302-bis on Sadovaya Street in Moscow," Berlioz's former residence.
2. Koroviev pays five thousand rubles to rent apartment 50.
3. He completely dislikes the black magic show and is "surprised he's been allowed to present it."
4. Varenuvka hears "a heavy, gloomy voice singing: 'rocks, my refuge'"  
""  
when he calls the Likhodeev apartment.
5. Varenuvka stops on his way to deliver the telegrams because he feels an irrepressible desire "to check whether the repairman had put a wire screen over the light-bulb" in the summer toilet.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapters 11-12**

#### *Questions*

1. What is Ivan worried about as he starts to write his statement about the Consultant?
2. How is Georges Bengalsky described?
3. What is the first trick Fagott performs?
4. What does Woland say about the audience?
5. What does Fagott say Sempleyarov did the previous night?

#### *Answers*

1. Ivan is worried that if he describes Berlioz as being deceased it might lead the clinic to "take him for a madman."
2. Georges Bengalsky is described as plump, wearing "a rumpled tailcoat"

and none-too-fresh shirt," and with a clean-shaven face.

3. The first trick Fagott performs is to flip a deck of cards to the cat, then have the cat send the cards back, with Fagott swallowing the cards.

4. "They love money," like all people, and "the housing problem has corrupted them."

5. Fagott says Sempleyarov went to visit his mistress on Yelokhovskaya Street.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapter 13**

#### *Questions*

1. What things upset Ivan's guest?
2. What languages does Ivan's guest know?
3. What did Ivan's guest know the end of his novel would be?
4. What was the title of Latunsky's article on Ivan's guest?
5. How did Ivan's guest get to the clinic?

#### *Answers*

1. Ivan's guest is upset by noise, violence, and, in particular, people's cries.
2. Ivan's guest knows Russian, English, French, German, Latin, and Greek.
3. "The fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate."
4. The title of Latunsky's article was "A Militant Old Believer."
5. Ivan's guest began walking to the clinic, then was picked up by a truck driver who was driving to the clinic.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapters 14-15**

#### *Questions*

1. How has Vareukha's appearance changed?
2. What interrupts the dead woman?
3. Who are the members of the audience in Bosoy's dream?
4. What was Dunchil hiding in his mistress' apartment?
5. What does the artist say about the human eye?

#### *Answers*

1. Vareukha now has a pale, chalk-like pallor on his face, and his eyes display furtiveness and cowardliness.
2. The crowing of a cock in the garden interrupts the dead woman.
3. All the members of the audience are bearded men.
4. Dunchil was hiding "Eighteen thousand dollars and a necklace worth forty thousand in gold."
5. The artist says the human eye cannot conceal the truth.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapters 16-17**

#### *Questions*

1. Where is Matthew Levi during the execution of the three men?
2. How does Matthew Levi get his bread knife?

3. What does Matthew Levi do with his bread knife?
4. What forces the employees of the affiliate for city spectacles to sing?
5. What does the bookkeeper find when he opens his bundle at the cash deposit window?

#### *Answers*

1. Matthew Levi sits on a stone under a sickly fig tree on the north side of the mountain during the execution of the three men.
2. Matthew Levi takes his bread knife from the counter of a bread shop in Yershalaim.
3. Matthew Levi uses his bread knife to cut the ropes binding the three executed men to their posts.
4. The secretary of the affiliate for city spectacles says the employees are forced to sing by "some sort of mass hypnosis."
5. The bookkeeper finds various kinds of foreign money when he opens his bundle at the cash deposit window.

### **Questions and Answers: Chapter 18**

#### *Questions*

1. Why does Poplavsky go to Moscow?
2. How does Poplavsky respond to Koroviev when he says the cat sent Poplavsky the telegram?
3. How is the man who asks Poplavsky about the location of apartment 50 described?
4. What is the girl in apartment 50 wearing?
5. How much money does Woland say the barman has?

#### *Answers*

1. Poplavsky goes to Moscow to try to get occupancy of Berlioz's apartment.
2. Poplavsky goggles his eyes in disbelief when he hear the cat send him the telegram.
3. The man who asks Poplavsky about the location of apartment 50 is tiny and elderly, "with an extraordinarily melancholy face."
4. The girl in apartment 50 is wearing a small lacy apron, "a white fichu on her head," and golden slippers on her feet.
5. Woland says the barman has 249,000 rubles in five savings banks "and two hundred ten-ruble gold pieces at home under the floor."

### **Questions and Answers: Chapters 19-20**

#### *Questions*

1. Who is Margarita married to?
2. How does Margarita interpret her dream of the master?
3. When does Azazello encounter Margarita?
4. What are Azazello's instructions to Margarita?
5. What does Margarita do with her shift?

## Answers

1. Margarita is married to Nikolai Ivanovich, "a very prominent specialist" who has made a very important discovery.

*(Note from the webmaster: Nikolai Ivanovich is Margarita's neighbour, and not her husband as indicated by the author of this text. The name of Margarita's husband is not mentioned in the novel)*

2. Margarita interprets her dream of the master to mean that he is either dead, and she will die soon to join him, or he is alive, and they "will see each other very soon!"

3. Azazello encounters Margarita just after she says she'd pawn her "soul to the devil just to find out" if the master is alive or not.

4. Azazello tells Margarita to take off her clothes at 9:30 and rub her face and body with the ointment, then wait for him to call her at 10.

5. Margarita throws her shift over her husband's head.

*(Note from the webmaster: Margarita's throws her shift over Nikolai Ivanovich's - her neighbour's - head)*

## Questions and Answers: Chapters 21-22

### Questions

1. Where does Latunsky live?
2. How does Margarita realize she is flying very rapidly?
3. What does the hog carry with him?
4. How were three rooms changed into six?
5. What is Abaddon's appearance?

### Answers

1. Latunsky lives in apartment 84 of the "House of Dramatists and Literary Workers."

2. Margarita realizes she is flying very rapidly once she looks down and sees two rows of lights quickly vanish beneath her.

3. The hog carries a briefcase in his front hoofs, a pince-nez on a string, and a hat.

4. Three rooms were changed into six by dividing one room of a three-room apartment in two, trading the apartment for a three-room and a two-room apartment, then trading the three-room apartment for two two-room apartments.

5. Abaddon's appearance is as a gaunt man with dark glasses.

## Questions and Answers: Chapter 23

### Questions

1. What is Margarita washed in?
2. What does the cat think is the worst job in the world?
3. What did Frieda do with her handkerchief?
4. What happens to Berlioz's head?
5. What does Woland say Baron Miegel is being accused of?

### *Answers*

1. Margarita is first washed in blood, then in rose oil.
2. The cat thinks being a tram conductor is the worst job in the world.
3. Frieda used her handkerchief to choke her newborn boy.
4. The flesh of Berlioz's head turns dark and shriveled, then falls off in pieces, and its eyes disappear.
5. Woland says "wicked tongues" are calling Baron Miegel "a stool-pigeon and a spy."

### **Questions and Answers: Chapter 24**

#### *Questions*

1. What target does Azazello shoot at?
2. What does Margarita think she will do if she gets out of Woland's apartment?
3. What does Woland say about mercy?
4. Where is the master's manuscript?
5. Where does Annushka hide the diamond-studded horseshoe and napkin?

#### *Answers*

1. Azazello shoots at the upper right-hand pip in the seven of spades.
2. Margarita thinks she will drown herself in the river if she gets out of Woland's apartment.
3. Woland says mercy "sometimes creeps, quite unexpectedly and perfidiously, through the narrowest cracks."
4. The master's manuscript is on the top of a "thick stack of manuscripts" the cat is sitting on.
5. Annushka hides the diamond-studded horseshoe and napkin in her bosom

### **Questions and Answers: Chapter 25**

#### *Questions*

1. When do the sun's rays return to Yershalaim?
2. What does Pilate's guest say "can be guaranteed in this world"?
3. What, according to Yeshua, is one of the first among human vices?
4. Where does Judas of Kiriath work?
5. When does Pilate notice the sun has set?

#### *Answers*

1. The sun's rays return to Yershalaim just as Pilate's visitor appears on the balcony.
2. Pilate's guest says "the power of great Caesar" is the only thing that "can be guaranteed in this world."
3. Yeshua says cowardice is one of the first among human vices.
4. Judas of Kiriath "works in the money-changing shop of one of his relatives."

5. Pilate notices the sun has set only after the head of the secret service has left the balcony.

## **Questions and Answers: Chapter 26**

### *Questions*

1. What does Niza say is the reason she decided to go out of town?
2. What does Judas see above the temple?
3. In Pilate's dream, what does he think of the execution of Yeshua?
4. Where did Matthew Levi take Yeshua's body?
5. What position does Pilate offer Matthew Levi?

### *Answers*

1. She says she decided to go out of town because she would have been bored if Judas came to her house.
2. Judas sees "two gigantic five-branched candlesticks" blaze above the temple.
3. In Pilate's dream, he thinks the execution of Yeshua never happened because Yeshua is walking beside Pilate, and because "it would be terrible even to think" of executing Yeshua.
4. Matthew Levi took Yeshua's body with him into "a cave on the northern slope of Bald Skull."
5. Pilate offers Matthew Levi a job sorting and looking after the papyri in Pilate's library in Caeserea.

## **Questions and Answers: Chapter 27-28**

### *Questions*

1. How did Dr. Stravinsky cure the staff from involuntarily singing "Glorious Sea"?
2. What did the investigator conclude about Berlioz's death?
3. What does the cat do after saying it's time for him to go?
4. What does the cat say about Dostoevsky?
5. What happens when the three men shoot at Koroviev and the cat?

### *Answers*

1. Dr. Stravinsky cured the staff of involuntarily singing "Glorious Sea" by giving them subcutaneous injections.
2. The investigator concluded Berlioz threw "himself under the tram-car while hypnotized."
3. The cat hurls his Browning, knocks out the two window panes, then splashes some benzene, which catches fire.
4. The cat says "Dostoevsky is immortal!"
5. When the three men shoot at Koroviev and the cat, the two disappear and a pillar of fire from the primus shoots onto the tent roof.

## **Questions and Answers: Chapters 29-32**

### *Questions*

1. What does Matthew Levi say of the master?
2. What will the storm do?
3. What does Margarita say she likes?
4. What does Woland tell Koroviev to avoid?
5. What will Margarita do once the master falls asleep in his eternal home?

### *Answers*

1. Matthew Levi says the master "does not deserve the light, he deserves peace."
2. The storm "will complete all that needs completing."
3. Margarita says she likes "quickness and nakedness."
4. Woland tells Koroviev to avoid inflicting any injuries.
5. Margarita says she will always be with him, watching over his sleep.

## **Questions and Answers: Epilogue**

### *Questions*

1. Who has died as a result of the visit of Woland and his companions?
2. What happened to black cats after Woland left?
3. What do the investigators learn about the master?
4. What has happened to Georges Bengalsky?
5. What is Ivan's new job?

### *Answers*

1. Berlioz and Baron Meigel die because of Woland's visit.
2. Approximately one hundred black cats were killed, and about another dozen were badly disfigured.
3. The investigators fail to learn why the master was abducted, and they never learn his last name.
4. Georges Bengalsky has lost much of his gaiety and retired from his job to live on his savings. Every spring during the full moon falls into an anxious state.
5. Ivan is now a Professor and a researcher at the Institute of History and Philosophy.



## 6. THEMES

### *Absurdity*

The actions taken by the devil, Woland, and his associates in Moscow seem to be carried out for no reason. From the beginning, when Woland predicts the unlikely circumstances of Berlioz's beheading, to the end, when Behemoth stages a shoot-out with the entire police force, there seems to be no motivation other than sheer mischief. After a while, though, their trickery reveals a pattern of preying upon the greedy, who think they can reap benefits they have not earned. For example, when a bribe is given to the chairman of the tenants' association, Bosoi, Woland tells Korovyov to "fix it so that he doesn't come here again." Bosoi is then arrested, which punishes him for exploiting his position. Similarly, the audience that attends Woland's black magic show is delighted by a shower of money only to find out the next day that they are holding blank paper, while the women who thought they were receiving fine new clothes later find themselves in the streets in their underwear. These deceptions appear mean-spirited and pointless, but the victims in each case are blinded by their interest in material goods.

### *Guilt and Innocence*

The story of Pontius Pilate serves to raise fundamental questions about guilt. As the Procurator of Judea, the representative of the Roman government in Israel, Pilate is responsible for passing judgment on people the Israelis have arrested and brought before him. In Yeshua's case, he feels guilty having to sentence Yeshua to death. Pilate's conscience is awakened during his interview with Yeshua; he shows a fascination with the idea of acceptance, but because of his position he is not able to completely believe in it nor is he able to forget about the idea of evil. The subsequent feelings of guilt over having sent an innocent man to death are compounded when it is reported that, at his death, Yeshua blamed no one for what happened to him, and "that he regarded cowardice as one of the worst human sins." To lighten his guilt, Pilate orders the death of Judas, the man who turned Yeshua over to the authorities. However, Pilate is left eternally discontent; "there is no peace for him by moonlight and his duty is a hard one."

### Good and Evil

The traditional understanding of the devil is that he is the embodiment of evil, and that any benefits one might expect from an association with him are illusory. In *The Master and Margarita*, the devil is portrayed slightly different. In the story he does take advantage of the people with whom he comes into contact, offering them money and goods that later disappear; however, he does not send any souls to hell. In fact, Bulgakov's depiction of the devil has him catering to a request made by Yeshua: he leaves the world with the souls of the Master and Margarita and in the afterlife the two souls are given a cottage in which they are united forever. Far more evil than the devil in this book is the literary establishment, which ruins the Master, indulges in gluttonous behavior, and aligns with the controlling Soviet government. By comparison, the actions of Woland and his associates can be looked at positively as they may actually lead people to better themselves. However, most of the victims of Satan attribute their experiences to hypnotism, putting the responsibility for their woes on the devil, not on themselves.

In the case of Jesus, the novel portrays him as an obscure figure, a pawn in a political struggle. Whereas Jesus of the Bible is a celebrated prophet, with a dozen disciples and crowds of thousands who would come to hear him speak and welcome him, Yeshua has one follower, Levi Matvei, who is so mentally unstable that Yeshua himself is uneasy around him. Rather than a gospel of love, Yeshua's message is the more psychological

observation that "there are no evil people on earth."

### *Artists and Society*

Both of the true artists in this book, the Master and Ivan, end up in the mental institution under Dr. Stravinsky's care, while less talented people feast on opulent meals and listen to dance bands at Griboyedov House. The damage caused by false artists goes beyond greed and laziness: when the Master produces his novel the established writers mock him and his book before the public has a chance to see it. This negative reaction does not harm the Master financially--he is independently wealthy from having won the lottery--but it crushes his artistic sensibilities and drives him to madness. As a result, he burns his work and wanders aimlessly in the cold. He is then admitted to the asylum. Even in his insanity, though, the Master knows himself: he realizes that he has lost his identity and that he probably could not survive outside if he escaped the asylum. He suffered so greatly for having created a work of true art that in the end, when Woland restores his burned manuscript, he is hesitant to take it: "I have no more dreams and my inspiration is dead," he says, adding that he hates the novel because "I have been through too much for it."

As for Ivan, the Master, during their initial meeting, tells the writer he should write no more poetry, a request Ivan agrees to honor. Later, as the Master leaves, he calls Ivan "my protégé." By the end of the story, Ivan becomes a historian, which is the position that the Master held before his novel about Pontius Pilate dramatically changed his life.

## 7. STYLE

### *Structure*

This book uses a complex version of the story-in-story structure, weaving the narrative about Pontius Pilate in through the text of the story that takes place during the twentieth century in Moscow. The chapters about Pilate are continuous, following the same four-day sequence of events, and they are coherent, with the same tone of seriousness in the voice throughout the Pilate story. In one sense, their cohesion shows Bulgakov breaking the rules of narrative, because these chapters spring from the minds of different characters. Chapter two is presented as a story told by Woland to Berlioz and Ivan, chapter sixteen is supposed to be Margarita's dream, and chapters twenty-five and twenty-six are allegedly from the Master's novel. Bulgakov tells the events in all of these with one voice because doing so strengthens readers' senses of how much these characters are alike in their thinking.

### *Mennipean Satire*

Critics have noted that this book follows the tradition of Mennipean Satire, named after Mennipus, the philosopher and Cynic who lived in Greece in the third century BC. Cynics were a school of Greek thinkers, founded by Diogenes of Sinope, who felt that civilization was artificial and unnatural, and who therefore mocked behaviors that were considered socially "proper." Diogenes is best remembered for carrying a lantern through Athens in broad daylight looking for an "honest man," but he also is said to have pantomimed sexual acts in the streets, urinated in public, and barked at people (the word "cynic" is believed to come from the Greek word meaning "doglike"). Cynics are remembered for being distrustful of human nature and motives: even today, people use the word "cynical" to describe someone who expects the worst of people.

The satires of Mennipus, written in a combination of prose and verse, made fun of pretensions and intellectual charades. The elite were also ridiculed in Mennipus' plays, as they are in *The Master and Margarita*. The Roman scholar Marcus Tarentius Varro, living in the first century BC, took up this style when he wrote his *Saturarum Mennipearum Libri CL* (150 Books of Mennipean Satires, c. 8167 BC). The form has continued through the centuries, distinguished from other satires by the wide range of society it derides and the harshness with which it mocks. From the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope's ruthless *Dunciad* is considered a Mennipean Satire, as is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, from 1932. In the 1960s and 1970s, around the time that *The Master and Margarita* was published, the form proved useful for Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to express his outrage with the Soviet system.

### *Symbolism*

The symbolic aspects of this novel serve to both render a clear vision of the action while also linking the spirit of the different plot lines together. Of these, the most notable are the sun and the moon, which are mentioned constantly throughout, giving the sense that they are the true observers of the action. The first page of the novel, with Berlioz and Ivan at Patriarch's Ponds, begins "at the sunset hour," and goes on to introduce the devil as the sun recedes. Pontius Pilate's headache is worsened by the blaring sun, as is, the following day, Yeshua's suffering on the cross. In contrast, the Master and Ivan are both tormented by moonlight, which plays with their sanity. Traditionally, sunlight is associated with logic and rationality, while the light of the moon is often related to the subconscious. Another major symbol is the mention of thunderstorms, which appear in the most significant places in the book. The storm that gathers while Yeshua is on the cross and breaks upon his death is notable for its ferocity, as is the storm that washes over Moscow

at the end, while Woland and his associates settle their business and leave. Writers often use a thunderstorm to symbolize the release of one character's pentup emotions. In *The Master and Margarita*, the storms can be seen as the crying out of whole cultures, ancient and modern, as they become aware of how diseased their social systems are.

The book has numerous other events and objects that can be seen as symbolic because they refer one's thoughts to broader philosophical issues than those at hand. Foreign currency, for instance, can be equated with non-Soviet ideas, with value that the government tries to suppress; the blood-red wine that Pilate spills does not wash away, like the sins on his soul; and the empty suit that carries on business, as well as the Theatrical Commission staff that finds itself unable to stop singing "The Song of the Vulga Boatmen," all represent the mindlessness of the bureaucratic system. These are just a few of the elements that add meaning to the story if read as being symbolic as well as actual.

## 8. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### *The Stalin Era*

Bulgakov's writing career, particularly the twelve-year period between 1928 and 1940 when he worked on *The Master and Margarita*, was marked by Russia's transition from the monarchic empire ruled by Nicholas II, who was overthrown in the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the totalitarian Communist government that ruled the country throughout most of the twentieth century. The first post-revolutionary head of the country, Vladimir Lenin, had the practical concern of protecting the country from enemies and establishing the Soviet power base. He guided the country through the 1918 to 1921 civil war and kept the economy mixed, partially nationalized and partially privatized.

In 1922, two years before Lenin's death, Joseph Stalin rose to be the secretary general of the Communist Party, and he used this position to gain control of the Soviet Union when Lenin died. Stalin felt that the country was far behind the world's more industrialized nations--at least a hundred years behind, in fact. He put forward programs, all part of what he called his "Five Year Plan," intended to increase production quickly. One place he pushed for change was agriculture. There were about twenty-five million farms in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, but few produced enough food to feed anyone but the families who lived on them. Successful farmers who made a profit were called "kulaks." Stalin proposed state-run agricultural collectives, which would produce enough to feed the whole country. The kulaks resisted. In 1929, he called for the "liquidation" of the kulaks, and in fighting to keep their farms they destroyed crops, livestock, and farming tools. Nearly one-third of Russia's cattle and half of the horses were destroyed between 1929 and 1933. Successful farmers were taken away to prisons. Soldiers were sent out across the land, arresting farmers who owned private land. In 1928, only 1.7 percent of Soviet peasants lived on collective farms, but that number grew rapidly with the military action: 4.1 percent of the peasants were on collective farms in October of 1929, a number that jumped to 21 percent just four months later and then 58 percent three months after that. By the end of the decade, 99 percent of the Soviet Union's cultivated land was collective farms, while millions of kulaks who had been taken from their farms labored in prison camps.

Stalin's Five Year Plan also reorganized Soviet industry. The government organization "Gosplan," with half a million employees, had the task of planning productivity goals for all industries and checking with factories to see if they were meeting their goals, all with the intent of raising Russia's annual growth rate by 50 percent. Factory managers and workers who were seen as holding back progress, even for safety or economic reasons, were arrested and sent off to labor camps. Fearing punishment, many workers stayed at their jobs twelve and fourteen hours a day, while other factories, with no hope of reaching their assigned production levels, took the chance of falsifying paperwork. From 1928 to 1937 Russian steel production rose from 4 to 17.7 million tons; electricity output rose 700 percent; tractor production rose 40,000 percent. The country's national income rose from 24.4 billion rubles to 96.3 billion. The price, of course, was freedom, and readers of Bulgakov can see the dangers of being in a closed, controlling society with limited resources.

### *The Brezhnev Years*

Tension between the Soviet Union and the United States was at its greatest between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s. At the time, these were the world's two leading "super power" nations, and they competed against each other for technological superiority in the race to put humans on the moon and military superiority in the buildup of nuclear arms. In 1964, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader most identified with the Cold War, was

forced from power in a coup d'etat, and was replaced by the duo of Leonid Brezhnev as the Communist Party leader and Aleksei Kosygin as Soviet Premier. The early part of their rule, from 1964 to 1970, was a period of reformation and stabilization. Brezhnev had risen up through the ranks of the Communist Party and was not interested in changing the social system, just in making the system function more smoothly within the structure set by the Soviet governing body, the Politburo.

The year 1967, when *The Master and Margarita* was finally published, was a time of youth rebellion in the United States, but the same spirit of rebelliousness pervaded in other countries across the world as well. One of the most notable instances of riots against the government came in Czechoslovakia, where, during the "Prague Spring" of 1968, protesters almost shut down the country's Communist government. Because Czechoslovakia was an ally of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev sent Soviet troops across the border, into Czechoslovakia, to defeat the protesters and to keep control of the country for the Communists. It was a turning point in Soviet history, showing the world that the Soviet Union would go to great lengths to defend Communism.

The fact that Bulgakov's book was finally published after nearly thirty years should not be taken as an indicator that the government was relaxing its policies toward artistic works judged to be critical of the political system. Writers were regularly arrested for spreading "anti-Soviet propaganda" if their work showed any flaws in the system, and convicted writers were sent to work in forced labor camps or to languish in mental asylums for "paranoid schizophrenia." Only a writer who managed to sneak his works out of the country and reach an international audience could avoid a harsh punishment from the government, which had its reputation within the international community to protect. This happened to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970 and was expelled from the country in 1974.

## 9. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Bulgakov was reviewed with respect during his lifetime, although it was not until the world saw *The Master and Margarita*, published almost thirty years after his death, that he came to be generally recognized as one of the great talents of the twentieth century. During his lifetime, his literary reputation stood mostly on the quality of the plays that he wrote for the Moscow theater, and, because of the totalitarian nature of Soviet politics, critics were at least as concerned with the plays' political content as their artistic merit. In the years after his death, Bulgakov's reputation grew slowly.

Writing about Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard* in 1935's *Soviet Russian Literature*, Gleb Strave was unimpressed, noting, "As a literary work it is not of any great outstanding significance. It is a typical realistic novel written in simple language, without any stylistic or compositional refinements." Strave went on in his review to express a preference for Bulgakov's short stories, which were unrealistic and fanciful. In 1968, when *The Master and Margarita* was released in the West, Strave was still an active critic of Soviet literature. His review of the book in *The Russia Review* predicted the attention that it would soon obtain, but Strave did not think that it was worth that attention, mainly because of the story line with Margarita and the Master, which he felt "somehow does not come off." True to his prediction, though, critics welcomed the novel with glowing praise when it was published. Writing in *The Nation*, Donald Fanger predicted that "Bulgakov's brilliant and moving extravaganza .. may well be one of the major novels of the Russian Twentieth Century." He placed Bulgakov in the company of such literary giants as Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, William Burroughs, and Norman Mailer.

Many critics have focused their attention on the meaning of *The Master and Margarita*. D.G.B. Piper examined the book in a 1971 article for the *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, giving a thorough explanation of the ways that death and murder wind through the story, tying it together, illuminating the differences between "the here-and-now and the ever-after." In 1972 Pierre S. Hart interpreted the book in *Modern Fiction Studies* as a commentary on the creative process: "Placed in the context of the obvious satire on life in the early Soviet state," he wrote, "it gains added significance as a definition of the artist's situation in that system." While other writers saw the book as centering around the moral dilemma of Pilate or the enduring love of the Master and Margarita, Hart placed all of the book's events in relation to Soviet Russia's treatment of artists. Edythe C. Haber, in *The Russia Review*, had yet another perspective on it in 1975, comparing the devil of Goethe's *Faust* with the devil as he is portrayed by Bulgakov.

That same year, Vladimir Lakshin, writing for *Twentieth-Century Russian Literary Criticism*, expressed awe for Bulgakov's ability to render scenes with vivid details, explaining that this skill on the author's part was the thing that made it possible for the book to combine so many contrasting elements. "The fact that the author freely blends the unblendable--history and feuilleton, lyricism and myth, everyday life and fantasy--makes it difficult to define his book's genre," Lakshin wrote, going on to explain that, somehow, it all works together. In the years since the Soviet Union was dismantled, the potency of *The Master and Margarita's* glimpse into life in a totalitarian state has diminished somewhat, but the book's mythic overtones are as strong as ever, making it a piece of literature that is every bit as important, if not more, than it was when it was new.

## 10. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

1. Master
2. Ivan Nikolayich Ponyryov
3. Other Characters

### **Master**

The Master is an author who has written a book about Pontius Pilate. "I no longer have a name," he tells Ivan when they meet at the mental hospital, where they both are incarcerated. While there, the Master explains his past to the poet. He once was an historian (which is the same profession that Ivan settles into at the end of the book), but when he won a large sum in the lottery, he quit his job to work on his book. One day he met Margarita, with whom he fell hopelessly in love. When she took the novel around to publishers, it came back rejected, and then, even though it was unpublished, the reviewers attacked it in the newspapers. In a fit of insanity, imagining that an octopus was trying to drown him with its ink, the Master burned his book. He gave what was left of his savings to Margarita for safe keeping, but he was soon arrested and put in the asylum, and he never saw her again.

In the mental hospital, the Master has a stolen set of keys that allows him to escape, but he has nowhere to go. Margarita's reward for helping with the devil's ball is her reunion with the Master. Woland arranges for them to return to the Master's old apartment, for his bank account to be restored, for him to receive identification papers and, miraculously, for the burned novel to return to its original condition. In the end, at the request of Jesus, Woland takes the Master with him when he leaves the world: Jesus cannot take him because "He has not earned light, he has earned peace." Margarita joins him, of course, and they are never separated again.

### **Ivan Nikolayich Ponyryov**

Ivan Nikolayich Ponyryov is a young, twenty-three-year-old poet, who writes under the pen name Bezdomny, which means "homeless" in Russian. This character is present in the first chapter of the novel and the last, as well as appearing intermittently throughout the story. When the novel begins, Ivan is meeting with Berlioz, a magazine editor, at Patriarch's Ponds. They are discussing the historical accuracy of Jesus when Woland, who is the devil, interrupts their conversation and tells them the story of the crucifixion as he witnessed it. He goes on to foretell the bizarre circumstances of Berlioz's death. When Berlioz dies in this exact same way a few minutes later, Ivan chases Woland and his accomplices across town, bursting through apartments and diving into the river. When he ends up at the headquarters of the writers' organization in his underwear, Ivan is arrested and sent to the mental ward. At the asylum, the Master is in a neighboring room; he is able to visit Ivan at night because he has stolen a set of keys that open the doors on their floor of the hospital. The Master explains that Ivan actually did encounter the devil, and he goes on to recount his own life story to the poet. Before he is released from the clinic, Ivan decides to stop writing poetry. By the end of the story, years after the events that make up the bulk of the book, Ivan has become an historian, but continues to be plagued by strange visions every time the moon is full.

### **Other Characters**

#### *Azazello*

Azazello is the harshest and most sinister member of Woland's band, the one who will physically attack an opponent rather than simply play tricks. He is a short, broad-shouldered disfigured man with a bowler hat and red



hair. His face is described as being "like a crash" and a fang protrudes from his mouth. It is Azazello who is sent to recruit Margarita to host the devil's ball, although he is not comfortable with this responsibility: he is awkward around women and thinks that one of the other servants who has more charm should have been sent to talk to her. He gives Margarita the cream that she rubs onto her body to become a witch. His true character, revealed in the parting scene, is that of "the demon of the waterless desert."

### *Behemoth*

Behemoth, one of the novel's most memorable figures, is a huge black cat who walks on his hind legs and has many humanlike qualities: he pays for his trolley fare, drinks brandy from glasses, fires guns, and more. At the black magic show at the Variety Theater, it is Behemoth who twists the head off of the master of ceremonies. When the apartment at 302B Sadovaya Street is raided by police, Behemoth takes a gun and stages a shootout with them; although it is later determined that, even after the firing of hundreds of bullets, nobody on either side was injured, Behemoth burns the apartment with kerosene, and then does the same to Griboyedov House, the headquarters of MASSOLIT. In the end he is revealed to not really be a cat at all, but "a slim youth, a page demon, the greatest jester there had ever been."

### *Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz*

Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz is the editor of one of Moscow's most fashionable literary magazines and a member of the management committee of MASSOLIT, the most prominent literary association in Moscow. The novel opens with Berlioz in the park discussing the historical evidence of Jesus Christ with Ivan. Woland interrupts with his own story about Pontius Pilate, and minutes later he prophesies that Berlioz will not make it to the meeting to which he is going; instead, he will have his head cut off by a woman. Leaving the park, Berlioz slips and falls under a trolley car, driven by a woman, and the wheels cut his head off. Later, during the devil's ball, his head is brought in on a platter, still alive and aware.

### *Bezdomny*

See Ivan Nikolayich Ponyryov.

### *Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi*

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, whose surname means "barefooted," is the chairman of the tenants' association of 302B Sadovaya Street, the building where Berlioz and Likhodeyev shared an apartment. After signing a one-week lease with Woland, Bosoi accepts a bribe, and takes it home and hides it in an air duct in his apartment. Woland calls the police to report the bribery, and Bosoi is arrested.

### *Fagot*

See Korovyov.

### *Yeshua Ha-Notsri*

In the version of the crucifixion told by Woland and the Master in this book, Jesus has a different name; he is known as Yeshua Ha-Notsri. Yeshua is presented as a simple man, not braver nor more intelligent than most, but more moral. Like the Jesus of Biblical tradition, he fascinates Pilate with the meek humanity of his ideas, but unlike the Jesus of the Bible he does not display a sense of security about the overall rightness of his death. The most striking aspect of Yeshua's conversation is that he believes in the goodness of all humans, even those who are cruelly

persecuting him: "There are no evil people on earth," he tells Pilate.

#### *Nikolai Ivanovich*

Nikolai Ivanovich is a neighbor of Margarita's who also rubs the special cream on himself that had turned Margarita into a witch. Instead of taking on witchlike qualities, he is turned into a hog.

#### *Jesus*

See Yeshua Ha-Notsri.

#### *Homeless*

See Ivan Nikolayich Ponyryov.

#### *Korovyov*

Korovyov is one of Woland's associates, who identifies himself as Woland's interpreter. He first appears at Patriarch's Ponds, near the place where Berlioz dies. He is described as a lanky man wearing pincenez glasses, a jockey cap, and a plaid suit. It is Korovyov who gives a bribe to Bosoi, and then calls the authorities to report him. As Woland and his entourage prepare to leave Moscow, it is revealed that Korovyov is not the buffoon he has presented himself as, but is a knight who once made "an ill-timed joke" and has been sentenced to serve Woland in this form because of it.

#### *Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev*

The manager of the Variety Theater, Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev, wakes up one morning after a night of drinking and finds that he has signed Woland to a week-long engagement at the theater.

#### *Margarita Nikolayevna*

Margarita Nikolayevna is the mistress of the writer known as the Master. In the past, when he was distraught about the novel, she comforted and nursed him. He gave all of his money to her for safekeeping, but then was arrested and taken away to the asylum. At a certain point, Margarita is asked to be the hostess of the devil's ball. Once she has a taste of witchcraft--invisibility and the ability to fly--she is glad to perform this duty. In return for her help, Woland offers to grant Margarita a wish. She wishes to be reunited with her beloved Master.

#### *Levi Matvei*

Unlike the traditional stories of Jesus in the New Testament of the Bible, Yeshua has only one disciple in this story. Levi Matvei follows the philosophical vagabond Yeshua Ha-Notsri around, writing down what he says, usually without much accuracy. "This man follows me everywhere with nothing but his goatskin parchment and writes incessantly," Yeshua explains to Pilate. "But once I caught a glimpse of that parchment and I was horrified. I had not said a word of what was written there. I begged him, 'Please burn this parchment of yours!' But he tore it out of my hands and ran away." Levi is the one who later brings the message to Woland that Yeshua would like to give the Master "peace."

#### *Natasha*

Natasha is Margarita's maid who witnesses Margarita's transformation into a witch after she rubs special cream over her body. Natasha then rubs the cream on herself and turns into a witch as well.

### *Pontius Pilate*

Pontius Pilate is presented as a tormented figure in this novel. He is in Jerusalem during the Passover holiday and is forced to pass a death sentence on a man who he thinks is a tramp and a fool, but not dangerous. After the crucifixion, Pilate assigns soldiers to guard the man who betrayed Jesus, fearing religious followers might try to take revenge on him. However, in this novel, there is no evidence that Yeshua actually has followers. Later, Pilate reveals that he himself had the traitor murdered. Throughout the story there is evidence that Pilate has become fascinated with Jesus from his brief encounter with him, and at the end of the book, Pilate is united with Yeshua.

### *Grigory Danilovich Rimsky*

The treasurer of the theater, Grigory Danilovich Rimsky, is visited by the ghost of Varenukha the night of Woland's performance, but manages to escape to the train station.

### *Professor Woland*

Woland is frequently referred to in the book as a foreigner. He is mischievous and cunning, but also noble and generous. The contradictions in his personality show in his looks: "his left eye was completely mad, his right eye black, expressionless and dead." He claims to have been present when Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus and he can foretell the future, but people rationalize his supernatural powers as illusions or else they, like Ivan and the Master, end up in the psychiatric ward. Woland and his associates wreak havoc in Moscow. They put on a show of black magic at the Variety Theater, at which gorgeous new clothes are given to all of the ladies and money falls from the ceiling: soon after, the women are found to be walking the streets in their underwear and the money that looked authentic proves to be meaningless paper. At the devil's ball, Woland drops his disguise as a visiting professor and reveals his true identity as the devil. On the day after the ball he and his associates ride off to the netherworld on thundering black stallions.

## 11. ESSAYS AND CRITICISM

1. The Nature and Politics of Writing
2. The Master and Margarita
3. Rehabilitated Experimentalist

### The Nature and Politics of Writing

Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* is a novel about novels--an argument for the ability of literature to transcend both time and oppression, and for the heroic nature of the writer's struggle to create that literature. The story's hero, the Master, is an iconographic representation of such writers. Despite rejection, mockery and self-censorship, he creates a fictional world so powerful that it has the ability to invade and restructure the reality of those that surround him. Indeed, it has a life beyond authorial control. Despite his attempts to burn it, the story of Pontius Pilate refuses to die. As Woland remarks, "Manuscripts don't burn." This transcendence of message over physical form--the eternal power of narrative over the mundane reality of flammable paper--is in itself an idea that "escapes" from Bulgakov's novel, becoming a commentary on his contemporary Soviet society and the role of authors like Bulgakov within it.

Readers first meet the Master in Dr. Stravinsky's mental hospital, as he says when asked about his identity, "I am a master

I no longer have a name. I have renounced it, as I have renounced life itself." His identity subsumed into his role as Great Author, the Master's symbolic status is sign-posted from his first appearance. Both the details of his creative process as well as the story he has created will be presented throughout Bulgakov's novel as powerful, almost occult forces, that are greater than material reality, just as the infernal visitors are greater than the rationalist society upon which they wreak havoc. The multiple narrative strands of the novel--the Master and Margarita's story of creation, the story-within-a-story of the master's novel, the dry world of state-controlled literature exemplified by MASSOLIT (a literary club in Moscow), and the ruleless world of the satanic gang--perform both individually and in their entirety as a commentary on the nature and power of narrative.

As the hero explains to his fellow inmate, it was the creation of his novel that caused his transcendence to the status of Master--the act of writing forcing a kind of personal transformation upon him. He and his lover, Margarita, were completely consumed in one other and in his work-in-progress--the two consummations fed into and from one another. The novel enabled their romance at the same time as their romance enabled the novel--it is Margarita who oversees its creation and bestows the name "Master" upon its author, and it is she who keeps faith in it when the publishing world rejects it. When the Master burns his manuscript, throwing it in the wood stove, he is attempting to reverse the alchemical process of creation. The unclean text must be transformed into ashes in the "purifying" flames, just as he was transformed into An Author by the purifying act of creating it.

In his story we can see a metaphorized version of the struggles of all authors, the master's story presenting a sort of extended meditation on the nature of being an author. The completion of the novel is the culmination of everything he was working toward and the expression of his personality, an "alternative self" in which his dreams reside. His rejection of writing thus becomes a rejection of his own mind, an act that is literalized by his self-committal to the asylum: he has literally "lost his mind." When Woland returns the manuscript to him, the Master rejects it, saying, "I hate that novel." Woland's reply encapsulates the crippling effects of such self-censorship. As he asks, "How will you be able to

write now? Where are your dreams, your inspiration?" The Master replies, "I have no more dreams and my inspiration is dead .. I'm finished." Of course, by the end of the novel, the Master has re-embraced his story, completing the final line as he flies off to his eternal cottage with Margarita. This pattern of creative struggle, rejection, self-doubt and transcendence represents a simultaneous exploration and rejection of glorification through pain. It is creation, not rejection, that turns a simple author into a Master. In just the same way, the Master's version of the crucifixion stresses joy over suffering. It is forgiveness that allows Pontius Pilate to ascend to Heaven, not a proscribed period of torment; just as Margarita's compassion frees Frieda the infanticide from the eternal cycle of suffering. Both the literal Purgatory of Catholic theology and the metaphoric purgatory of authorial trial are rejected in favor of Grace and acceptance.

This rejection of suffering-as-purity acts as a nuanced critique of literary life in Soviet culture. The writers of "acceptable" literature--the members of MASSOLIT--are forgettable idiots not worthy of serious critique. The authorial voice, represented by the all-powerful satanic gang, dismisses them with a capricious amusement exemplified by the fate of Berlioz, who simply has his head cut off to shut him up. Similarly, the proprietors of the Variety Theater are subjected to various Byzantine tortures befitting their production of terrible art. In this way, The Master and Margarita presents not so much an indictment of Socialist Realism as a disgusted mockery of it. Instead, the more serious and sensitive exploration is reserved for "real" authors, those who are outside state approval and whose work is marginalized and banned. Again, the Master is used to exemplify such authors. Subjected first to dismissal and then to active persecution, he gradually embraces the logic of MASSOLIT and burns his own book. As Woland says, "They have almost broken him," and they have done so by causing him to break himself. When this is taken into account, the rejection of suffering as a creative aesthetic must be read as a powerful call to an artistic community under siege rather than to the forces besieging it. The story of the Master's suffering acts as a parable which warns of the dangers inherent in heroizing struggle.

To Bulgakov and his contemporaries, heroizing struggle was an attractive option, very difficult to resist. Soviet writers of the Stalinist period were subjected to extreme levels of censorship, and faced with a choice between living in fear, writing what they were told to write, or never attempting to get published. In The Master and Margarita, Bulgakov creates an artistic world that acknowledges these conditions, and negotiates a different intellectual and philosophical approach to them. The danger of accepting that struggle purifies is presented by the fate of the Master. Struggling does not purify him--rather it represents an acceptance of the forces ranged against him; a voluntary erasure of self that serves the purposes of the state. When he embraces the power of his narrative, he embraces a form of resistance, which says that joy, creation and the telling of stories must be an end in themselves, since--like the Master's novel--they may well be truly finished only after the death of the author. As Bulgakov bitterly said of his own work:

I have heard again and again suspiciously unctuous voices assuring me, 'No matter, after your death everything will be published.'

The most difficult task facing The Master, Bulgakov, and Soviet writers in general is to accept that fact while refusing to consign themselves to purgatory.

The power of narrative to create belief, and the concurrent power of belief to restructure reality, is a major thematic aspect of the novel. This works in a multilayered way, with many versions of narrative playing

against each other and providing commentaries on one another. In the most obvious, structural instance, the novel-within-a-novel motif allows Bulgakov to comment on the role of literature in the life of the society and author that produces it. A common genre in Russian literary history, the book within a book appears in such works as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Zamiatin's *We*. Bulgakov's innovation is the relationship between the two books. Though the story of Pontius Pilate is indeed a story within a story, and though it is indeed the Master's novel, discrete boundaries between the two texts are constantly blurred until it is no longer clear which story is taking place within which. Only once is an excerpt from the Master's novel presented as an excerpt--when Margarita sits down to read the charred fragment. The rest of the time, Pilate's story comes from the minds and mouths of others--from Woland at Patriarch's Ponds and the dreams of Homeless at the asylum. It becomes just as real as the story that seems to contain it, a parallel reality that reaches into contemporary Moscow and reshapes it according to its needs. Everything in the Moscow reality revolves around the Yershalayim reality that the Master's book set in motion, culminating in a scene in which it becomes apparent that the Master now exists, like Bulgakov's frame narrative, to resolve the painful reality of Pontius Pilate's story. What started as an author's attempt to achieve--to transform his life by the creation of literature--has been entirely reversed. The author exists in the service of literature, and not the other way round.

The role of literature within the culture that produces it is similarly configured: it literally has the power to change the past, present, and future. The interaction of the Yershalaim and the Moscow realities complicates the relationship of cause and effect through the manipulation of chronology, and in doing so suggests that art transcends time. Chapter twenty-six of *The Master and Margarita* marks the end of the Master's story of Pilate, but in chapter thirty-two Pilate himself reappears, this time within the Moscow narrative. Woland tells the Master:

We have read your novel, and we can only say that unfortunately it is not finished. I would like to show you your hero. He has been sitting here for nearly two thousand years  
He is saying that there is no peace for him

He claims he had more to say to [Ha-Notsri] on that distant fourteenth day of Nisan.

The meeting of the master and his hero Pilate in the 'eternal now' of the afterlife completes the link between past and present. The two concurrent story lines finally intersect physically, after they have touched upon each other throughout the novel. The Master frees Pilate from his eternal torment, and is himself granted peace by one of his own creations--his version of Levi Matvei who arrives as Yeshua's messenger to Woland. Narrative, this would seem to suggest, is so powerful that it is not only incapable of destruction, but also the very means by which reality is constructed. In this way, Pilate is paradoxically "created," millennia before his creator, the Master, was even born.

When the Master wrote about Pilate, he effectively changed the past, and his characters gained the ability to walk into his present and change his life and the life of his society. In an extended chronological and narrative game, Bulgakov suggests that it is what we read that makes us believe, and what we believe that makes us who we are. Woland and his followers wreak havoc on Moscow by dropping millions of rubles into the audience of the Variety Theater, rubles that turn into foreign bills, soda bottles, and insects, infesting the economy with a supply of worthless money. As Bulgakov makes clear, money--no less than fiction and religion--is dependent on faith, on the willingness to believe that objects of material culture are greater than the sum of their parts. When that belief is lost, reality becomes a set of meaningless, valueless

artifacts of no use to anyone. In the final analysis, *The Master and Margarita* represents an absolute rejection of "reality" as it is understood by Soviet materialist culture. Instead, the novel says, fiction is reality and reality is fiction.

Everything is dependent on stories.

Source: Tabitha McIntosh-Byrd, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2000.

McIntosh-Byrd is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania.

### **The Master and Margarita**

*The Master and Margarita* was essentially completed in 1940 but its origin goes back to 1928, when Bulgakov wrote a satirical tale about the devil visiting Moscow. Like his literary hero, Gogol (as well as the Master in his own novel), Bulgakov destroyed this manuscript in 1930 but returned to the idea in 1934, adding his heroine, Margarita, based on the figure of his third wife, Elena Sergeevna Shilovskaia. The novel went through a number of different versions until, aware that he had only a short time to live, he put other works aside in order to complete it, dictating the final changes on his deathbed after he had become blind. It remained unpublished until 1965-66, when it appeared in a censored version in the literary journal *Moskva*, immediately creating a sensation. It has since been published in its entirety, although the restored passages, while numerous, add comparatively little to the overall impact of the novel. It has been translated into many other languages. (In English, the Glenny translation is the more complete, while the Ginsburg translation is taken from the original *Moskva* version.)

The novel's form is unusual, with the hero, the Master, appearing only towards the end of the first part, and Margarita not until Part Two. It combines three different if carefully related stories: the arrival of the devil (Woland) and his companions in contemporary Moscow, where they create havoc; Margarita's attempt, with Woland's assistance, to be reunited with her love after his imprisonment and confinement in a psychiatric hospital; and an imaginative account of the passion of Christ (given the Hebrew name of Yeshua Ha-Notri) from his interrogation by Pontius Pilate to his crucifixion. Differing considerably from the gospels, the latter consists of four chapters which may be regarded as a novel within a novel: written by the Master, related by Woland, and dreamed of by a young poet (Ivan Bezdomnyi, or 'Homeless') on the basis of 'true' events. Correspondingly, the action takes place on three different levels, each with a distinct narrative voice: that of Ancient Jerusalem, of Moscow of the 1930s (during the same four days in Holy Week), and of the 'fantastic' realm beyond time. The book is usually considered to be closest in genre to Menippean satire.

Despite its complexity, the novel is highly entertaining, very funny in places, and with the mystery appeal of a detective story. In the former Soviet Union, as well as in the countries of Eastern Europe, it was appreciated first of all for its satire on the absurdities of everyday life: involving Communist ideology, the bureaucracy, the police, consumer goods, the housing crisis, various forms of illegal activities and, above all, the literary and artistic community. At the same time it is obviously a very serious work, by the end of which one feels a need for more detailed interpretation: what, in short, is it all about? The problem is compounded by the fact that it is full of pure fantasy and traditional symbols (features associated with devil-lore, for example), so that the reader is uncertain what is important to elucidate the meaning. Leitmotifs (such as sun and moon, light and darkness, and many others) connect the three levels, implying the ultimate unity of all existence.

Soviet critics tended to dwell initially on the relatively innocuous theme

of justice: enforced by Woland during his sojourn in Moscow, while Margarita tempers this with mercy in her plea to release a sinner from torment. Human greed, cowardice, and the redemptive power of love are other readily distinguishable themes. More fundamental ones are summed up in three key statements: 'Jesus existed' (the importance of a spiritual understanding of life, as opposed to practical considerations in a materialistic world that denied Christ's very existence); 'Manuscripts don't burn' (a belief in the enduring nature of art); and 'Everything will turn out right. That's what the world is built on': an extraordinary metaphysical optimism for a writer whose life was characterized by recurring disappointment. There is indeed a strong element of wish-fulfilment in the book, where characters are punished or rewarded according to what they are seen to have deserved.

Thus the novel's heroes, the Master and Margarita, are ultimately rescued, through the agency of Woland, in the world beyond time. They are, however, granted 'peace' rather than 'light', from which they are specifically excluded: a puzzle to many critics. Here, on a deeper philosophical level, there is an undoubted influence of gnosticism with its contrasting polarities of good and evil--which, as I have argued elsewhere, are reconciled in eternity, where 'peace' represents a higher state than the corresponding polarities of light and darkness. Another influence is the Faust story, with Margarita (a far more dynamic figure than either the Master or Goethe's Gretchen) partly taking over Faust's traditional role, in that she is the one to make the pact with Woland, rejoicing in her role as witch. A major scene is 'Satan's Great Ball', a fictional representation of the Walpurgisnacht or Black Mass.

Bulgakov, however, reinterprets his sources-- Faust, traditional demonology, the Bible, and many others--in his own way, creating an original and entertaining story which is not exhausted by interpretation. His devil is helpful to those who deserve it and is shown as necessary to God's purposes, to which he is not opposed. Bulgakov's Christ figure, a lonely 'philosopher', has only one disciple (Matthu Levi) although eventually Pontius Pilate, 'released' by Margarita from his torments after 2,000 years, is allowed to follow him as well.

Woland too has his disciples: Azazello, Koroviev, and a huge, comical tomcat called Behemoth. So has the Master, with Ivan Bezdomnyi. Like Faust, the Master is the creative artist, 'rivalling' God with the devil's help; like Yeshua he is profoundly aware of the spiritual plane, but is afraid, cowed by life's circumstances.

Endlessly fascinating, the novel indeed deserves to be considered one of the major works of 20th-century world literature.

Source: A. Colin Wright, "The Master and Margarita," in Reference Guide to World Literature, second edition, edited by Lesley Henderson, St. James Press, 1995.

### **Rehabilitated Experimentalist**

Bulgakov's brilliant and moving extravaganza [The Master and Margarita] may well be one of the major novels of the Russian 20th century

For the

Western reader, the novelty of Bulgakov's genre can only be relative after Joyce and Beckett, Nabokov, Burroughs and Mailer; yet the novelty of his achievement is absolute--comparable perhaps most readily to that of Fellini's recent work in the cinema

...

[This] is a city novel, the enormous cast of characters (largely literary and theatrical types) being united by consternation at the invasion of Moscow by the devil--who poses as a professor of black magic named



Woland--and his three assistants, one of whom is a giant talking cat, a tireless prankster and expert pistol shot

...

On its satirical level, the book treats the traditional Russian theme of vulgarity by laughing at it until the laughter itself becomes fatiguing, ambivalent and grotesque. But there is more: thematically, the novel is put together like a set of Chinese boxes. A third of the way through, in a mental hospital, the hack poet Ivan Bezdomny meets the Master, whose mysterious presence adds a new dimension to the narrative--the dimension in which art, love and religion have their being. Ivan has been taken, protesting, to the hospital; the Master, significantly, has voluntarily committed himself, rejecting the world. He is a middleaged historian turned novelist who, after winning 100,000 rubles in the state lottery, devotes himself, an egoless Zhivago, to the twin miracles of love and art. Aided by the beautiful Margarita, whom he has met by chance in the street, he writes a novel about Pontius Pilate--which she declares to be her life--only to become the object of vicious critical attack in the press and, in a fit of depression, burns the precious manuscript

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What, then, becomes of the manuscript? The answer is the key to Bulgakov's work. Echoes of Gogol, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Hoffmann and a dozen others are not hard to find, but they are internal allusions; to account for the form of the book--and its formal significance within Soviet literature-- one must mention Pirandello, and the Gide of *The Counterfeiters*. Bulgakov's characters, in the common Russian phrase, are out of different operas. The story of the disruption of Moscow by Woland and company is *opéra bouffe*; the story of the Master and Margarita is lyrical opera. But there is a third and epical opera, richly staged and in a style that contrasts sharply with the styles of the other two. The setting is Jerusalem, the main subject Pontius Pilate, the main action the crucifixion of Christ.

### **Rehabilitated Experimentalist**

This narrative is threaded through the whole of the book, in a series of special chapters.

By merging [the question of what happened to the Master's novel] with Woland's account and Ivan's dream, Bulgakov seems to be suggesting that truth subsists, timeless and intact, available to men with sufficient intuition and freedom from conventional perception. The artist's uniqueness in particular lies in his ability to accept miracle--and this ability leads him, paradoxically, to a truth devoid of miracle, a purely human truth. I am simplifying what I take to be implicit, though complex and unclear, in Bulgakov's book, but there is a clue, easily overlooked, that would seem to support this interpretation. When the Master first appears to tell Ivan his story, Margarita is waiting impatiently for the promised final words about the fifth Procurator of Judea, reading out in a loud singsong random sentences that pleased her and saying that the novel was her life. Now, Bulgakov's own novel ends precisely with the phrase about the cruel Procurator of Judea, fifth in that office, the knight Pontius Pilate. Is the novel we read then, to be identified with the Master's?

The answer is clearly (but not simply) yes. The perspectives turn out to be reversible. Bulgakov's novel had appeared to include a piece at least of the Master's; now at the end it appears that the Master's novel has enlarged to include Bulgakov's. The baffling correspondences, in any event, make the case for mystery, and the heart of mystery is transfiguration--quod erat demonstrandum. Margarita's faith in the Master's art is thus justified in ways which she could not have anticipated--and becomes a symbol of Bulgakov's similar faith in his own work. The Master's novel is Margarita's life in one sense as Bulgakov's

novel is in another.

[The Master and Margarita] is a plea for spiritual life without dogmatic theology, for individual integrity based on an awareness of the irreducible mystery of human life. It bespeaks sympathy for the inevitably lonely and misunderstood artist; it opposes to Philistinism not good citizenship but renunciation.

Source: Donald Fanger, "Rehabilitated Experimentalist," in *Nation*, January 22, 1968, pp. 117-18.

## 12. SUGGESTED ESSAY TOPICS

### Chapter 1

1. Describe the Professor's conversation with Berlioz and Ivan. In what ways does he dispute the notion that God does not exist? How do his prophecy and specialty in black magic influence the impact of his claim that Jesus did exist?
2. What oddities does Berlioz encounter by the Patriarch's Ponds, aside from the Professor's appearance? How do these oddities provide a backdrop for his and Ivan's encounter with the Professor?

### Chapter 2

1. Describe the ways in which this chapter illustrates Pilate's weariness. How does his weariness contrast with Yeshua's character?
2. How does the story of Pilate and Yeshua told here differ and elaborate on the Gospel accounts of the relationship of Pilate and Jesus?

### Chapters 3-4

1. How might Berlioz's death serve as a seventh proof of God's existence?
2. Discuss Ivan's chase after the professor, the choirmaster, and the cat. How does the chase further the sense of surrealness and artifice created by earlier chapters?

### Chapters 5-6

1. Compare Ivan's belief that unclean powers have caused Berlioz's demise with the disbelieving reaction of the doctor and the people at Griboedov's to his testimony.
2. Analyze the character of Riukhin. Why does he curse the statue along the boulevard? What is the meaning of his confession that his poems are lies and his recognition that his life is miserable?

### Chapters 7-8

1. Analyze the history and current events at apartment 50. What could explain the peculiar events at the apartment?
2. Describe Ivan's mental and emotional condition in chapter eight. Why does no one believe Ivan's stories about Pilate and the death of Berlioz?

### Chapters 9-10

1. Discuss Bosoy's crime of speculating in foreign currency. What does his acceptance of the bribe and arrest indicate about corruption in Communist Moscow?
2. Analyze the attack on Vareukha. In light of earlier events, what does it reveal about Woland and his retinue? Why might Vareukha be attacked?

### Chapters 11-12

1. What does the title of chapter 11 mean? How might Ivan be said to have split in two?
2. How does Woland's magic show bring out the dark, material desires of Moscow's citizens and bring them to fruition? What are Woland's reasons for fulfilling these desires?

### Chapter 13

1. How does Ivan and the master's shared knowledge of the Pilate story change the credibility and objectivity of that story? Has the story become more convincing as a result?
2. What are the possible reasons for Ivan's refusal to believe he met Satan at the Patriarch's Ponds? Given the events in the novel thus far, is Ivan's disbelief well-founded?

### Chapters 14-15

1. Discuss the importance of the scene at Rimsky's desk. What accounts for the change in Varenuhka? How does the cock's crowing recall the Gospel story of a cock crowing three times?
2. How does Bosoy's dream, with its emphasis on exposing people who hide illegal currency, fit in with the novel's theme of artifice and secrecy? Similarly, how do the theatrics of his dream compare with the theatrics of Woland's magic show?

### Chapters 16-17

1. Compare the surreal feeling of Bosoy's dream and the events of chapter 17 to Ivan's dream, with its realistic depiction of the execution at Bald Mountain. How does this comparison highlight the unreality of Communist Moscow and argue for the truth of earlier claims that God and the Devil exist?
2. Discuss Matthew Levi's relationship to Yeshua and his actions at the execution, including his rage at God. What has inspired Matthew Levi to come to the execution and cut down the three bodies?

### Chapter 18

1. Compare the prophecy that Andrei Fokich Sokov will die of liver cancer, and his response to the prophecy, with the prophecy of Berlioz's death and Berlioz's response.
2. Discuss the difficulty Poplavsky has in seeking to occupy Berlioz's apartment. Why do Azazello and the cat treat him so roughly, and how does their treatment of him contrast with Koroviev's treatment of him?

### Chapters 19-20

1. Describe Margarita's character as it is revealed by her response to Azazello. Why is she so willing to confront him?
2. Margarita's dream is one of a series of dreams thus far in the novel. Compare her dream to the earlier ones. Why does she respond so optimistically to her dream?

### Chapter 21-22

1. Analyze the globe Woland shows Margarita. What is the significance of the globe and the events shown on it?
2. How does Margarita's flight reprise the novel's theme of the mutability of space and time?

### Chapter 23

1. Describe Margarita's performance as the hostess of Satan's ball. What

enables her to withstand the pressures involved with serving as hostess?

2. Discuss the purpose of Satan's ball. Why do the condemned souls emerge once each year? Describe how the décor and atmosphere of the ball contrasts with its guests.

#### Chapter 24

1. Woland grants the master and Margarita several wishes. This generosity conflicts with his earlier cruelties. What has inspired his generosity, and what do the couple do with their wishes?

2. Examine the conversation between Margarita, Woland, and his retinue before the master appears. What does it reveal about their personalities?

#### Chapter 25

1. The appearance of the huge dark cloud at the start of the chapter, and the sun's emergence as Aphranius goes to Pilate, exemplifies the role weather has played throughout the novel in setting scenes, highlighting plot movement. Examine this role, and the symbolic presence of weather in the novel thus far.

2. Judas and his love of money is one example of the relationship between money, luxury, and morality explored by the novel. Compare Judas' passion for money and Pilate's desire for material comforts with Yeshua's rejection of a drink before he dies.

#### Chapter 26

1. Niza's betrayal of Judas to Aphranius is part of a web of secrecy and deceit involving Yeshua's execution. How does this web contrast with the character of Yeshua himself?

2. Describe Pilate's moonlight dream. What does it mean? What significance lies in it beginning at midnight?

#### Chapters 27-28

1. How does the inability of the Moscow police to catch Woland and his retinue contrast with the Soviet state's extensive monitoring and control of its citizens, as portrayed in this novel?

2. Margarita is one of several characters who have access to the master's novel about Pilate. What is the impact of his novel being revealed through several different characters?

#### Chapters 29-32

1. Discuss the relationship between the master and Margarita. What characteristics do they have in common? Why is Margarita so devoted to the master?

2. Matthew Levi does not dispute Woland's assertion that evil is essential to life on earth. However, he does seek peace for the master and Margarita. What have they done to deserve peace, and why don't they deserve the light?

#### Epilogue

1. Ivan's fate is inconclusive, in contrast to the decisive fate of most of the novel's characters. What is the significance of his inconclusive fate, and of his actions during the annual festal spring full moon?

2. Discuss the description of the aftermath of Woland's visit to Moscow. How does the persecution of so many alleged perpetrators contrast with the inability to stop Woland and his retinue from wreaking havoc on Moscow?

### 13. SAMPLE ESSAY OUTLINES

#### Topic #1

The Master and Margarita is set in two cities: Moscow, where Woland, the master, and Margarita are at the center of the plot, and Yershalaim, where the drama of Yeshua and Pilate drives the plot forward. Analyze the juxtaposition of these two plot settings and examine the meaning of this juxtaposition

#### *I. Thesis Statement:*

The Master and Margarita establishes the plot setting in biblical Yershalaim as real and the plot setting in communist Moscow as false. In doing this, it argues that the existence of God and the devil, called absurd by Communist leaders and party members, is real. In contrast, by depicting an array of fantastic, surreal events happening in Moscow, the novel argues that communist Moscow is absurd and fundamentally unreal.

#### *II. Realism and credibility of Yershalaim narrative.*

- A. Before beginning to tell Pilate story, Woland declares "Jesus did exist."
- B. Plain descriptions of Herod's palace, Pilate, Yeshua, and Kaifa.
- C. Yeshua's simple, non-rhetorical language.
- D. Crude physicality of the execution scene.
- E. Pilate's weary, subdued nature, and hunger for sensual pleasure.
- F. Judas's desire for money and Niza leading him to death.
- G. Aphranius's grim, violent character.

#### *III. Absurdity and deceptiveness in Moscow narrative.*

- A. Surrealism of initial chapter and Berlioz's death.
- B. Incredible speed of Ivan's chase and Ivan's inability to catch Woland.
- C. Styopa's removal from apartment 50 to the jetty at Yalta.
- D. The refusal to believe Ivan's testimony about Berlioz's death.
- E. Koroviev's bribe and the arrest of Bosoy.
- F. Woland's bizarre magic show.
- G. Bosoy's dream of the public exposure of currency hoarders.
- H. The guests at Satan's ball, and apartment 50's conversion to ballroom.
- I. Woland and retinue vanish when pursued by police air
- J. Inability of secret police to catch Woland and retinue or uncover their actions. Persecution of innocent parties in epilogue.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

- A. Suffering and realism of Yershalaim characters presents them as believable.

B. Fantastic events and duplicity in Moscow make reader question reality and legitimacy of Stalin regime.

C. The novel rejects the bizarreness and cruelty of Moscow narrative as false and accepts the biblically inspired Yershalaim narrative as real

## **Topic #2**

When Woland and his retinue descend on Moscow, they interact with many different characters. These characters have various responses to their contact with Woland and his retinue. Examine the master and Margarita's response to Woland and its significance for the novel as a whole.

### *I. Thesis Statement:*

The master and Margarita are the only two Moscow characters who are willing and able to confront the supernatural realm Woland inhabits. In their confrontation, they exhibit the courage all the other Moscow characters lack. By virtue of their courage and devotion, they are the heroes of the novel, and are rewarded by being granted peace at the novel's conclusion.

### *II. The master's response to Woland and the supernatural*

- A. Writes Pilate manuscript.
- B. Talks with Ivan about the Pilate story and recognizes the professor is Satan.
- C. Recognizes Woland's true identity immediately.
- D. Proclaims himself afraid of nothing.
- E. Anticipates encounter with Pilate and grants Pilate freedom.

### *III. Margarita's response to Woland and the supernatural.*

- A. Interprets dream as meaning she will reunite with the master.
- B. Agrees to Azazello's invitation to visit Woland.
- C. Welcomes being transformed into witch.
- D. Enjoys her reception by the river after ending her flight.
- E. Successfully carries out her duties as hostess of Satan's ball.
- F. Grants Frieda her freedom and makes the master appear.
- G. Suffers no psychic damage from visit to Woland.
- H. Trusts that everything will turn out well.

### *IV. The master and Margarita's mutual confrontation with Woland and Pilate.*

- A. Granted wish to return to their basement apartment.
- B. Given peace by Yeshua as reward for Pilate manuscript.
- C. Come to terms with their death and fly from Moscow with Woland.
- D. At novel's end, embrace their eternal life in their eternal home.

### *V. Conclusion*

- A. Master and Margarita, both separately and jointly, prove capable of courageously embracing, confronting, and accepting the supernatural.
- B. Master and Margarita die as result of confrontation with Woland, but in dying they achieve peace as their unique reward.



#### **14. COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

1968: Viewing the Vietnam War on television, Americans became more and more suspicious of their government. Atrocities, such as the massacre of hundreds of Vietnamese men, women, and children in the village of My Lai, made Americans feel as distanced from their government as the citizens of Moscow in *The Master and Margarita*.

Today: Americans are still suspicious of the government's honesty and competence, so that any military initiative is met with distrust.

1968: The newly appointed secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek, refused to attend conferences in Warsaw and Moscow. In order to keep control of the satellite Communist countries, the Soviet Union sent 200,000 troops into Czechoslovakia.

Today: Czechoslovakia no longer exists. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, it divided into two republics: The Czech Republic, with a capital city of Prague, and Slovakia, whose capital is Bratislava.

1968: Race riots swept many of the country's major metropolitan areas after Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead in Memphis. A total of 21,270 arrests were made across the country. Forty-six people died in the riots.

Today: Many social scientists consider the continued divisions between the races to be America's greatest social failure.

## **15. TOPICS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

Explain why you think that Woland's associate Behemoth is presented as a cat, while Pilate's closest companion is his dog. List the characteristics of these animals that make them fit the roles that Bulgakov has given them here.

Study the treatment of writers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s through the 1960s. Report on the standards to which writers were held by the government, and the punishments that were given to those who disobeyed.

Read *Faust*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which is openly acknowledged as one of the inspirations for *The Master and Margarita*. Compare Goethe's version of the devil with Bulgakov's Woland. Which do you think is more dangerous? Which is written to be the more sympathetic figure? Why do you think Bulgakov made the changes to the devil that he made?

Study the specific political role played by the Procurator of Judea. How did this position come into existence? What would have been the extent of his powers and responsibilities?

## **16. MEDIA ADAPTATIONS**

The Master and Margarita was adapted for video in 1988. This version was directed by Alexandra Petrovich and released by SBS.

The video Incident in Judea, directed by Paul Bryers and released by SBS in 1992, is based on material from Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita.

A Polish version, Mistrz i Malgorzata (The Master and Margarita--with English subtitles--of The Master and Margarita was released on four video cassettes by Contal International in 1990. This version was directed and written by Maciej Wojtyszko.

The Master and Margarita was adapted for audio cassette by IU Liubimov, and released by Theater Works in 1991.

An audio compact disc called Master and Margarita: Eight Scenes from the Ballet was released by Russian Discs in 1995.

## 17. WHAT DO I READ NEXT?

This book's use of fantasy elements to lampoon social behavior is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's ever-popular Alice books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872). Bulgakov refers to these books, in fact, in the beginning of chapter eight, when Ivan finds a cylinder in the mental ward labeled "Drink," similar to the mysterious bottle labeled "Drink Me" that Alice finds at the start of her adventure in *Wonderland*.

Many of Bulgakov's ideas, especially his conception of Woland, the devil, are taken directly from German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's two-part poem *Faust* (published in 1808 and 1832), which he wrote over a span of fifty years.

Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* created a sensation when it was released in 1988, causing an Iranian religious leader to offer a reward for the "blaspheming" author's death. Rushdie himself acknowledged the similarities between his book and *The Master and Margarita*, noting that "the echoes are there, and not unconsciously." Like Bulgakov's novel, it is the retelling of an ancient religious story within a contemporary story.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is a Russian novelist of a generation after Bulgakov's, who grew up within the repression of Lenin's reformed government. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970 and was expelled from Russia in 1974 for denouncing the official government system. Critics consider some of his early fictional works about the Soviet government to be his most powerful, including *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) and *The First Circle* (1968).

Critics have pointed out that the modern trend of "magical realism" in fiction has much in common with *The Master and Margarita*. This style has been most evident in Latin America since the 1960s, in the works of such writers as Alejo Carpenter, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa. The most preeminent novel in this genre is *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez, who won the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.

## **18. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING**

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### **For Further Study**

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