



The Human Response to Evil and Injustice in Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita

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The Master and Margarita

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The heart of Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*, poses a paradoxical understanding of the problem of evil. The opposing forces of good and evil, which we usually understand as engaged in a struggle, one against the other, are oddly dependant on each other in the novel. Bulgakov's devil, Woland, carries the paradox of good and evil, and through him we can see the unity in the novel and grasp the complexity of the problem of evil. The novel's paradoxical idea is captured initially in the famous quotation from Goethe's *Faust* which precedes the first chapter: "I am part of that force which eternally wills evil and eternally works good."^[1] The idea is restated by Woland at the end of the novel when he asks: "what good would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it" (360)? Modeled after Goethe's Mephistopheles, Woland is the sources of riddles, the ringleader of a cohort of pranksters. Woland is present in each of the novel's two worlds, Moscow and Yershalaim (ancient Jerusalem); he talks with Yeshua, Bulgakov's Jesus; he exerts the power to change names, written records, shapes and fashions; he places everything in time. In short, Woland possesses the power to temporarily throw the world into disorder. But, unlike Mephisto, Woland understands the harmonious unity of good and evil, and thus his disorder has purpose: Woland causes characters to question life, to see it as incomplete and unfulfilled.^[2] His pranks serve to turn the closed world of Moscow on its head, to expose perspective and to reveal the destructive violence that can be perpetrated in the name of a fixed world view. Woland is not a devil of out and out evil; the evil he works—the pricking of hearts into moments of awareness—"eternally works good." Characters therefore must learn to recognize moments of awareness lest they remain fixed in their limited perspectives, incapable of self-reflection and the creation of meaning. Thus we must see the necessity of Woland's presence in the world, and the interdependency of the forces of good and evil which he represents.

Yet there is a sense in *The Master and Margarita* that a more violent, more destructive evil is present—an evil less interested in bringing individuals to awareness than in power and domination. Woland stakes a claim as a force of evil that eternally works good in the novel, but the circles of destructive violence originate with Stalin and Caesar, the absent figureheads of authority in Moscow and Yershalaim. By the corrupting influence of power, Stalin and Caesar have lost sight of the good, and though we see neither, they are the roots of organized, institutional evil in Moscow and Yershalaim. Richard Pevear, in his introduction to the novel, refines this idea, saying, "the reality of the world seems to be at their disposal, to be shaped by them and to bear their imprint... Their imposed will has become the measure of normality and self-evidence. In other words, the normality of this world is imposed terror" (xvii). We cannot label the existence of evil in the novel as "inexplicable"—evil here is omnipresent, though never given a name or a face. The power exerted by faceless evil destroys the social bonds of community and forces individuals to live in fear. The political arrests that nightly terrorize the citizens of Moscow^[3] are not directly carried out by Stalin himself, but he is nevertheless behind the arrests, the unseen center of the circles of terror and violence in Moscow. The ability to create meaning is greatly restricted in a world where terror has become the norm. It is all but completely smothered. This smothering inhibits all ability to create meaning, save for those few characters who question the reality of the world, who remain self-reflective and who can imagine the world in new framework. Only they are capable of creating meaning—though it is meaning which is private to the individual, not public. Even in the presence of destructive evil, the energy of life lingers in the hearts of individuals who strive for meaning.

Thus we can say that *The Master and Margarita* is a novel concerned with the creation of meaning in a world where the unifying bonds of community have been shattered. This paradoxical idea that individuals can still achieve a meaningful existence in a world terrorized by power is an expression of the novel's vision: there is a quality in human nature that drives the creation of meaning even in a repressive world; and in a disordered world, human beings will strive to find unity. Though the novel explores such

a paradoxical theme, the internal unity of the text becomes an expression of the novel's vision—the unity achieved is complex, but ultimately, it becomes a beautiful expression of Bulgakov's faithful, radiant hope in human nature's capacity for the creation of meaning.

Bulgakov, like his novel's hero, the Master, was striving to create a meaningful work of fiction in a closed society. Indeed, Bulgakov's achievement is a testament to the paradox of a repressed society. In a society where authority attempts to repress the creation of meaning, where truth and history become fixed and dogmatic, and where the social interaction of ideas is cut off, the self can constitute meaning for the self through the creation of a work of art. Such creation is the work of an active imagination, striving continually to question and re-envision the world. Despite writing during one of Russia's most repressive periods, Bulgakov creates a vision, contained in the language of the novel itself and demonstrated by its very creation, which remains hopeful. Unfathomable darkness is balanced by beauty and light, by laughter and joy. "The very language of the novel was a contradiction of everything wooden, official, imposed," Richard Pevear observes, "It was a joy to speak" (vii).

A closed text, like a closed society, inhibits the artistic creation of meaning. Through satire and laughter, however, *The Master and Margarita* becomes a source of life and vitality. The type of satire employed by Bulgakov serves to open the text, achieving an internal freedom within the novel that is stylistically an expression of Bulgakov's vision. Bulgakov utilizes techniques of Menippean satire, a form of indirect satire "in which the objects of the satire are characters who make themselves ridiculous by what they think, say and do."^[4] Not only characters, but we find the Russian state, the Moscow literary society, the Gospels and even the narrator himself as principle objects of satire in the novel. Menippean satire in *The Master and Margarita* is distinguished by the untraditional or exaggerated treatment of historical figures—Yeshua and Pontius Pilate immediately come to mind—; scandal scenes such as Woland's séance at the Variety Theatre; breaks from reality such as dreams or hallucinations, Ivan's schizophrenia or the Master's near-madness; the use of elements both comic and fantastic.^[5]

Unlike a closed text unified by a single idea, an open text like *The Master and Margarita* finds a higher form of unity through the combination of several self-referential voices that make up the narrative. An open text is characterized by what literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin calls a polyphony of voices.^[6] Stylistically, *The Master and Margarita* shares many characteristics with Dostoevsky's poetics: the novel is "marked by the existence of several different worlds within the text, from which emerge several different philosophical and ideological points of view—perspectives on an event expressed through the independent voices of [the] characters" (Bakhtin, 16). These voices exist in a state of equality, "Every voice, every 'field of vision,' in the novel is of 'equal worth' (Bakhtin, 16). Unlike a closed text, the plurality of voices in an open text is not subordinated to one singular voice or perspective. Rather, there is an acceptance and incorporation of every voice, every point of view such that, as in Dostoevsky's novels, "each opinion really does become a living thing and is inseparable from an embodied human voice" (Bakhtin, 17). For example, the Yershalaim story is told by three different "authors"—Woland who is witness to the events, Ivan who dreams the novel, and the Master who creates the story as a work of fiction. These voices in the novel break through the usual constraints of time and space, exposing additional layers of meaning. Each voice interacts with the paradoxical idea of evil in the novel from an independent and highly individualized perspective. Through this interaction new worlds come into being, and the unity is found in the meaning these new worlds constitute.

When we write fiction we are engaged in an active imagining of other worlds and other roles. The Master's creation of the Yershalaim story is a wonderful example of this. The Master's novel does not simply retrace the events of Jesus and Pilate as they are recorded in the Gospels. Rather, he radically re-imagines the Jesus and Pilate story in a

new and meaningful way. Yeshua is not the Jesus of the New Testament; he does not ride into Yershalaim on an ass and he was not born in Bethlehem. In fact, Yeshua claims not to know where he was born! Such a work of fiction can often challenge the fixed historical perspective of a community through the active re-imagining of events and their significance. The novel is in essence a search for new meaning in an old story—it is the culmination of an examination of perspective and the creation of new meaning through the imagining of new worlds. In the Master's case, this re-imagining is far more radical: he is rewriting the Gospels, the word of God.

Likewise, for a reader, a radical imagination—that which a closed society abhors more than anything else—creates new worlds to explore. When we read a work of fiction we enter into this new world created by text; and our entrance requires an active imagining of ourselves as if we existed in that world. It must become for us a temporary home, a place we can go on our search new meaning and from which we can reflect on our own world. Margarita's love for the Master is sustained through rereading the remaining, charred pages of his novel. For her, the novel is both a torment and the source of hope; it fuels her eternal hope for the Master's return, but re-opens the wound of his absence. Along with a portrait and a bank book, the novel becomes an artifact of memory. Still, Margarita begs to be released from the memory of the Master: "Release me, then, I beg you, give me freedom to live, finally, to breathe the air" (223). Through reading the charred manuscript, her memory of the Master is preserved eternally. It becomes the substance of her hope that the Master will be returned to her, and also her torment.

But for those in power, a radical imagination like the Master's can be a dangerous thing. In the closed world of Moscow, the Master's novel becomes a subversive work of art because it attempts to re-imagine the fixed world view of Stalin's regime. The Master's editor typifies the reaction of those who hold power to potentially subversive material when he asks to know who gave the Master the idea to re-write the Jesus and Pilate story:

He crumpled the manuscript needlessly and grunted. The questions he asked seemed crazy to me. Saying nothing about the essence of the novel, he asked me who I was, where I came from, and how long I had been writing, and why no one had heard of me before, and even asked what in my opinion was a totally idiotic question: who had given me the idea of writing a novel on such a strange theme.(143)

Here, challenged by the Master's retelling of the Gospels, the editor asks the questions of the established literary regime. Threatened by the Master's radical creation, the regime attacks his novel through a series of newspaper articles. The Master dismisses the first of them with laughter, but the articles do not cease:

But the more of them that appeared, the more my attitude towards them changed. The second stage was one of astonishment. Some rare falsity and insecurity could be sensed literally in every line of these articles, despite their threatening and confident tone. I had the feeling, and I couldn't get rid of it, that the authors of these articles were not saying what they wanted to say, and that their rage sprang precisely from that. And then, imagine, a third stage came—of fear. No, not of fear of these articles, you understand, but fear of other things totally unrelated to them or to the novel. Thus, for instance, I began to be afraid of the dark. In short, the stage of mental illness came. (145)

Once freed from the fixed perspective imposed by the regime—achieved through the creative act of writing fiction—the Master is terrorized by the faceless power and driven to near-madness. The Master describes this movement towards madness as a kind of spiritual death: "And I went out into life holding [the novel] in my hands, and then my life ended" (143). But, as we will see, the Master mistakes his death for only the end of one part of his life. The Master will find new life in once again taking up the pen to write.

Many characters, however, become trapped within a particular perspective—for them a new life is unattainable. These characters lack the active imagining of other worlds; they become fixed, as it were, in a particular role. There are certainly several characters who exhibit this unfortunate quality, yet I have two predominate characters in mind who exemplify the trap of fixed perspective: Berlioz, the literary magazine editor, and Pontius Pilate. Pairing these two is not entirely fair; thus a further distinction is necessary: the most unfortunate characters in the novel are those who never demonstrate an awareness of being trapped in their world view. Pilate becomes aware of his trap yet cannot escape it. Berlioz is offered that opportunity, but rejects it. Early in the novel, Berlioz lectures Ivan Homeless on what is the only 'correct' interpretation of the Gospels as defined by the state-imposed Atheism. Berlioz insists that "this same Jesus, as a person, simply never existed in the world" (9), showing what it means to be completely at home in a fixed perspective: to completely internalize a system of thought. Berlioz betrays that he is a character who lacks self-reflection and who has defined himself in relationship to a particular perspective on the world. Also evident in Berlioz is a hollowness of self and an inability to perceive the world from a different perspective. Without self-reflection, Berlioz allows himself to be defined by something external to the self—that is, he allows himself to be defined by power. Consequently, Berlioz cannot read the signs that suggest a change of perspective is needed, which becomes his trap, and ultimately, his death.

Throughout the novel, the idea of how we read signs is played with in various ways. Reading signs often ties directly to distinct moments of awareness—to needles in the heart—which, if read correctly, can achieve a transcendence of perspective. How a character responds to the pricking of his heart reveals how well or how poorly he reads these moments; most often, however, these moments are misread. Such is the case with Berlioz at Patriarch's Ponds. His heart pricked with a "blunt needle," Berlioz experiences the sudden onset of a "fear, groundless, yet so strong that he wanted to flee the Ponds at once without looking back" (8). At the same moment, Berlioz perceives "a transparent citizen of the strangest appearance... A peaked jockey's cap on his little head, a short checkered jacket also made of air" (8). This appearance of the devil leaves Berlioz even more shaken, though he refuses to grant validity to the aberration. In response to the sudden fear that overcomes him and the aberration of the devil that appears before him, Berlioz attempts to find a reasonable explanation for these "extraordinary phenomena" (8). "The life of Berlioz had taken such a course that he was unaccustomed to extraordinary phenomena," we are told, "Turning paler still, he goggled his eyes and thought in consternation: 'This can't be!...'" (8). So frightened by this experience, for it has shaken the core of his being, the literary magazine editor can only shut his eyes (8). Berlioz thus misses an opportunity to achieve a transcendent awareness that would unhinge him from his fixed perspective. Uncomfortable in the face of the extraordinary, the new and the radical, Berlioz closes his eyes and does not see.

There are characters in *The Master and Margarita* who, like Berlioz, become trapped within their own limited world view. There are still others who are blinded by power, who become trapped within a system's fixed perspective. Pontius Pilate is of this second order of characters. We understand Pilate's torment as his confinement within a particular system: he is the hated Procurator of Judea, the representative of Caesar in Yershalaim. In the first Yershalaim chapter, sunlight beats down on Pontius Pilate throughout. The sunlight penetrates the Hippodrome (the palace of Herod, Pilate's confinement of sorts), giving Pilate no sanctuary. The sunlight functions like the omnipresent gaze of power from which Pilate cannot hide. This gaze comes from across the Mediterranean, from Rome, and pierces the enclosed colonnade of the Hippodrome. Pilate is trapped within his role as procurator and representative of Rome—a role he can neither re-envision nor escape. During the trial of Yeshua, Pilate seeks to withdraw from the colonnade to some back room out of the reach of the sunlight:

His teeth still bared, the procurator glanced at the arrested man, then at the sun, steadily rising over the equestrian statues of the hippodrome, which lay far below to the

right, and suddenly, in some sickening anguish, thought that the simplest thing would be to drive this strange robber off the balcony by uttering just two words: 'hang him.' To drive the convoy away as well, to leave the colonnade, go into the palace, order the room darkened, collapse on the bed. . . (24)

Through the image of sunlight the oppressiveness of power becomes apparent—as does Pilate's inability to go outside the system. The sunlight functions in yet another way as the torment of awareness. With a look of dread, Pilate grabs his aching head, aware that his role is an evil and destructive one. Pilate seeks to withdraw further inside the hippodrome, the symbol of Roman authority in Yerushalaim, to crawl back into his hole with the hope of finding peace from his torment. Yeshua, however, suggests another approach, one which is akin to stepping outside the system: "I advise you, Hegemon, to leave the palace for a while and go for a stroll somewhere in the vicinity—say, in the gardens on the Mount of Olives" (25). To join Yeshua in the garden is, as we will see, a step that Pilate cannot make.

Although he becomes aware of his role as an instrument of death and violence, Pilate lacks the courage to go outside the system, to transcend his role as Procurator. Something—we know not what exactly—pursues the procurator from the start. Rose oil forebodes a bad day for Pilate: "More than anything in the world the procurator hated the smell of rose oil, and now everything foreboded a bad day, because this smell had been pursuing the procurator since dawn" (19). The rose imagery operates in conjunction with the garden motif present in the Yerushalaim chapters (and the Moscow ones, as well). In the Yerushalaim chapters, an opposition is drawn between the interior space of the hippodrome and the exterior space of the garden that encompasses the colonnade. The offensive scent comes from outside the hippodrome, and "it seemed to the procurator that a rosy smell exuded from the cypresses and palms in the garden" (19). Like the sunlight, the smell of rose oil penetrates the enclosed, interior space of the hippodrome, highlighting Pilate's feeling of entrapment and torment. Pilate is isolated within the hippodrome and within the concentric circles of the cordons which guard the palace. Figuratively, this isolation is suggestive of the fixed role Pilate finds himself fulfilling. The foreboding rose oil hints at the trap of history Pilate finds himself in; as procurator and representative of Caesar in Yerushalaim, Pilate must condemn Yeshua to death and in doing so become the evil oppressor of Jesus.

Power turns destructive when those in authority lose faith in people, as Yeshua accuses Pilate of doing. "The trouble is...that you are too closed off and have definitively lost faith in people" (25), he observes. When Pilate loses faith in people, he chooses to conquer rather than persuade; he becomes the bearer of death. In the novel, horse imagery represents the terror wrought by those in power who seek to conquer. The Yerushalaim story opens with this description of Pontius Pilate: "In a white cloak with blood-red lining, with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, there came out to the covered colonnade. . .the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate" (19). The horse imagery in the Yerushalaim story, particularly as the image relates to Pilate (as is the case here), suggests a symbolic link between the choice to conquer and the death and destruction carried forth by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In Revelations, the first horseman appears riding a white horse: "behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). And the second horseman appears riding a red horse: "And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another, and there was given unto him a great sword" (Rev. 6:4). Conquering, this shows us, always carries with it death. As Procurator of Judea, Pilate possesses "the power to take peace from the earth," and he holds the great sword. Yet, without courage and a faith in people, Pilate remains trapped by his role, trapped by the hippodrome and trapped by the sunlight, the gaze of power. He is tormented by the premonition that he will unjustly condemn Yeshua to death despite the offer to walk in the garden—a decision

for which Pilate will become a fixed character in history. He is tormented by his own lack of courage to choose justice over violence. Pontius becomes the embodiment of another paradox in *The Master and Margarita*: the paradox of justice and injustice.

Awareness for Pilate is the recognition of the injustice of Yeshua's execution. As I said earlier, it is painful to become aware of our own injustices, yet there is no other way of knowing justice without first knowing injustice. Such is the paradoxical nature of justice and injustice in the novel. Acts of injustice—most often the destructive use of power and authority—though they ultimately lead to the disintegration of society, spawn a just, human response. Becoming aware of injustice teaches us to know what is just—but then we must have the courage to act justly. Pilate lacks this courage. Other characters, however, possess the courage to act for justice. In the face of injustice, and while the bonds of community around them are frayed and fractured, characters such as Margarita, the Master and Ivan Homeless, preserve an integrity of the self. Able to sustain a faith in people, these three characters resist the temptation to become self-centered—that is, they refuse to turn away from people, away from the human connections of community. Without maintaining a faith in others, power would quickly act to dehumanize the self. Such is the case with Pilate, who is trapped by his position in the power structure, and thus unable to establish a human connection with Yeshua. We can say that authority in *The Master and Margarita* is indeed a largely dehumanizing, destructive force—it dehumanizes social interaction and destroys the bonds of community. Yet, even under such circumstances, courageous individuals can retain integrity and a commitment to justice through self-reflection and a deep, abiding faith in people. Thus, and perhaps most paradoxically of all, authority's attempt to stifle meaning actually supports the creation of meaning. In a climate of injustice, the creation of meaning becomes a task of the self for the self.

To evil and injustice, authority cannot provide a human response; the task of providing a human response rests with individual witnesses of the terror authority imposes on the social world. Under the stifling weight of terror, social life becomes stale and the community becomes lifeless. Paradoxically, however, the conditions are ripe for individuals to create private meaning. From the opening pages of the novel, we sense the disintegration of the Moscow community. The Patriarch Ponds, a large public square, is devoid of social activity. Social activity is often a strong indicator of a community's health, the integrity of the social body. Public squares in particular showcase the social activities of a healthy, integrated community. Conspicuously absent here, however, are any people at all:

Ah, yes, note must be made of the first oddity of this dreadful May evening. There was not a single person to be seen, not only by the stand, but also along the whole walk parallel to Malaya Bronnaya Street. At that hour when it seemed no longer possible to breathe, when the sun, having scorched Moscow, was collapsing in a dry haze somewhere beyond Sadovoye Ring, no one came under the lindens, no one sat on a bench, the walk was empty. (7)

The oppressive atmosphere of terror is almost palpable. The sun, an image of the life-stifling gaze of power, is suggestive indeed of the absent yet omnipresent Soviet regime, with its official language, its ideology and its 'social programs.' The nearly inhospitable Patriarch Ponds illustrates the disintegration of community that results when public space becomes closed off from substantive social interaction—communication through language, movement and social activity, encounters with new ideas, perspectives, voices.

When the world of Moscow is turned upside down by the "black magician" Woland, we are afforded a glimpse of the ugly particulars of the disintegrated Moscow society. Here, a counterfeit image of substantive social interaction replaces the real thing. By external appearance there are still the signs of community in Moscow. Probe deeper, however,

and one sees that social interaction in Moscow is predicated on wealth and access to power. The séance Woland holds at the Variety Theatre exposes the community's preoccupation with money and the outward signs of wealth. Before the séance, Woland asks his retinue: "have the city folk changed inwardly" (123)? We find this question answered by the time the chapter ends. In one trick of black magic, Fagott-Koroviev (Woland's sidekick) lets rain on the audience ten-rouble bills. "In a few seconds, the rain of money, ever thickening, reached the seats, and the spectators began snatching at it... the word 'money, money!' hummed everywhere, there were gasps of 'ah, ah!' and merry laughter" (124-125). In another trick, Woland and Fagott-Koroviev play on the audience's vanity, setting up a Parisian boutique, enticing women to come on stage with rugs, perfume and shoes. The immoderate desire for transitory things like money or other images of wealth is a weakness of all people.[7] A moderate amount of money is of course necessary to sustain life—to provide for food and shelter. Indeed, a certain amount of money is even necessary to secure a private space (a home, an apartment, a room in which to engage in the creative activity). When the desire for money becomes the overriding concern of the individual in society, he becomes blind to his better nature. "They're people like any other people," Woland admits, "they love money, but that has always been so" (126). Both the money and the clothing prove to be transitory, counterfeit—only images which served to expose the inward shallowness of Moscow's citizens.

The presentation of housing is the most troubling and most obvious sign of the breakdown of society in *The Master and Margarita*. "Ordinary people... In general, reminiscent of the former ones," Woland concludes about the theatre audience, "only the housing problem has corrupted them" (126). Housing becomes a symbol of status and power; it is fought over; it is imbedded with corruption, bribery and coercion. Private space becomes privileged space; it is violated by the corrupting influence of power. For those who cannot cheat their way into a private apartment, private space is lost altogether. Apartment no. 47, into which Ivan Homeless storms, thinking he had chased Woland and his gage inside, epitomizes the degradation done to private space under a regime of terror. The space is neglected, dirty, dark.

In the huge, extremely neglected front hall, weakly lit by a tiny carbon arc lamp under the high ceiling, black with grime, a bicycle without tyres hung on the wall, a huge iron-bound trunk stood, and on a shelf over the coat rack a winter hat lay, its long ear-flaps hanging down. (51)

We are also told that Ivan knows his way around the apartment, suggesting that perhaps Apartment no. 47 is the prototypical government housing unit. Regardless, any sense of home or family is absent in this brief glimpse of apartment life. The woman Ivan encounters in the bathroom hints at an affair. The kitchen is empty; there is no one present, only "a dozen extinguished primuses [stoves/ovens]" — enough for twelve families—cobwebs and an old icon (52). The strange occurrence of twelve primuses in the kitchen (for it is certainly out of the ordinary) is an element of Bulgakov's satire. The exaggerated picture of apartment life serves to intensify the loss of private space and the loss of social ideas of home in Moscow.

Housing in *The Master and Margarita* functions primarily in two ways. Apartments, homes, offices — i.e. private spaces in general — illustrate both the politics of housing and the paradoxical disintegration of society by an oppressive regime and its program of terror. The politics of housing play out predominately in Apartment no. 50—the residence of the literary editor Berlioz, the theatre director Styopa and eventually, Woland and his retinue. Housing is fought over with "pleas, threats, libels, denunciations, promises..." (95). The politics of housing — who gets what and why — is exposed when Berlioz unexpectedly dies and his apartment becomes vacant. "The news of Berlioz's death spread through the whole house with a sort of supernatural speed," we are told, "and as of seven o'clock Thursday morning, Bosoy [chairman of the tenant's association] began

to receive telephone calls and then personal visits with declarations containing claims to the deceased's living space" (95). The competition over housing, and private space in general as we will see, shows the work of terror in the self-interested practices of those who try to bribe, cheat or lie their way into an apartment. We see the worst in human nature in characters like Berlioz, Styopa and the many people making claims to the vacant apartment. The competition for housing exposes the evil practices of individuals who respond to the oppressive reach of power by becoming self-interested.

Terror also shows its destructive effects through the complacency of society towards injustice. We learn early on that Apartment no. 50 is plagued by strange occurrences, by disappearing residents: "people began to disappear from this apartment without a trace" (76), we are told. The hint is subtle but clear that these disappearances are not the work of some sorcerer with a penchant for vaporizing well-off socialites, but are rather the everyday 'arrests' of citizens by the Russian secret police (see: chapter 7, note 1). Thus even private space is not a shelter from the oppressive reach of power. The everyday nature of the arrests has produced a general acquiescence among the members of the community—the disappearances do not disturb, the disappeared are quickly forgotten. Rumors spread among the other tenants about the disappearances, but only a week after the last person vanishes from Apartment no. 50, Berlioz and Styopa take up residence. Under the omnipresent eye of power, the social bonds are broken and individuals turn away from each other, becoming focused only on the self. And it is when an individual becomes too self-focused that he stops witnessing the injustices suffered by his neighbors, his friends, and his fellow human beings.

There are, it seems, two predominate responses to the destructive intrusion of power into private space and the disintegration of society in *The Master and Margarita*. I have in mind a turn towards self-interestedness on the one hand, and the striving to create private meaning on the other. The response to the vacancy in Apartment no. 50 shows that entangled with complacency towards visible injustice is an attitude of self-interest. Self-interest and the lust for power, like the sun, are blinding to those who would otherwise see, preventing them from seeing the injustice of their actions. In a society organized by power—those who have power and those who don't—self-interest becomes the singular motivation of those who desire power. The struggle for housing corresponds to the struggle for power through which are exposed the ugly particulars of how power maintains itself: through bribery, coercion, lying, etc. We see this certainly in the politics of Apartment no. 50, but it is also visible in the politics of the Massolit literary society.

At the House of Griboedov, the Massolit headquarters, the politics of power is maintained by wealth and envy. Here literary talent is something that can be purchased at the right price. Members of Massolit can sign-up for "full scale creative vacations" (56); they can flash their membership card and enjoy the spoils of the literati. The narrator speaks of the envy any ordinary visitor would feel walking around the Massolit headquarters:

Any visitor finding himself in Griboedov's, unless of course he was a total dim-wit, would realize at once what a good life those lucky fellows, the Massolit members, were having, and black envy would immediately start gnawing at him. And he would immediately address bitter reproaches to heaven for not having endowed him at birth with literary talent, lacking which there was naturally no dreaming of owning a Massolit membership card, brown, smelling of costly leather, with a wide gold border—a card known to all Moscow. (56)

When literary talent can be bought, and then displayed with a small leather card, wealth becomes the only avenue by which one can enter this elite club. Massolit membership defines a lifestyle that only a select few can participate in and enjoy. To anyone outside Massolit, literary talent becomes something to be envied and wished for, though only for instrumental or material reasons (power, wealth, influence, etc.). And even within

Massolit, there is a jockeying for power and prestige. The executive board debates at one point the assignment of dachas, summer homes outside the city:

'We must be envious, comrades. There's twenty-two dachas in all, and only seven more being built, and there's three thousand of us in Massolit.'

'Three thousand one hundred and eleven,' someone put in from the corner.

'So you see,' the Bos'n [a high ranking member] went on, 'what can be done? Naturally, it's the most talented of us that [get] the dachas. . .' (59)

The dachas—and the escape from the city that they represent—stand out as the greatest reward for literary talent in the world of Massolit. It is, however, a material reward sought by those who are ignorant of the spiritual rewards of the literary life. The literary man in Moscow has become a voice for the regime; he occupies a privilege place in the hierarchy of power. Of the Massolit members, only Ivan Homeless seems interested in a spiritually meaningful literary life. For this reason, Ivan, who is more interested in re-imagining new worlds and creating meaningful works of literature, stands on the periphery of the Massolit circle.

The Master, too, stands apart from Massolit. He and Ivan are without a fixed place in the literary world, and in a sense, without an intellectual or creative home within the existing power structure. Yet the Master unlike Ivan does have a home in the literal sense, and it is his shelter from the oppressive reach of power. His apartment—a mere two rooms—is distinguished by the privacy it grants its inhabitant. Recounting his life in the apartment, the Master begins:

Ah, that was the golden age! . . . A completely private apartment, plus a front hall with a sink in it . . . little windows just level with the paved walk leading from the gate.

Opposite, only four steps away, near the fence, lilacs, a linden and a maple. Ah, ah, ah!

In winter it was very seldom that I saw someone's black feet through my window and heard the snow crunching under them. And in my stove a fire was eternally blazing!

(139)

Secluded in his basement apartment, the Master is able to strive for meaning through the creation of his novel. This description of the apartment shows it full of life and warmth, the source of energy to sustain the spirit. When Margarita joins the Master in the apartment, it becomes rich with meaning and with the sustaining love of the two have for each other. The creation of the novel becomes the love affair of the Master and Margarita, the meaningful creation of two loves, two lovers: "When the storms ended and sultry summer came, there appeared in the vase the long-awaited roses they both loved. The man who called himself a master work feverishly on his novel, and this novel also absorbed the unknown woman" (142). While the creative effort is buoyed by the love the Master and Margarita share, the creative act, the imagining of new worlds and roles, requires self-reflection and a critical look at the world. Captured in the Master's apartment is the paradox of home in the novel: while it can be a safe place, sustained by love, the home must be abandoned, in the intellectual sense, in the sense that self-reflection cannot take root within a fixed perspective, and the artist must become homeless.

The idea developing here is that home plays another important role in The Master and Margarita in the sense of what it means to be at home within a particular system of thought. As we saw with Berlioz, to be at home within a system can mean to have internalized a fixed perspective on the world, on truth and on history. More often than not, a fixed perspective entraps the self, closing the self off from moments of awareness or the introduction of new ideas or ways of thinking. Yet we must not forget that this idea of being at home within a system is not without its paradoxical element. With the stifling intrusion of power, home is also a safe place in the novel, a place rich with meaning and love and from which we can engage in self-reflection and the creative exercise. Being at

home within a particular perspective allows us to live with certainty about our world. It only becomes problematic when we cease to be self-reflective about our perspective, about our point of view on the world. Yet those in power act to restrict, or entirely eliminate private space, preventing home from being a place in which meaning can be constituted. Without private space, self-reflection becomes impossible, as does the creation of meaning. If, like the Master, we are able to secure a refuge from the gaze of power, home can become for us the site of our search for new meaning in a closed world. Without self-reflection, however, home quickly turns into a closed space that prevents the inclusion of the new. The only thinkers (creators, artists) in the novel are those who remain introspective, who critically examine their intellectual home.

Thus home is balanced by homelessness in *The Master and Margarita*. To be 'homeless' in the novel means to have no fixed perspective, to be at home in no external system of thought. Homelessness is freedom from the constraints imposed by a singular, fixed point of view. In this sense, 'homeless' is an apt pseudonym for the poet Ivan. Ivan stands outside the atheist, state-sponsored system of thought ascribed to by every other Moscow literary figure. Ivan's poetic retelling of the Gospels from the first chapter exemplifies Ivan's intellectual homelessness. Inasmuch as Ivan imagines another perspective on the Jesus story, he eschews ascription to Berlioz's atheist view and shows his intellectual freedom.

There are, however, consequences to a life of intellectual homelessness. Early on, Ivan finds himself in a psychiatric clinic. He is near madness. Confronted with Berlioz's sudden death (his head chopped off by a tram car), Ivan is unable to understand the event from any particular perspective. Berlioz's death appears inexplicable, unexplainable without a system of thought to call home. Ivan demonstrates in particular an inability to use language within a particular context to explain what he has witnessed. At the clinic, Ivan attempts an explanation:

'Listen then: yesterday evening I met a mysterious visitor at the Patriarch's Ponds, maybe a foreigner, maybe not, who knew beforehand about Berlioz's death and has seen Pontius Pilate in person'
' Well, so he said beforehand that Annushka had spilled the sunflower oil ... And he slipped right on that place. How do you like that?' Ivan inquired significantly, hoping to produce a great effect with his words. (90)

Ivan's words comprise an irrational explanation of Berlioz's death when viewed from the rational, logical perspective of the doctor. Although correct in his recounting of events, Ivan cannot communicate within the fixed language of Moscow. His homelessness means he must first learn a new language in order to make himself and his story known to the authorities. Ivan first must learn naming and then how to reason within a system of thought. In the Wittgenstein sense, Ivan must learn a language-game. At first, it is a simple game of naming:

A frosted glass cylinder with the word 'Drink' on it lit up at the foot of Ivan's bed. After pausing for a while, the cylinder began to rotate until the word 'Nurse' popped out. . . . But here Ivan happened to be lucky. Ivan pressed the button a second time at the word 'Attendant.' The cylinder rang quietly in response, stopped, the light went out, and a plump, sympathetic woman in a clean white coat came into the room... (86)

After Ivan grasps the function of naming things, the doctor asks Ivan to prove that he can "reason logically" (91). The little game exposes Ivan's inability to use language to make himself known within the context of the imposed system of thought. In his homelessness, Ivan has no identity, no way to make himself known to others.

Ivan is not the only character in the novel that we can classify as homeless. Other such characters include the Master (as we have seen), Woland and Yeshua. Each is 'homeless' in his own sense; yet with each character the homelessness brings perspective, and with perspective, uncertainty and disorder. For instance, when Woland first arrives in Moscow he is called a stranger and judged to be 'homeless' in the sense that his physical appearance corresponds with no identifiable nationality. Berlioz and Ivan label Woland a foreigner yet cannot place his nationality through speech or dress: "'A German...' thought Berlioz. 'An Englishman...' thought [Ivan]" (10). Perplexed, the two friends also comment on his eccentric clothing and proficiency with Russian. Woland belongs to no known identity, though his appearance clearly distinguishes him from the residents of Moscow. The narrator recalls the various, and very divergent, descriptions of Woland from reports about his visit. "A comparison of [the reports] cannot but cause amazement," we are told, "...It must be acknowledged that none of these reports is of any value" (10). Woland is not without an identity, however; he presents himself to Berlioz and Ivan as a professor of black magic, in Moscow on research. Woland, like a chameleon, changes colors to suit his surroundings. In Moscow, Woland appropriates a name, a title and eventually Berlioz's vacated apartment.

Woland must eternally shift his identity, eternally moving from home to home without the promise of a final resting place—without the promise of salvation. He must carry the paradox of good and evil, which is a state of eternal homelessness. Such is his existence as "part of that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good" (3) that Woland is never at peace but the agent of disorder. "And at night, by moonlight, I have no peace..." (287) he says. We hear Woland accept his burden at the end of the novel when he implores Matthew Levi (Yeshua's disciple) to "Kindly consider the question: what would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it" (360)? Woland understands his place as that force eternally willing evil to eternally work good, and that without someone to carry the paradox of good and evil, life would cease to exist on earth. Woland has a fixed, true form, which is revealed in his flight over Moscow at the end of the novel, but peace and rest, a home, he will never find—Woland can never achieve salvation.

Yeshua, too, will never rest, never stop suffering. Yeshua exhibits similar aspects of homelessness in his character, particularly if we understand homelessness as a metaphor for freedom of thought and a self-reflective mind. At his appearance before Pontius Pilate in Chapter Two, Yeshua admits that he lives nowhere and does not his known lineage. Yeshua answers Pilate's question "Who are you by blood?" by saying "I don't know exactly" (22). And, as we noted earlier, to Pilate's question "Where is your permanent residence?" Yeshua admits, "I have no permanent home... I travel from town to town" (22). We can say that Yeshua is homeless when we consider homeless in the literal sense—that is, to mean without a physical residence.

He is homeless as well in the sense that Ivan and the Master are homeless—that is, he is intellectually homeless. Yeshua, like the historical Jesus, speaks in parables—the familiar yet seditious parables of love, compassion, courage and forgiveness. And again like Jesus, Yeshua is killed for speaking a subversive language, a language that challenges the idea of justice in Roman-controlled Yershalaim. Yeshua calls Pilate "good man" (20), for which he receives a beating; he calls his accusers, those who seek his death, "good people" (22). It is, however, only when Yeshua offers his prophetic view of authority—simultaneously the main idea of the novel—that he draws Pilate's most intense fury:

'Among other things,' the prisoner recounted, 'I said that all authority is violence over people, and that a time will come when there will be no authority of the Caesars, nor any other authority. Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice, where generally there will be no need for any authority.' . . .

. . . 'And the kingdom of truth will come?'

'It will, Hegemon,' Yeshua answered with conviction.

'It will never come!' Pilate suddenly cried out in such a terrible voice that Yeshua drew back. (30-31)

Yeshua's idea undermines the whole of Roman authority and attacks the very foundation on which it rests: violence and conquering. And for saying it, Yeshua is put to death. Though, like the Master's, the spirit of Yeshua's word never dies. An intellectually homeless life rewards an open society willing to accept new and radical ideas. But in a closed society, for one courageous enough to speak a subversive word, homelessness can bring uncertainty, uneasiness and death.

Yeshua's word lives on and is given new meaning through the Master's retelling of the Pontius Pilate story. Such is the power of fiction to provide new layers of meaning through the retelling of a historical event. Fiction attempts to make history relevant in the present, to reveal the significance of an historical event through a re-imagining of it. As we have noted, the task of the artist (poet or fiction writer) is to continually invent new worlds and re-conceive of old ones. In the retelling of history, the writer strives to incorporate new ideas and points of view in the creation of a work of fiction. Matthew Levi, the tax collector who throws his money down in the road to become Yeshua's disciple, makes the first record of Yeshua's gospel. Even Levi's first-hand account seems largely fictionalized:

'there's one with a goatskin parchment who follows me, follows me and keeps writing all the time. But once I peeked into this parchment and was horrified. I said decidedly nothing of what's written there. I implored him "Burn your parchment, I beg you!" But he tore it out of my hands and ran away. (23)

Still, Yeshua's word must be re-envisioned eternally to make Yeshua's message of love and mercy current and relevant. Thus the task of the writer is to strive to create a meaningful work, one which makes history relevant in the present. Such a task requires a constant reexamination of perspective, which is a sort of intellectual homelessness.

Ivan, as we have said, is emblematic of the homelessness of the contemplative, creative life, and the necessity of the artist to be without a fixed, immovable world view. Homelessness, however, is not the ideal. The three characters who most exhibit the qualities of homelessness—Ivan, Woland and Yeshua—each have strong desire for a home, a place to rest after the wanderings of a homeless existence spent striving for meaning and truth. The paradox here is that in homelessness there is a desire for home, and in the search for truth there is a desire for certainty.

Salvation in *The Master and Margarita* is neither home nor homelessness (as neither is the ideal, but only serve as an expression the paradoxical nature of the contemplative life). Rather, salvation in the novel is the freedom to cultivate the spirit—to create spiritual meaning for the self—without the imposed terror of power or the fear of violence. Salvation is portrayed through two images, that of the Master's cottage in heaven and that of the endless ribbon of moonlight on which Pilate and Yeshua walk, engaged in an eternal conversation. These two images suggest a release of the paradoxes that riddle and torment human life: order and disorder, good and evil, justice and injustice, destructive violence and love, meaning and meaninglessness. To attain salvation is to achieve an awareness of the higher unity of these paradoxical relationships—that is, for instance, to see the necessity of evil in the world. Salvation is not, however, eternal redemption in the Christian sense. Rather it is peace, an end to the torments of life. For his part, Pilate is tormented by his historical connection with Yeshua. To achieve peace, Pilate first must be released by the Master, whose re-imagining of Pilate's role in Yeshua's death unhinges the hated procurator from his fixed historical

association with Yeshu. Freed by the Master, Pilate must then join Yeshua on an endless walk along a ribbon of moonlight. In a sense, he must take the step he was unable to take before, to join Yeshua for a conversation in the Garden on the Mount of Olives. This linking of Pilate and Yeshua implies the timelessness of salvation: Yeshua must eternally set Pilate's mind at ease as they walk. Likewise, the Master and Margarita's cottage is the reward of peace, not redemption. They are allowed to live unburdened by the sufferings of earthly life, but each must continue to love and must continue to create.

Margarita must descend into Hell in order to learn that she possesses the capacity of mercy and forgiveness. It is there that Margarita finds Frieda, and it is there that Margarita must perform her act of forgiveness. Margarita's decent is marked by several changes, internally and externally, in her character. Margarita rejects her material possessions, symbolized in her nakedness and pledge to never return to the apartment. On her broom ride, Margarita releases unbridled anger and violence. She also moves from the city to the wilderness, paralleling Faust's movement in the Walpurgisnight sections of Goethe's play. At Woland's Ball, Frieda appears and pricks Margarita's conscience. Of Frieda, we know that she is "young, about twenty, of remarkably beautiful figure, but with somehow restless and importunate eyes" (267). The very handkerchief with which she killed her child torments Frieda eternally. Frieda's suffering stirs Margarita's mind and pricks her heart. Margarita loves in the abstract—she loves the idea of the Master and his novel. Frieda's suffering brings Margarita into an awareness of the spirit of suffering. Margarita's forgiveness allows Frieda to transcend the memory of killing her child, allows Frieda to find an acceptable place for that memory that she might also find peace.

Margarita needs to forgive the past deeds of someone in order to save the Master. Margarita's eternal love saves the Master and encourage him to return to life. Margarita's capacity for hope, derived from her eternal love for the Master (for the idea of the Master and his novel), cures the Master, in a manner of speaking. When the Master destroys his own manuscripts, Margarita instantly recognizes the Master's madness. "God, how sick you are," she observes, "Why is it, why? But, I'll save you, I'll save you... I'll cure you, I'll cure you" (147). And, indeed, Margarita saves the Master by asking that he be return to her: "I want my beloved master to be returned to me right now, this second" (284). Despite all this, the Master still feels his past is dead, most symbolically so when he mentions the destroyed manuscripts. However, Woland responds with the live-affirming line, "manuscripts don't burn" (287). Our creations, he says, never die, though perhaps we merely set them aside as artifacts from one period of our life. The Master's salvation lies in the realization that his life is not over, that he must continue to create.

Salvation for the Master and Margarita is a spiritual home where the Master can once again begin writing, interacting eternally with "those you love, those who interest you and who will never trouble you" (384). The cottage is a place of rest—a peaceful place ordered by love rather than by violence. Together with Margarita in the cottage, the Master is free to write eternally without fear or terror. For the thinker, artist or poet, salvation is also the attainment of perspective. Margarita's and the Master's ascension to heaven includes a final flight over Moscow:

They flew over the boulevards, they saw little figures of people scatter, running for shelter from the rain. The first drops were falling. They flew over smoke—all that remained of Griboedov House. They flew over the city which was already being flooded by darkness. (372)

The perspective on the city gained through flight, through the ascension to heaven, is symbolic of salvation's promise of eternal rest from a life of striving to unHINGE oneself from a limited perspective and to understand the complex unity of good and evil.

The image of Yeshua eternally walking in conversation with Pontius Pilate on a path of moonlight is also the achievement of a unity between two opposing forces in the novel: the force of love and force of violent power. Pilate is tormented by his own cowardice to choose the path of love: "...he dreams one and the same thing: there is a path of moonlight, and he wants to walk down it and talk with the prisoner [Yeshua], because, as he insists, he never finished what he was saying that time, long ago, on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. But, alas, for some reason he never manages to get on this path, and no one comes to him... he hate most of all his immortality and his unheard-of fame" (382). Yet Pilate is released from his torment (knowing that he was Yeshua's oppressor) by the Master: "You're free! You're free! He's waiting for you!" he says (382). Yeshua and Pilate walk off eternally trying to come to an understanding, talking "heatedly about something, they argue, they want to reach some understanding" (395). The image is again a paradoxical one and raise this very paradoxical question: can we have a savior without an oppressor? Earlier we discussed the intimate relationship between destructive use of violence and the creation of meaning—that is, we said that even in a world governed by terror, human beings posses the capacity to create meaning. The paradoxical idea of the novel, therefore, is once again explored in the pairing of Yeshua and Pilate in this final scene.

'Gods, gods!' says that man in the cloak, turning his haughty face to his companion. 'Such a banal execution! But please,' here the face turns from haughty to imploring, 'tell me it never happened! I implore you, tell me, it never happened?' 'Well, of course it never happened,' his companion replies in a hoarse voice, 'you imagined it.' 'And you can swear it to me?' the man in the cloak asks ingratiatingly. 'I swear it!' replies his companion, and his eyes smile for some reason. 'I need nothing more!' (395)

Yeshua would not have died and become the force of good in the novel if Pilate had not sent him to the cross. Pilate's salvation is that final break from the trap of history, which allows him to finally take the step onto the path of love.

Ivan, however, remains in the world. There he must continue writing, must continue to strive for meaning and truth, and must continue to radically re-imagine his world. Before his ascension to heaven, the Master allows Ivan, still an occupant of the clinic, to write again. The Master once again sets Ivan on the path of homelessness—a search for meaning, the struggle for truth; he calls Ivan his "disciple" (374), instructing Ivan to write the sequel to the Yershalaim story. Indeed, the Master's novel, the story of Pilate and Yeshua, is retold eternally in Ivan's memory on that day "each year, with the festal spring moon" (392). The memory is a sort of torment for Ivan that sets him ill at ease. On the night of the festal spring moon, Ivan wanders around Moscow tormented by the knowledge that there are things he cannot understand, that there are "things he cannot manage" (393). At night he dreams the Yershalaim story until he is set free by Margarita's kiss:

She bends over Ivan and kisses him on the forehead, and Ivan reaches out to her and peers into her eyes, but she retreats, retreats, and together with her companion goes towards the moon...

Then the moon begins to rage, it pours streams of light down right on Ivan, it sprays light in all directions, a flood of moonlight engulfs the room, the light heaves, rises higher, drowns the bed. It is then that Ivan Nikolaevich sleeps with a blissful face. (396)

Margarita's kiss is symbolic of the eternal love of a woman, an idea from in Goethe's Faust that Bulgakov plays with here. In Faust, feminine beauty leads Faust to salvation. For Ivan, however, Margarita is not the image of eternal beauty. Rather, she represents

the sustaining power of an active love. This kiss, this memory provides Ivan a sustaining vision of salvation.

Despite his eternal wanderings and his presence in the world, Woland has a fixed, true form revealed during his flight over Moscow at the end of the novel. "And, finally, Woland also flew in his true image. Margarita could not have said what his horse's bridle was made of, but thought it might be chains of moonlight, and the horse itself was a mass of darkness, and the horse mane a storm cloud, and the rider's spurs the white flecks of stars" (380). Even transfigured into his "true image," Woland must continue to carry the paradox of good and evil. This final image of Woland hints back to our consideration of Woland as the force of chaos and disorder in the world. The darkness he carries is death, but not the destructive violent death produced by power. With death, Woland brings salvation, the release from a life spent in uncertainty and striving for eternal truth and meaning.

Notes

[1] Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, with an introduction by Richard Pevear, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 3. All further references will be made parenthetically in the text.

[2] There are parallels here with St. Augustine's understanding of evil in *The Confessions*. Evil is a turning away from the good, which for St. Augustine is God. In a sense, then, evil is our inability to see the good: when we are turned away from God we cannot see God; when we become absorbed with ourselves, we can only see ourselves. In *The Master and Margarita*, Woland's evil, his disordering of the world, produces an awareness of our turning away from God—that is, only if we are willing to see. This is close to what Augustine would say, that an awareness of evil teaches us about the good—an awareness of our turning away from God, teaches us to turn towards God. For more on St. Augustine's understanding of the problem of evil, see my Chapter II: *Religious, Secular and Legal Confession in Foucault, Dostoevsky and St. Augustine*

[3] Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 403 (Chapter 7, note 1). Also see the arrest of the Master in Chapter 13, pp. 148-49.

[4] M.H Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1988, p.167

[5] See: Edward J. Brown, *Major Soviet Writers: Essays in Criticism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 388-411

[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 5. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the text, e.g. (Bakhtin, p.). For more, see particularly the first chapter, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature."

[7] St. Augustine treats desire in a similar manner. For Augustine, desire is an impulse of the flesh which he must control (and he's not sure he can) before making the turn towards God. In a sense, desire is something that stands between Augustine and God, something that he must overcome before his conversion. St. Thomas Aquinas talks about desire in a slightly different way—in a much more Aristotelian way. Aquinas says that only God (infinite good) can satisfy our desire for happiness; no material or sensual good can satisfy our desire for happiness because of the finitude of such things as wealth,

fancy clothes, sexual pleasure, etc. In both cases, Augustine and Aquinas portray those who desire money or power as shallow and ignorant of the infinite goodness of God. See St. Augustine's Confessions, Books I & II, and St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Contra Gentiles, Book III, Chapters 37-40