



History as Hippodrome: The Apocalyptic Horse and Rider in The Master and Margarita

David M. Bethea

In this essay, Bethea discusses Bulgakov's use of the image of the horseman from the Book of Revelations in The Master and Margarita. Published in The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion, edited by Laura D. Weeks, pp. 122-42. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996.

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Webmaster

Jan Vanhellemont
Klein Begijnhof 6
B-3000 Leuven

+3216583866
+32475260793

Although *The Master and Margarita* has been called "an apocalyptic fiction, one whose referential focus is, within its defined context, "the end of all things,"¹ little has been said beyond this.² Only Edward Ericson has ventured further than casual allusion to claim, in the closing of his article, that "the ending of the novel is an elaborate parody of the last book in the Bible, the Apocalypse of St. John."³ We need have no doubt of Bulgakov's knowledge of the text of Revelation and of his willingness to use that text as an artistic point of departure: son of a professor of divinity at the Kiev Theological Academy, one schooled in both the sacred texts and the works of Russian religious philosophers (the writings of Father Pavel Florensky, in particular, as Chudakova and others have demonstrated,⁴ had a profound impact on the conception of *The Master and Margarita*), Bulgakov was later to take a passage from Revelation as epigraph to his early novel *The White Guard*.⁵ But even more intriguing, Bulgakov seems almost from the beginning of his writing career to have associated the horseman or knight (*vsadnik*)⁶ with the ideas of eternal punishment, the burden of conscience, and the futility of atonement. One of his first feuilletons, "The Red Crown" (1922), involves a conscience-stricken hero who waits in vain for the return of his dead brother, described as "the familiar horseman with the unseeing eyes."⁷ And by the time Bulgakov began work on *The Master and Margarita* in 1928 he had apparently discovered equine traits in his Satan, as several early variants of the title--"The Hoof of the Engineer," "The Consultant with a Hoof," "The Juggler with a Hoof," and "The Horseshoe of the Foreigner"--indicate, and a rich semantic field for further development.⁸ What all this suggests is that Bulgakov probably had in mind the text of Revelation and the image of a retributive horseman as he worked on the novel. But what remains to be shown is how text and image are telescoped in the novel's form and composition. To this end we might best proceed from the explicit to the implicit, from the Yershalaim chapters, where horses and horsemen are an obvious and not unexpected feature of the setting, to the Moscow chapters, where horses and horsemen are much less obvious and more unexpected, to the concluding chapters, where the Yershalaim and Moscow subplots coalesce and the idea of the apocalyptic horse and rider is given its fullest treatment.

Bulgakov's picture of Jerusalem, or Yershalaim as it is called by its Aramaic name in the novel, is one dominated from the outset by implacable sunlight, the sharp blade of legality, and Roman military might. Everything in the Yershalaim chapters (2, 16, 25, 26) appears to have a realistic motivation, with the implication that Bulgakov intended to strip away any mythic coloration from his utterly verisimilar account of the trial and sentencing of Yeshua (the historical Jesus). Here Pilate is the cynosure; the exchange with Yeshua is seen through his eyes, for it is he who is standing in judgment over this earthly court. Thus it should come as no surprise that Pilate, as an extension of the Roman state and its temporal power, is given the attributes of a *cavalryman*--after all, by the time of Christ, horses had been an important element of strategic warfare for centuries. But Bulgakov's equine and equestrian allusions are even in this context so marked as to suggest the presence of some other code or subtext. Pilate walks with a cavalryman's gait; he is repeatedly referred to as a horseman (*vsadnik*; his most awesome title is "vsadnik Zolotoe Kop'e"--"Rider of the Golden Spear");⁹ and he observes with pained interest a Syrian cavalry ala speeding to Bald Mountain (Golgotha) moments after he has read the death sentence. Thoughts of simply hanging Yeshua and being done with him are accompanied by distressed looks at the sun, "which (is) relentlessly rising over the equestrian statues of the hippodrome."¹⁰ When Pilate vehemently denies Yeshua's claim that the kingdom of truth will come, he does so with a thunderous voice like the one in which he once commanded his horsemen to "Slash them (the Germans)! Slash them!"¹¹ during a battle in the Valley of Maidens. In his feelings of wrathful impotence before Caiaphas (here Bulgakov follows the Gospel of John by having Pilate, who wishes to save Yeshua, yield unwillingly to the legal pressure of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin), Pilate imagines his revenge in terms of a flood of Arab horsemen bringing "bitter weeping and moans"¹² to the streets of the Holy City. And as Pilate emerges from the Palace of Herod the Great to preside over the sentencing, he again notices the equine statues of the hippodrome, then hears, en route back to the palace, hoofbeats announcing the approach of the ala and shouts of children (from a street leading onto the Square of the Hippodrome) to "look out (for the horsemen)!"¹³ The last image passing before Pilate's eyes as he leaves the Gabbatha is that of a lone cavalryman who, bringing up the rear, "gallop(s) past & with a trumpet on his back, flaming in the sun."¹⁴

The execution of Yeshua takes place in the next Yershalaim chapter (16) and is also pervaded--or perhaps more appropriate verbs for what ensues would be *encircled* or *surrounded*--by images of the horse and rider. The first sentence of this chapter, marked by being a separate paragraph as well, makes pointed reference to the double cordon (one made of cavalry) surrounding the place of execution: "The sun was already setting over Bald Mountain, and the mountain was encircled (*otseplena*) by a double cordon (*otseplenie*)."¹⁵ There follows a detailed description of the ala and its route to Bald Mountain. Those charged with overseeing the execution, including the Centurian Mark, the chief of the palace guard, and Afranius,¹⁶ the chief of the secret police, are distinguished

by arriving at their destination on horseback (the century, on the other hand, which Mark commands arrives on foot). Scattered throughout the chapter are other references to the cavalymen, the ala, the grooms, and their horses. Matthew the Levite understands the "joyful ending" (Yeshua's death) is near at hand by noticing the sudden activity of the grooms and horses preparing to depart. And when the cordon is broken after Yeshua's death and a massive storm breaks over Bald Mountain, we watch through a shroud of water as the cavalry (now the Russian *konnitsa* rather than the borrowed *kavaleriia*) rides back to Yershalaim.

The reader already alerted to the "magnetized" images of horse and rider cannot help but see the last two Yershalaim chapters, especially "Burial" (26), as straining the stays of Bulgakov's carefully wrought verisimilitude. This is not to say that the author's design is somehow flawed (for the careful reader feels from the start that something is afoot beneath the surface, laconic and muscular, of this realism), but that attempts to account for the tenacious presence of the imagery cannot be accounted for merely in terms of realistic motivation. Chapter 25 opens with still another sinister allusion (among others) to the hippodrome. By now we should be asking ourselves about the historical existence of this hippodrome. Why is it constantly in the background? What meaning can it have for Pilate and his story? That the execution is over and Afranius has arrived is signaled to Pilate (as the arrival of the "joyful ending" was earlier signaled to Matthew the Levite) by the movement of horses: "Now, breaking through the tapping of the thinning rain, the final sounds of trumpets and the clattering of several hundred hooves reached the Procurator's ears."¹⁷ Pilate and Afranius then plot, in a bravura performance of Aesopian language, the murder of Yuda (Judas).¹⁸ At this point Bulgakov's deviation from the Gospels is most significant: rather than have Yuda kill himself, he has him killed by Afranius and his henchmen. Pilate, the avenging horseman, and Afranius, his agent, seek out their quarry in a virtual flurry of equine and equestrian imagery. Afranius sends horsemen to see to the burial of Yeshua and the others; he then disguises himself by wearing an old chiton and riding a mule into the city (an ironic allusion to the Gospels' triumphant Christ?), where he meets Niza, his double agent and Yuda's lover, and sets the trap for Yuda; after that he disappears into a stream of pedestrians and riders. In his eagerness to get to his rendezvous with Niza, Yuda curses a mounted patrol that has momentarily blocked his passage. And after Yuda is murdered, Afranius changes back into his genuine costume in a passage full of magnetized imagery and allusive perhaps of Christ's legendary entry (thus the earlier mention of the mule) into Jerusalem. Retributive horseman, at least at this stage of the text, has totally superseded the Prince of Peace.

What should be clear by now is the symbolically charged role of Pilate: both as "Rider of the Golden Spear" responsible for the execution of Yeshua and as the mastermind who uses Afranius (the imposing "military rider" on the "spirited cavalry horse") to murder Yuda, he stands at the center of this punishing, deadly serious horseplay. He is the judge; his verdict in both cases is death; and his method of carrying out these executions is characterized by images of the horse and rider. But this is only half, the most obvious half, of Bulgakov's design. How does the text of Revelation and its notion of tragic secular history combine with Bulgakov's depiction of Pilate as the avenging horseman?

First, Bulgakov sets the stage for subtextual interplay by introducing into the Yershalaim chapters, usually in connection with Pilate's perception of the hateful city, motifs from the Book of Revelation. These include the repeated image of the catastrophic storm (to spill over into the Moscow chapters) promising to end history, that of the abyss over which the city, like the "Whore of Babylon," seems to hang, that of destruction by demonic fire, and that of the ominous Temple, with its roof covered by dragonlike scales and its pair of five-point candelabras recalling the dragon and the beast of ten horns (Revelation 13:1, 4; 17:3, 7, 12, 16).¹⁹ As particularly noteworthy in this context we might cite the opening passage of chapter 15 ("How the Procurator Tried to Save Yuda of Kerioth"):

The darkness which had come from the Mediterranean shrouded the city hated by the Procurator. The hanging bridges connecting the Temple with Anthony's dreaded tower disappeared. The abyss that had descended from the heavens engulfed the winged gods over the Hippodrome, the crenellated Hasmonaean Palace, the bazaars, the caravansaries, the alleys, ponds & The great city of Yershalaim had vanished as though it had never been. Everything was swallowed by darkness that threw fear into every living heart in Yershalaim &

With its belly (the storm cloud) had already covered the Bald Skull, where the executioners were hastily piercing the hearts of the victims; its weight fell on the Temple in Yershalaim, it crept down the hill in smoking streams and flooded the Lower City. It poured into the windows and drove the people from the crooked streets into the houses & Whenever the black steamy mass was ripped by

*fire, the great bulk of the Temple with its glittering scaly roof would fly up from the solid murk. But the fire would go out in an instant, and the Temple would sink back into a dark abyss. Over and over, it rose and dropped again, and every disappearance was attended by the crashing of catastrophe.*²⁰

To anticipate a little, although everything here is given the expected realistic motivation (the storm), this cluster of apocalyptic motifs will be carried over into the Moscow chapters and given a largely fantastic (Woland-instigated) motivation.

It is not difficult to see that the wrath of the storm falls chiefly on the Temple, in Bulgakov's rendering the seat of Old Testament morality, retributive rather than redemptive justice, and satanic literalism. As critics have noted, Pilate is, for the most part, a sympathetic figure caught on the horns of a dilemma, trapped by the letter of the law. Neither the death of Yeshua nor Yuda brings him satisfaction, since he knows, all too painfully, that the law in the first case is driving an innocent (and to Pilate most appealing) man to his death and that his personal code of vengeance in the second case is poor compensation--it cannot bring Yeshua back to life. Thus Pilate is a tool of a system or intelligence (Roman and Jewish law) larger than himself, just as the Satan of Revelation is a deadly force whose acts, though apparently self-motivated, actually fulfill a larger divine dispensation. Perhaps it is in this respect that Pilate might be seen as Satan's deputy in a setting overlaid with the gathering presence of the Antichrist. Pilate, like Satan, is empowered to punish, but retribution alone cannot generate a genuine resolution, and so death in the Yershalaim chapters is relentlessly associated with endings that refuse to become beginnings. If the horsemen of Revelation bring destruction and judgment all according to divine plan, then some other agency (that of the Lamb) is needed to bring forgiveness and redemption.

It has been suggested by more than one critic that, by the final chapters of ***The Master and Margarita***, the image of the closed circle develops into a significant element of the novel's structural integrity.²¹ Yet the image of the circle is not for Bulgakov necessarily benign, and if the ending in fact does somehow return to the beginning, it is an ending that stresses *change through continuity*, not the tracks of futile, predictable motion. This becomes more obvious when we consider the negative images of circular confinement in the Yershalaim chapters. When Pilate rages at Caiaphas, "What are you saying, High Priest? Who can hear us now in this place (the palace garden)? & The garden is cordoned off (*otseplen*), the palace is cordoned off (*otseplen*), so that not even a mouse could slip through a crack,"²² he uses the same verb form, the same image of a closed chain (*tsep*'), that will later appear several times to describe the execution of Yeshua and the setting of Bald Mountain, with its double ring of horsemen and cavalry.²³ Birds describe circles in the air over the dying Yeshua. And the cavalry ala, returning from the site of the execution, crosses the same square (of the Hippodrome?) as it did in the morning, thereby completing the circle of its deadly day's work.

Here it might be fitting to recall the hippodrome and the metaphor of the horserace, which, in the Moscow chapters, become central to the spirit of their dizzying play. There is no place, needless to say, for the pure entertainment of a horserace in the serious atmosphere of the Yershalaim chapters. Still, the urge to suggest an absurdly finite model for Pilate's view of history may be why Bulgakov moved the description of the Moscow hippodrome, which he certainly knew well, into Yershalaim, the sources--especially Brokgauz-Efron--for which make scant mention of such a hippodrome and offer no clues to its appearance.²⁴ Is not Bulgakov saying that the goals of the "realist," the "materialist," the one who denies the realm of the spirit and contemplates acts that will guarantee his success and security in this world, are nothing more than a race around the track of history's hippodrome? Inevitably they lead back to the reality of death. However clever and ruthless Pilate is as a horseman, he can never break the chain of his personal history. As Aristotle states in the *Metaphysics*, history at any given moment is an infinite series of possibilities, only one of which can be actual in terms of the next moment. And it is poetry's function, as he states further in the *Poetics*, to describe the possibilities that history in its inexorability has left out. Hovering with its equine statues at the edge of Pilate's thoughts, the hippodrome is Bulgakov's objective correlative for this idea of tragic inexorability: as the present unfolds, Pilate sees a future full of rich possibility (his walks with the wandering philosopher) retreating into a finite, guilt-ridden past that will, ironically, continue to haunt him forever.

To sum up, then, it has been demonstrated that Pilate's chief function as apocalyptic horseman is to bring judgment (both on others and, equally important, on himself) and death to Yershalaim. This function incorporates not only that of the Four Horsemen and the locust-like horses whose king is Abaddon (Revelation 9),²⁵ but also that of the avenging Lamb, described as a magnificent rider (Revelation 19)--dressed in a white robe dipped in blood²⁶--on a white steed, before an army

of heavenly cavalry amassed to inflict ultimate defeat on the troops of Satan. Bulgakov's view of Revelation does not, at this preliminary level, appear entirely canonical (after all, he deviates from, or "polemicizes"²⁷ with this subtext as he does elsewhere, reinterpreting it as he sees fit according to the philosophic and aesthetic requirements of his, the larger, text). His Christ figures, Yeshua and the Master, are much less the avengers than the forgivers. Therefore, one of Bulgakov's most puzzling apocryphal strokes becomes, in respect to the image of the apocalyptic horseman most significant: Yeshua, the historical Jesus, denies any basis for the legend that he entered Yerushalaim astride an ass. "I have no ass, Hegemon & It is true that I came to Yerushalaim through the Susa Gate, *but I came on foot.*"²⁸ Apparently Bulgakov chose to transfer the role of retributive horseman away from the Lamb entirely, making Pilate, the fifth procurator (when he should traditionally be the sixth),²⁹ the fifth horseman as well.

The equine and equestrian imagery, quite explicit in the Yerushalaim chapters, is not nearly so as we proceed to the outer text, and on first reading could easily be overlooked amid the background of farce and whimsy. Hence it should not seem curious that, of the many commentators who have traced the parallels between Yerushalaim and Moscow,³⁰ none has sensed a link between Pilate the unwilling rider and a city of people *driven* by their satanic impulses. But as Gasparov points out, Moscow is a splintered, reduced version of Yerushalaim.³¹ What shall be argued, therefore, is that the tragic Pilate has become a mass of vulgarians (*poshliaki*), the ubiquitous horse a modern system of public conveyance, and the hippodrome of history, literally and figuratively, a circular, slapstick race around the streets of Moscow.

Leitmotifs provide the first clue to Bulgakov's shift in design from tragic to comic, from hippodrome as apocalyptic metaphor to horserace as pure entertainment. Korov'ev wears a jockey's cap that he raises while showing Berlioz the way to the tram (and to death);³² Behemoth sports the whiskers of a cavalryman; as Woland and his helpers make their escape from Homeless, they are referred to as a "troika" (why, we might ask, has Bulgakov left out Azazello?); on the second floor of Griboedov House there hangs a poster depicting a rider, a balcony with palms (a motif borrowed from the Yerushalaim chapters),³³ and an "inspired" young writer taking a seat with his pen (his *kop'e?*), and on the first floor the vaulted (i.e., probably circular) roof of the restaurant seems alive with Assyrian (as opposed to Syrian)³⁴ horses; Homeless is spirited off to Stravinskii's in a truck to the dismay of a coachman who yells, "You'd do better on a racehorse!";³⁵ the circus act of bicycle riders (also a "troika") that opens the performance at the Variety Theater is colored by equine imagery ("*na dyby*"--"on hind legs"; "*s sedlom naverkhu*"--"with the seat/saddle above")³⁶ and by fast motion in circles (here the metaphor of the circus and the horserace coalesce); the petrified Rimsky becomes in retreat from his haunted office a rider (*sedok* can be both a horseman and a passenger) who is jostled on his seat as he is borne by a speeding taxi along the "*Sadovoe kol'tso*" (ring road);³⁷ it is the mounted police along with those on foot (recall the combination of cavalry and foot soldiers that forms the ring around the site of Yeshua's execution)³⁸ that are sent to break up the line of ticket buyers gathered, on Sadovoe, outside the theater; and the unfortunate boss of the branch office of the Commission on Spectacles has an obsession with organizing clubs, including an equestrian circle ("*kruzhok verkhovoi ezdy*"). Moreover, and most convincing, Bulgakov has placed his centers of madcap activity (here, of course, Margarita's and the Master's apartments are important--and logical--exceptions) along the Sadovoe Ring Road; Berlioz's ill-starred apartment, the Variety Theater, and Griboedov House are all given precise locations on this street, and, indeed, Sadovoe is by far the most alluded to landmark in Moscow.³⁹ What emerges, as various Muscovites chase Woland or are chased by him, is an atmosphere of sheer "raciness."

Chapters 30 to 32 contain not only the most "elaborate"⁴⁰ but the most explicit parody of the Book of Revelation in Russian literature. What is in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* an allusion to the imminent danger brought on by a godless stage of history becomes in Bulgakov a broad application of the text of Revelation involving themes, characters, and the very climax of the novel. This is the sort of elevating parody, as Nabokov has remarked, that pays a tribute to its source and "always goes along with (the spirit of) genuine poetry,"⁴¹ and is not the sort, much in evidence in the Moscow chapters, that provides a "grotesque imitation" of the original.⁴² We know at once that we are in the presence of something serious by Bulgakov's shift to an elegiac tone, best represented in the beautiful, ghostly opening of chapter 32:

*Gods, my gods, how sad the evening earth! How mysterious the mists over the bogs! Whoever has wandered in these mists, whoever has suffered deeply before death, whoever flew over this earth burdened beyond human strength knows it. The weary one knows it. And he leaves without regret the mists of the earth, its swamps and rivers, and yields himself with an easy heart into the arms of death, knowing that it alone can soothe him.*⁴³

Bulgakov has cleared the stage for this race beyond history by leaving Moscow behind in mock apocalyptic ruin. Like Yershalaim before it, Moscow is the city of the devil, a getting-and-spending world of petty Judases, the fallen Whore of Babylon with her "merchants & grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness" (Revelation 18:3). The "temples" of satanic impulse--Berlioz's apartment,⁴⁴ the Griboedov House, and *Torgsin* (a relative of the modern Berezka store⁴⁵)--have been burned to the ground:⁴⁶

She (the Whore of Babylon) shall be burned with fire & (and) when they (the kings of the earth) see the smoke of her burning, they will stand far off in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour thy judgment has come."

(Revelation 18:8-10)

And the cataclysmic storm⁴⁷ that first announced the appearance of the Master to Ivan--to be followed by the story of the Master's figurative crucifixion, and then the actual crucifixion of Yeshua--is given now, at the moment of the physical deaths of the lovers, its ultimate expression. With this apocalyptic manifold in place, the final destination of both Moscow and Yershalaim--the abyss that promises nonbeing and the utter insignificance of secular history--should come as no surprise.

The deaths in chapter 30 of the Master and Margarita, arranged by Woland at the behest of (the now divine) Yeshua,⁴⁸ provide the precise moment at which the "hidden" horses in the text, both those whose presence might be too easily justified by the realistic setting of Yershalaim and those whose presence has been ingeniously masked in the swirling backdrop of contemporary Moscow, emerge to take on their genuine mythic dimensions. The seriousness of the inner text seems to have penetrated into the fantastic atmosphere of the outer text to produce a new and urgent lyricism adequate for the coming scenes of flight and freedom. The intuitive Margarita, who has been reading the same apocalyptic opening to chapter 25, senses that a storm is on the way, but has no idea of its motivation. Torn by the past and the knowledge of his permanent psychic debility, the Master has an attack of anxiety. Suddenly, Azazello appears with greetings from Woland and an invitation to an "outing" (*progulka*). After regaling their guest with cognac ("*koniak*"), the hosts drink Woland's present, the poison Falernian wine that is a favorite of Pilate. (Thus Pilate the horseman, it might be said, executes not only Yeshua and Yuda, but the Master and Margarita as well.) In the pre-storm light the Master realizes immediately that his *end is approaching* ("*nastaet konets*").⁴⁹ "What does this new state mean?" asks the now dead Master.

*"It means," replied Azazello, "that it is time for us to start. The storm is thundering already, do you hear? It is growing dark. The horses paw the earth, the little garden shivers. Say farewell, farewell, to your little basement flat."*⁵⁰

As the group of riders leaves Moscow behind (in an earlier version Margarita's last gesture before departure is to save a child from the *balcony* of a burning house),⁵¹ Woland, Behemoth, Korov'ev, and Azazello are transformed into Bulgakov's version of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.⁵² Each former jester is now distinct in his somber grandeur, but it is Woland, the ultimate horseman, who is grandest of all:

*And finally, Woland himself was also flying in his true shape now. Margarita would have found it difficult to say what his horse's reins were made of. She thought they might be chains of moonlight, and the horse itself only a hulk of darkness, his mane a cloud, and the rider's spurs white blurs of stars.*⁵³

The arrival of the horsemen at the site of Pilate's eternal torment brings us to the novel's mystifying climax. Chained Prometheus-like to the memory of his cowardice, Pilate has been reliving the immutable past for twelve thousand moons. It is time for the Master to finish his novel, to complete what he has left unresolved ("Your novel has been read & and the only comment on it is that, unfortunately, *it is not finished* ["*on ne okonchen*"]).⁵⁴ The Master is given the same opportunity to release Pilate that Pilate once had to release Yeshua.⁵⁵ But the Master, motivated by Margarita's plea for Pilate, is able to make the right choice, to break the chain of history, and thus to end his masterpiece ("Well, now you can finish [*konchit*"] your novel with a single phrase!")⁵⁶ with a gesture that augurs new beginnings. The forever immobile Pilate is now free to *walk* with the wandering philosopher along the lunar path toward the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21).⁵⁷ Maybe, says Woland, they will finally come to an agreement on something. The novel about Pilate finished, the Master and Margarita are rewarded with the eternal refuge and peace (*pokoï*) that neither they nor their author had in life. It is interesting that Woland suggests it is not fitting that

the lovers return to historical Moscow, on the one hand, or follow after the liberated Pilate, on the other ("Why follow in the steps of that which is already finished ["*kon cheno*"]?)"⁵⁸ The reward they are to receive has somehow been specially earmarked for them. And so Woland and his horsemen disappear, the couple dismount,⁵⁹ proceed--like Pilate--on foot to their idyllic resting place, and, to complete yet another circle, their story closes with the Master being released from his hero, the horseman Pontius Pilate, by his author, just as he had released his hero from the burden of guilt.⁶⁰

What is the meaning of this ending and how does it gear with the elaborate apocalyptic apparatus that Bulgakov has engineered? It would be a mistake, I think, to see this final moment as anything resembling an apocalypse of terrible judgment and retribution--that is, the Apocalypse of John. What Pilate deserves is punishment, and yet the Master frees him. The horses and horsemen symbolize physical death, to be sure, but that death is no ending (as it is, for example, in the case of Berlioz). Too much perhaps has been made of the Master's weakness, of the judgment that he deserves peace while Yeshua deserves light. Surely Pilate, who joins Yeshua on the lunar path, is no more worthy than the Master, his author? No, Bulgakov's unorthodox apocalyptic vision is finally benign and his horses and horsemen positive, at least inasmuch as death, the ultimate mystery, can be understood as a joyful opening into a state beyond history. The guiding intelligence here is not that, dominating Revelation, of the avenging Christ, but that of the merciful lamb, and it is for this reason that Margarita's voice ("Let him go!") emerges as especially resonant. Hers is the voice of the compassionate⁶¹ Virgin, nowhere to be found in the last book of the Bible.

There are, we should not forget, three distinct settings to suggest the rewards earned by the various characters. Homeless is left in Moscow, fated to remain a captive of history and to experience each year the return (that is, the circle) of his nightmare about Pilate. Pilate, history's relentless horseman, and Yeshua, the peripatetic "good man" whose faith in others has little or no historical justification, mount the path toward the New Jerusalem, toward the point in the misty future when history is still infinite possibility, when they can at last "agree on something," and when all can be well. Yeshua's concern is ethical--man's perfectability--and that is why, comforting Pilate, he continues up the path. Thus if Homeless is a victim of the past and Yeshua and Pilate have their sights on a vision of the distant future, where does this leave the Master and Margarita? They are, I believe, left in a timeless present, one that is both free from the pain of the past and the promise of the future, but one from which, with the gift of imaginative empathy (a sort of Keatsian "Negative Capability"), the past can be recaptured and the future anticipated. Such a paradise cannot of course be imagined in this world, especially not in the Soviet Union, but were it to exist, it would look like the little home, with its Venetian window and climbing vine, given to the Master and Margarita. Until God, the final author hovering beyond the final text, brings history and religious mystery together in this world, we must rely on Bulgakov's version of a *poeta ex machina* to make things right. With the New Jerusalem still distant, only art can free Pilate, write history from actuality back into possibility.

Yet Bulgakov, even now, is not quite finished. In the epilogue he closes, and simultaneously opens, a final circle. Ivan Nikolaevich (Homeless) and Nikolai Ivanovich come each spring to Margarita's *garden* to relive what has been irretrievably lost. The latter, once turned into Natasha's porcine steed, is a parodic mirror of the former,⁶² and chides himself for his faintheartedness--"What was I, an old ass [*ose!*], afraid of?"⁶³ Homeless's predicament, however, is the more serious: he is haunted by a dream swarming with images of the noseless executioner, the dying Gestas, and the apocalyptic storm. Death is here in its tragic, inexorable character--Gestas is stabbed with the same spear that killed Yeshua. And, significantly, a merciful injection ("*ukol*") causes the nightmare to cease. The verb ("*kolot' kol'nut*") used to stab Gestas and Yeshua with Pilate's spear reappears in the noun whose prick releases Homeless and his lacerated ("*iskolotaia*") memory. What Bulgakov is suggesting in this ending that *continues* what has already ended, is that Homeless, the faithful disciple, must undergo his own spiritual death each Easter season in order to be released, if only for an oneiric moment, into that state beyond history where the Master and Margarita now reside. Only at this point in the text, and *not* in the preceding chapter, does Yeshua swear to Pilate that the execution never happened. Suddenly we have returned to the vicious circle of history to discover how, through Homeless's experience of periodic death-in-life, the circle is to be opened. Homeless perceives that endings can be happy after all. As he asks the Master:

"So that's how it [*the story of Pilate*] ended ["*konchilos*"]?" "That's how it ended ["*konchilos*"], my disciple."

And as Margarita concludes:

"Yes, of course ["konechno"] that's how it did. Everything has ended ["konchilos"], and everything ends [konchaetsia"] & And I shall kiss you on the forehead and all will be with you as it should."⁶⁴

Little wonder, then, that Homeless wakes feeling calm and healthy after his dream. Together with the Master and Margarita, the author, the reader, and perhaps even Pilate himself, he can adjust to this ending, knowing he is free of "the cruel fifth Procurator of Judea, the horseman Pontius Pilate."

Notes

Bruce A. Beatie and Phyllis W. Powell, "Story and Symbol: Notes toward a Structural Analysis of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 15 (1978): 237.

See Edward Ericson, Jr., "The Satanic Incarnation: Parody in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *Russian Review* 33 (January 1974): 35-36; Boris Gasparov, "Iz nabliudeniia nad motivnoi strukturoi romana M. A. Bulgakova, *Master i Margarita*," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 3 (1978): 218-19; Georgii Krugovoi, "Gnosticheskii roman M. Bulgakova," *Novyi Zhurnal* 134 (1979): 60-61; W. J. Leatherbarrow, "The Devil and the Creative Visionary in Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita*," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, no. 1 (1975): 42-43; and A. C. Wright, "Satan in Moscow: An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *PMLA* 88 (October 1973): 1164; 1167-68.

Ericson, "The Satanic Incarnation," 35-36.

M. Chudakova, "A Vital Necessity: About Mikhail Bulgakov's Personal Library," *Soviet Literature*, no. 2 (1977), 143-44; Krugovoi, "Gnosticheskii roman," 49-50; Milne, "*Master and Margarita*," 9-12, 26.

See Sydney Schultze, "The Epigraphs in *White Guard*," *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 15 (1978): 213-18.

Piper sees the Master in chivalrous terms as "an important knight in an age-old battle, whose role & is to assert spiritual values in the teeth of and because of an evil whose existence he knows full well" (D. G. B. Piper, "An Approach to *The Master and Margarita*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 7 (1971): 157). Here the traits, such as idealism and love of beauty, of the romantic knight (*rytsar* ') should not be confused with those of the rider (*vsadnik*). For Bulgakov, the rider is not a benign figure but one (such as Pilate) associated with the ideas of guilt and death.

See M. Chudakova, "Tvorcheskaiia istoriia romana M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1 (1976): 243-44, 249.

Ibid., 219, 225, 233, 237. It might be argued, of course, that the "hoof" in these variant titles refers to the *cloven* hoof of Satan, and therefore an equine allusion should be ruled out. But the "horseshoe" in the fourth variant title suggests that indeed Bulgakov was linking, rather than trying to keep distinct, Satan and the image of the horse.

Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971), 64. This text is used throughout the essay. The translation, emended where necessary for precision, is Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Grove, 1967). Hereafter cited as *MM*, with references to the Russian text separated from those of the translation by a slash; e.g., 64/37.

MM, 33/24.

MM, 42/31.

MM, 49/38.

Since the same verb is used in both cases, this warning anticipates the "Beware of the Tram!" sign that flashes before Berlioz moments before his death. See page 389 of this essay.

MM, 55/43.

MM, 217/182.

For a fine discussion of the problematical character of Afranius, see Richard W. F. Pope, "Ambiguity and Meaning in *The Master and Margarita*: The Role of Afranius," *Slavic Review* 36 (March 1977): 1-24.

MM, 380/314-15.

Pope ("Ambiguity and Meaning," 6-10) is especially good on this.

The English text of the Bible used throughout this essay is *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: 1977). It has been checked against the Russian text *Bibliia ili knigi sviashchennago pisaniia vetkhago i novago zaveta* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1964).

MM, 378/312-13.

See Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, "The Use of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov," *Slavic Review* 33 (December 1974): 695, 706-7; J. Delaney, "The Master and Margarita: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp," *Slavic Review* 31 (1972): 99.

MM, 48/37.

The double cordon is also mentioned earlier in the chapter "Pontius Pilate" (44/33). It is, of course, Pilate who gives the order to form the cordon around Bald Mountain.

The equine statues atop the hippodrome have no basis in any historical description of ancient Jerusalem and must have been added by Bulgakov from his knowledge of the Moscow hippodrome, which was indeed (and still is) adorned with such statues. Josephus, a primary source for anyone doing research on ancient Jerusalem, makes only passing reference to the hippodrome: In Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, 20 vols. (New York: Putnam's, 1927), 2:339, he says that during an insurrection of the Jews in 4 B.C. one of their camps was located to the south of the city, near the hippodrome. The only other mention of the hippodrome, in Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities*, 20 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 13:491, is likewise uninformative. Bulgakov's leading source, Brokgauz-Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol. 13, 652-58, tells us merely that "during the reign of Herod the Great, Jerusalem again entered a period of flowering and became adorned with magnificent buildings (a theater, amphitheater, and *perhaps even a hippodrome*)" (657; emphasis added).

There is an Abaddon who also shows up in the chapter "By Candlelight" (329/274-75).

Pilate's cloak has a blood-red lining as well. See Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 204 n. 3.

Ibid., 198, 228.

MM, 37/26; emphasis added.

Ibid., 213; and Krugovoi, "Gnosticheskii roman," 56-57.

For the parallels between Ershalaim and Moscow, see Beatie and Powell, "Story and Symbol," 220-23; Ericson, "The Satanic Incarnation," 25; Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 215-21; Leatherbarrow, "The Devil," 31-33; Mahlow, *The Text as Cipher*; Proffer, "On *The Master and Margarita*," 548-59; and Wright, "Satan in Moscow," 1170-71.

Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 215-21.

Other references to the jockey's cap appear on pages 12/4 and 121/106.

The balcony and the palms resurface in other Moscow chapters: "Schizophrenia, as Said Before" (90/77) and "Ivan Splits in Two" (148-49/132).

Noted by Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 215.

MM, 85/72.

MM, 150/133.

In this same chapter a mustachioed (like Behemoth) coachman drives up on the Sadovoe to one of the victims of the magic show, reigns in his nag, and grins diabolically (192/170).

Noted by Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 219.

Gasparov ("Iz nabliudenii," 222) places the Griboedov House on Tverskoi Boulevard. Yet the opening description of the house sets it convincingly on a ring road (and my assumption is that this ring road is Sadovoe): "Starinnyi dvukhetazhnyi dom kremovogo tsveta pomeshchalsia na bul'varnom kol'tse v glubine chakhlogo sada, otdelennogo ot tratuara kol'tsa reznoi chugunnoi reshетки" ("The old, two-story, cream-colored mansion was situated on a boulevard circle [and was set] deep within a run-down garden, divided from the sidewalk of the circle by a wrought-iron fence") (71/59). Whether this boulevard is Sadovoe really makes no difference, however, as Bulgakov deliberately links the image of the circle and the garden (thus *Sadovoe kol'tso*) from the start. Both Berlioz's apartment (97/84) and the Variety Theater (131/116) are explicitly placed by Bulgakov on Sadovoe Ring Road. As mentioned, Sadovoe is by far the most alluded to geographical landmark in Moscow: of the sixteen Moscow chapters in book 1, eleven make precise reference to Sadovoe (often several times); in chapter 1, for example, the sun (presumably of Berlioz's life) is setting beyond Sadovoe (11/3); in chapters 3 and 4, it is Annushka "from Sadovoe" who is responsible for Berlioz's death (65/51); in chapter 10, Varenuška is attacked by satanic forces in the garden of the Variety Theater and then spirited along Sadovoe to Likhodeev's apartment (142-44/126-28); and in chapter 14, Rimskii escapes the same forces by catching a taxi and rushing away from the theater, again along Sadovoe (201/178).

Ericson, "The Satanic Incarnation," 36.

Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (New York: Putnam's, 1963), 24.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 76.

This passage, argues Chudakova ("Tvorcheskaia istoriia," 252), is strongly autobiographical.

The title of chapter 27 is "Konets kvartiry no. 50" ("The End of Apartment 50").

A Berezka store is a store predominantly for tourists which accepts only foreign hard currency as payment.

On the motif of fire, see Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 222-29.

Cf. Revelation 16:17-19: "The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake."

An earlier version has Matthew the Levite visit Woland as a "violet horseman" (*fioletovyi vsadnik*) (Chudakova, "Tvorcheskaia istoriia," 238).

MM, 464/375.

MM, 466/376.

Ibid.

This, of course, makes the absence of Hella logical. Beaujour ("The Use of Witches," 704 n. 22) suggests, I think erroneously, that the witch's absence is carelessness on Bulgakov's part.

MM, 478/384-85.

MM, 479/385.

Cf. 53/42.

MM, 480/387.

Bulgakov considered the possibility of having Ieshua come to Pilate on the *balcony* (Chudakova, "Tvorcheskaia istoriia," 239).

MM, 481/387.

The couple was originally to gallop to their eternal refuge on horseback (Chudakova, "Tvorcheskaia istoriia," 247).

Bulgakov here clearly links Pilate, Ieshua, the Master, and himself as ultimate author: Pilate had the chance to release Ieshua, but released Var-Ravvan (Barabas) instead ("Imia togo, kogo seichas pri vas *otpusiat na svobodu*" ["The name of him who shall now, in your presence, be released"] [53/42]); the Master, urged on by Margarita, is now able to release the captive Pilate ("*Otpustitie ego!*" vdrug kriknula Margarita & Master & slozhil ruki ruporom i kriknul & "*Svoboden! Svoboden!*" ["Release him!" suddenly cried Margarita & The Master cupped his hands like a megaphone and shouted: "You are free! You are free!"] [480/386-87]); and finally Bulgakov releases the Master from the past and obsessive thoughts of his hero Pontius Pilate with the same phrase ("Kto-to *otpuskal na svobodu* mastera, kak sam on tol'ko chto *otpusil* im sozdannogo geroia" ("Someone released the Master as the Master had just released his hero") (482-83)/omitted from the Ginsburg translation; emphasis added).

"What is he (Pilate) saying?" asked Margarita, and her utterly calm face was clouded by compassion (*sostradanie*)" (479/386). For Margarita's link with the Virgin Mary, see Ericson, "The Satanic Incarnation," 31-35.

Noted by Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii," 227.

MM, 496/400.

MM, 498/402.

This essay appears in expanded form in David Bethea, *The Shape of the Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989). Readers are strongly urged to turn to that book for a fuller explication of the apocalyptic vision not only in Bulgakov but in Dostoevsky, Bely, Platonov, and Pasternak.