



**Existential Thought in Bulgakov's
The Master and Margarita**
Michael Glenny

In this essay, Glenny explores possible neo-Platonist influences on The Master and Margarita. Published in Canadian-American Slavic Studies 15, nos. 2-3 (summer-fall 1981): 238-49.

From the archive section of
The Master and Margarita

<http://www.masterandmargarita.eu>

Webmaster

Jan Vanhellemont
Klein Begijnhof 6
B-3000 Leuven

+3216583866
+32475260793

Reading Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* superficially, and leaving aside for the moment any attempt to answer the many riddles posed by the novel, its structural divisions are reasonably clear. It is as if two (perhaps three) distinct yet related narratives, differing in length and genre, have been stitched together within one set of covers. The shorter one is an original, fictive version of the trial and crucifixion of Christ, based partly on St. Matthew's gospel¹ but with a number of striking changes, additions and subtractions; for convenience this narrative will be referred to as "Jerusalem."

The other main narrative, longer and more complex, is set in the Moscow of Bulgakov's own time, but with his characteristically ironic realism enlivened by the presence of grotesque, supernatural figures (a device also used in several of Bulgakov's satirical short stories and novellas of the mid-twenties).² In this strange tale a character known only as "The Master" is persecuted for the heterodox ideas contained in the "Jerusalem" story, of which he is the author: he destroys the manuscript of the offending book, voluntarily enters a madhouse and is eventually released by supernatural intervention, with his manuscript restored--only to die shortly afterward. His companion in this bizarre adventure is his mistress, Margarita, who, in the role of go-between, successfully intercedes for the Master with the powerful figure who leads the supernatural forces--a strange gentleman named Woland, endowed with many of the attributes conventionally given to the Devil. For simplicity's sake, these parts of the novel will be labelled "Moscow." Toward the very end of the book, the main characters of both the "Jerusalem" and the "Moscow" narratives meet in a kind of limbo, the ends are rather hastily tied up and the book ends on a low-key and somewhat enigmatic note.³

Bulgakov loved mystification. His use of it was intentional, and it is a most attractive facet of his literary *persona*; but this fondness for disguise, allegory, myth and sheer hocus-pocus can also make the deciphering of his meaning very difficult. The reader must unravel the purposely tangled skein, must find the key (or keys) to the code.⁴ Many critics and scholars, Soviet and Western, have produced interpretations of this book; there are almost as many theories as critics. Some commentators, for instance, carefully avoid any discussion of the nature of the Christ-like "Ieshua Ha-Nozri,"⁵ while others claim that the "Jerusalem" story is meant to strip any notion of divinity from this figure.⁶ With no doubt equal conviction another scholar claims that, on the contrary, Bulgakov's Ieshua *is* the biblical Christ, but cunningly presented from an unusual angle in order to slip him past the Soviet censor and re-establish the Christ of the New Testament as a central landmark in Russian literature.⁷ The "Moscow" narrative puzzles the critics even more; a widely-accepted explanation is that it constitutes an ironical, updated inversion of the Faust legend, with the "Jerusalem" novel-within-the-novel functioning largely as a pretext to motivate the attacks on the Master (Faust), to which Woland (Mephistopheles) responds by a diabolical counter-attack on the forces of Soviet philistinism and bureaucracy, while Margarita (as her name suggests) is a Russian Gretchen in modern dress.

Yet to point out the biblical and Goethean prototypes⁸ of Bulgakov's novel does not in itself provide a satisfactory conceptual exegesis of the author's intention. To state that Edmund Spenser took motifs, imagery and forms from Ariosto tells us neither why he wrote *The Faerie Queen* nor the meaning of the allegory. There are, it seems two main riddles to solve in *The Master and Margarita*; once these are interpreted, solution of the many other puzzles should become much easier. The first riddle is: what is the purpose behind the "fifth gospel," the story of Pilate, Ieshua, Levi Matthew, Caiaphas and others? The second is: who is Woland? The aim of this article is to put forward some suggestions for a solution of the first riddle; an examination of the second question awaits a later opportunity.

There is a sound, coherent (though perhaps not exhaustive) answer to the first riddle to be found in the work of a remarkable and independent-minded Soviet critic, I. Vinogradov, who has published a most original and stimulating interpretative article on

The Master and Margarita.⁹

In dealing with the "Jerusalem" narrative, Vinogradov isolates Pontius Pilate as the central personage:¹⁰

Bulgakov is, as it were, subjecting his hero [Pontius Pilate] to a distinctive and crucial psychological experiment, in which he poses to us, to himself, to Pilate and to Pilate's human ego, this question: What is man? Is he responsible for his acts? Is his moral choice predetermined by the conditions of that choice, or is it the case that even the harshest circumstances can never serve to justify an immoral act?

Through Pilate, through his fate and his spiritual agony, Bulgakov replied: Yes--he is responsible. Because man is something more than a concatenation of circumstances, something more than mere existence. As a physical being he may, Bulgakov implies, fight against fulfilling his moral duty with all his might and may enlist a dozen allies in this cause--self-preservation, habit, inertia, fear of suffering, of hunger, of poverty, of banishment or of death. But as a spiritual being, endowed with a moral consciousness, he is always responsible to his own conscience--and he is always alone. He has no allies to whom he can transfer even a part of his responsibility, and there are no external circumstances or conditions of his choice which can justify him if he chooses evil. Here, faced by the merciless demands of moral duty and its punitive force--conscience, his human dignity is defenseless, and if he wants to retain it he can do so by one means alone: by being true to himself, to his moral convictions.

*It is not hard to perceive that Bulgakov's assertion of the unconditional primacy of man's moral tenets, even in the harshest situation, is very close in meaning to modern developments in [the formulation of] the philosophy of Existentialism, as a result of which Existentialism became so widely known and played no small part in the resistance to fascism.*¹¹

Certain motifs which occur in Bulgakov's novel permit the assumption that although he did not share [the Existentialists'] historical pessimism (we need only recall Ieshua's conviction that the kingdom of truth will come to pass), nevertheless a perception of his own historical period as one of crisis is obviously by no means foreign to him.

A reading of Jean-Paul Sartre will provide confirmation that as a literary critic Vinogradov is better acquainted with recent Western philosophy than are many of his non-Soviet colleagues; also that he is right in thinking that Bulgakov did not share certain of the more pessimistic attitudes of Sartrean existentialism. The nature and origins of Bulgakov's existentialist cast of thought is an important subject for the literary scholar, and one which remains to be fully researched. Until then, some evidence exists to suggest that it might derive, at least in part, from the existentialist teachings of Lev Shestov.

"Shestov" was the pseudonym of Lev Isaakovich Schwartzmann (Shvartsman), born in Kiev in 1866.¹² He was a Jew, and although he was not formally converted to Christianity, he was a religious philosopher, and much of Shestov's thought implied an acceptance of the New Testament as a revelation of the Divine. Shestov's family was rich and relatively assimilated; they clearly belonged to the small, privileged upper stratum of Russian Jewry, since Lev Isaakovich was able to study law at the universities of Moscow and Kiev. As a further indication of his privileged status, Shestov was admitted to the St. Petersburg bar, although he never practiced law.¹³ Shestov's home in Kiev at the turn of the century was the center of a brilliant intellectual circle, which included Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov. It is thus highly probable that Shestov's acquaintances of that period included Sergei Bulgakov's cousin, Afanasii Bulgakov, father of Mikhail, who was a professor of West European ecclesiastical history at the Kiev Theological Academy.

Shestov's subsequent career as an author and philosopher had two principal phases--the first in Russia, the second in emigration after the Revolution. The writings of his "Russian" period¹⁴--six volumes of essays, aphorisms and *pensées*--were published between 1898 and 1912, while his émigré works appeared first in Berlin (*Potestas clavium*, 1923) and subsequently in Paris until his death there in 1938. Three books of his later maturity were published posthumously after World War II, also in Paris.¹⁵

Despite the essentially religious character of his thought, Shestov undoubtedly exerted an influence on the French school of humanistic existentialism, in particular on Camus and Sartre. Both of them assimilated Shestov's ideas and admitted their force, acknowledging his originality and consistency, while differing from him over what they regarded as his inclination to "escape"--meaning his assertion that since the ultimate, irrational dilemma of human existence (what Kierkegaard and Camus call "The Absurd") is insoluble in purely human terms, the only possible solution is that God must exist. As Camus puts it: "when Shestov discovers the fundamental absurdity of all existence, he does not say: "This is the absurd," but rather: "This is God: we must rely on Him even if He does not correspond to any of our rational categories.""¹⁶

Shestov's last publications in Russia were the two collections of philosophical essays, *Nachala i kontsy* (1908) and *Velikie kanuny* (1912). Living in Germany at the outbreak of World War I, he departed to live in Moscow from 1914 to 1917, when he and his family fled to Kiev. During the grim Kievan winter of 1918-19, with its countless political upheavals and changes of régime, so graphically described by Bulgakov in ***The White Guard***, Shestov was able to teach at the so-called People's University of Kiev, where he gave a course of lectures on Greek philosophy. Later in 1919, unable to accept the Bolshevik régime which was by then established in Kiev, Shestov left Russia via Rostov and Sevastopol, eventually settling in France, where he remained until his death.

The link between Shestov and an older generation of the Bulgakov family at the turn of the century has already been mentioned. It would seem to be at least equally probable that in Kiev during the winter of 1918-19, when Mikhail Bulgakov was living there at his home and practicing as a doctor,¹⁷ he would have attended Shestov's lectures on philosophy.¹⁸ Given the earlier connection, it also seems not implausible that Bulgakov should have met Shestov elsewhere than in the lecture-hall for further discussion of philosophical and, no doubt, other matters too. Bulgakov left Kiev at about the same time as Shestov. He made the same long and difficult overland journey, though at Rostov Bulgakov took another direction and went to the Caucasus; we also know it was on that journey that he first started to write.¹⁹ Unless there exists other, documentary, evidence on the subject, probably the only source of a confirmation or denial of any contacts between Bulgakov and Shestov in 1918-19 is Bulgakov's surviving sister, who was reported in 1974 as living in Moscow.²⁰

The clues to a Shestov-Bulgakov connection are therefore purely circumstantial, although there is also some inferential literary evidence. Perhaps the strongest suggestion comes from the striking parallel between certain categories of thought that are common to Bulgakov and Sartre, which Vinogradov noticed; for this connection a plausible link, for want of any other, could be Shestov. Further indirect evidence is that Bulgakov's novel ***The Master and Margarita*** is grounded in a sound knowledge of Neo-Platonist ideas. This, of course, proves nothing by itself; Neo-Platonism was much in vogue when Bulgakov was of the age when one acquires one's primary intellectual baggage. But it also happens to have been Shestov's special field of interest in ancient philosophy; he felt, in particular, a profound sympathy with the thought of Plotinus, the third-century founder of Neo-Platonism.

The final scrap of evidence which can be adduced within the scope of this article comes from a passage in one of Shestov's essays, published in St. Petersburg in 1908. This, too,

proves nothing by itself; but it is so strikingly relevant to one of the most original and telling moments in Bulgakov's story of Pontius Pilate and Ieshua Ha-Nozri that it bears quotation, followed by the appropriate passage from ***The Master and Margarita***. Shestov is using the Pilate-Christ encounter to illustrate the poverty of conventional rationalism when faced by Christ's essentially irrational claims. Thus writes Shestov the philosopher:

*The old Roman, Pilate, who was apparently an educated man, clever and not bad at heart, though weak in character, could neither understand nor elucidate the cause of the strange struggle which took place before him. With his whole heart he pitied the pale Jew before him, who was guilty of nothing. "What is truth?" he asked Christ. Christ did not answer him, nor could He answer, not through ignorance, as the heathen desired to believe, but because that question cannot be answered in words. It would have been necessary to take Pilate's head, and turn it towards the other side, in order that he might see what he had never seen before.*²¹

And this is how Bulgakov the writer treats the same confrontation:

"Why should a tramp like you upset the crowd in the bazaar by talking about truth, something of which you have no conception? What is truth?"

At this the Procurator thought, "Ye gods! this is a court of law and I am asking him a irrelevant question my mind no longer obeys me." Once more he had a vision of a goblet of dark liquid. "Poison, I need poison."

And again he heard the voice:

"At this moment the truth is chiefly that your head is aching and aching so hard that you are having cowardly thoughts about death. Not only are you in no condition to talk to me, but it even hurts you to look at me. You cannot even think and you can only long for your dog, who is clearly the only creature for whom you have any affection. But the pain will stop soon and your headache will go."

The secretary stared at the prisoner, his note-taking abandoned.

Pilate raised his martyred eyes to the prisoner and saw how high the sun now stood above the hippodrome, how a ray had penetrated the arcade, had crept toward Ieshua's patched sandals and how the man moved aside from the sunlight. The Procurator stood up and clasped his head in his hands. Horror came over his yellowish, clean-shaven face. With an effort of will he controlled his expression and sank back into his chair.

Meanwhile the prisoner continued talking, but the secretary had stopped writing, craning his neck like a goose in the effort not to miss a single word.

"There, it has gone," said the prisoner, with a kindly glance at Pilate. "I am so glad. I would advise you, hegemon, to leave the palace for a while and take a walk somewhere nearby, perhaps in the gardens or on Mount Eleona. There will be thunder--" the prisoner turned and squinted into the sun--"later, toward evening. A walk would do you a great deal of good and I should be happy to go with you. Some new thoughts have just come into my head which you might, I think, find interesting, and I should like to discuss them with you, the more so as you strike me as a man of great intelligence." The secretary turned mortally pale and dropped his scroll to the ground. "Your trouble is," went on the unstoppable prisoner, "that your mind is too closed and you have finally lost your faith in human beings. You must admit that no one ought to lavish all his devotion on a dog. Your life is a cramped one, hegemon." Here the speaker allowed himself to smile.

The only thought in the secretary's mind now was whether he could believe his ears. He had to believe them. He then tried to guess in what strange form the Procurator's fiery temper might break out at the prisoner's unheard-of insolence. Although he knew the Procurator well, the secretary's imagination failed him.

Then the hoarse, broken voice of the Procurator barked out in Latin, "Untie his hands." ²²

Note how Shestov's characterization of Pilate: "an educated man, clever and not bad at heart, though weak in character." neatly and precisely sums up Bulgakov's more extensive, imaginative treatment of that figure. Without wishing to overstress the point, nor to draw a facile, simplistic parallel, we may note also the congruence between the two versions that is expressed in Shestov's cryptic but pregnant sentence: "It would have been necessary to take Pilate's head and turn it toward the other side, in order that he might see what he had never seen before." Compare that with the extract from Bulgakov, and it will be apparent that, in an almost literal sense (the "turning" of Pilate's head) this is exactly what Ieshua does--and, in so doing, makes one of the first and most significant of Bulgakov's departures from the general spirit of the gospel narrative in St. Matthew XXVI-XXVII. Whereas to illustrate the radical change needed in Pilate's mode of perception the philosopher may invoke no more than the simple, brief, direct metaphor of "turning the head," Bulgakov the novelist, writing about complex, elusive concepts in the classic narrative tradition of realistic fiction, cannot be so abrupt and succinct; instead he must objectify his description of the same process by the use of concrete, plausible physical description. Thus Pilate's inability to comprehend the full significance of Ieshua's position is objectified by Bulgakov in the form of the painful headache from which Pilate is made to suffer in the very first lines of the "Jerusalem" narrative; this headache vanishes in the instant at which Pilate's "head is turned" and he perceives "what he had never seen before," namely the full implications of Ieshua's extraordinary arguments and his extraordinary powers.

Whether or not Shestov is the common denominator shared between Bulgakov and the French existentialists, the text itself of Bulgakov's "Jerusalem" story reveals that his thought belongs firmly within the existential tradition. Since ***The Master and Margarita*** was written several years before the writings of Sartre began to be published, it is all the more remarkable that perhaps the most illuminating exegesis of the "Jerusalem" narrative is to be gained from a reading of Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*. In attempting to convey this by means of a paraphrase of Sartre²³ that is as condensed as possible, it must be assumed that the reader knows Bulgakov's treatment of Pontius Pilate in the "Jerusalem" narrative well enough to see the relevance.

In his attempt to define human consciousness (i.e., to answer the fundamental question: "How does a human being differ from an unconscious thing such as a stone?") Sartre's form of existentialism posits a duality as the essence of consciousness: there cannot be perception or awareness of Being without its opposite, Nothingness. By nothingness is meant that yawning gap of "otherness," of Not-Self, stretching between himself or herself and all other beings, of which every conscious individual is inevitably aware; indeed this internal Nothingness is what constitutes consciousness. In this Nothingness there is an infinite number of possibilities. These include the possibility of answering "No" to every suggestion. When a man perceives for the first time that Nothingness exists within himself (i.e., that he is free to do and think whatever he chooses), he suffers Anguish. Unable to bear the thought of his boundless freedom, and in order to escape from this Anguish, he often adopts the cover of Bad Faith. This takes the form of pretending to himself that he is not as free as he actually is.

Nobody, of course, suffers this anguished recognition of his own freedom all the time, or

very often. But every now and then, perhaps because of some extreme situation, such as war or revolution, some personal or professional crisis, people are forced to think about their values, and then they will face their freedom with horror. When they see that a choice, perhaps fatal, is their's alone; that custom, law, conventional wisdom or a tactical retreat are no longer any help; that they have no guide in their choice but their conscience; that in such a crisis they are not essentially members of a profession, class or hierarchy--then they experience Anguish at that private Nothingness which is identical with their freedom. At such moments people take refuge in Bad Faith, which consists in seeing what one is and denying it.

Sartre identifies two forms of Bad Faith. For brevity's sake discussion of the first form is omitted here, but the second form applies exactly to Bulgakov's Pilate. In this form of Bad Faith, the victim of Anguish pretends that it was not he who had in fact imposed this behavior upon himself; he pretends to himself that he is bound by necessity and has no choice open to him--as does Pontius Pilate in ***The Master and Margarita***.²⁴ It should be clear that in this narrative, Bulgakov has given us a very vivid and precise description of a man suffering--literally and physically--from a classic crisis of existential anguish.

It is never entirely clear in *L'Être et le Néant* whether Sartre thinks people are to be blamed for falling into Bad Faith or not. Bulgakov, on the other hand, unequivocally believes that people *are* to be blamed for doing so; indeed, Bulgakov regards this as man's cardinal act of wrongdoing, and he calls it by a harsher term than "Bad Faith": he calls it cowardice. This is the first and main point at which Bulgakov's brand of existentialist thought diverges from that of Sartre.²⁵

Bulgakov also differs from Sartre in an even more fundamental matter: the question of good and evil. Sartre stops short of any attempt to define absolute values; indeed, he denies the possibility of discovering any such absolute values as good and evil. Shestov is no help here either, because he appears to sidestep the question by arguing that since God is beyond good and evil, man can overcome the problem of evil only by a leap into the irrational--the leap of faith in God: another aspect of what Camus means by Shestov's propensity to "escape." On the evidence of ***The Master and Margarita***, Bulgakov diverges from the main currents of both religious and humanistic existentialism on this issue and prefers a more traditional, Kantian position, in which the moral law--man's criterion for the distinction between good and evil--is an absolute that has no other source beyond the will of man acting in accord with his reason.²⁶ This very point--the universality and rationality of the moral law--is in fact where the "founders" of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, differ most radically from Kant.²⁷

Bulgakov believes that good and evil, far from being divorced from the nature of human consciousness, as Sartre contends, are indissolubly linked with it--indeed that they are one and the same thing; for ***The Master and Margarita*** is based on the premise that good and evil can only be said to exist in so far as man can act (or attempt to act) through his will as a free agent. In this book Bulgakov attempts to do no less than confront the ultimate riddle which Sartre denied and Shestov sidestepped by his maxim of *sola fide*: what are good and evil and why should we seek one rather than the other? The problem of evil is the classic stumbling-block of theistic and humanistic moral systems alike: how can a wholly good God or even a godless, morally neutral universe be reconciled with the undoubted existence of evil?

In tackling this question and putting his answer into imaginative literary form, Bulgakov draws upon ideas that derive from the Neo-Platonist gloss on Plato's myth of the creation in the *Timaeus*. This teaching, an outcome of the efforts of Proclus to reconcile the inconsistencies in Plato's theodicy, opposes both monotheism and polytheism by postulating a dual Godhead.²⁸ One of the strongest arguments in favor of a dualistic as opposed to a monistic theory of the moral universe is that once dualism is accepted, then

the apparently insoluble contradiction in the simultaneous existence of good and evil can be more rationally resolved.

To judge by ***The Master and Margarita***, this seems to be Bulgakov's position; the clearest pointer to it lies in his choice of the novel's epigraph, taken from the lines in Goethe's *Faust* in which Faust asks Mephistopheles who he is: FAUST: Nun gut, wer bist Du denn? MEPHISTOPHELES: Ein Theil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft. (29)

This is a direct clue to what is perhaps the novel's most original and disturbing proposition: that evil is the inevitable shadow without which the light of good would not be light: that without evil there cannot be good; therefore that good and evil are dual constituents of the moral universe. In formulating this more explicitly, Bulgakov puts these words into the mouth of Woland:

*"You [Matthew the Levite] spoke your words as though you denied the very existence of shadows or of evil. Think, now: where would your good be if there were not evil, and what would the world look like without shadow? Shadows are thrown by people and things. There's the shadow of my sword, for instance. But shadows are also cast by trees and living beings. Do you want to strip the whole globe by removing every tree and every creature to satisfy your fantasy of a bare world? You're stupid."*³⁰

To accept this premise does not mean, however, that we can be indifferent to good and evil. If human consciousness, as the absolute paradigm of reality, is indissolubly compounded of these two opposed principles, then the struggle between them must be an ontological necessity;³¹ and since in order to exercise his will man must have the power of choice, he is free. Bulgakov in his novel is thus contending that our ultimate freedom, from which all choice stems and which is therefore the determinant of our being, is to choose between good and evil. Were evil finally to prevail (as it prevails, for instance, when Pilate capitulates to the High Priest in the struggle over Ieshua's death sentence), it would negate man's freedom of choice--and hence man's very being. Therefore if we are to opt for being--which is the *rational* choice--we must exert our will to seek good; this is Bulgakov's variant of Kant's Categorical Imperative. If we use our freedom to choose evil, any such choice is in the direction of non-being, hence in the direction of our own and (if we hold power) of other people's destruction.

Here we are at the very heart of the "Jerusalem" story in ***The Master and Margarita***. Like the biblical gospels, the narrative functions at more than one level. Like them it is a partial reconstruction of a series of events which may or may not have taken place in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius Caesar; at another level it is also, like the gospel versions of the Passion, a symbolic enactment of the clash between good and evil. But its fundamental divergence from the gospels lies in its philosophical premises: the characters in Bulgakov's story act out a version of the conflict based on his syncretistic view of good and evil.

Ieshua is good; Caiaphas is evil. For reasons which have nothing to do with justice and everything to do with short-term political expediency, Caiaphas blackmails Pilate into pardoning Barabbas, whom they both know to be guilty of sedition, and into convicting Ieshua, whom they both know to be innocent of any such charge.

Pilate is man; in his hands is the power to choose between good and evil, life and death. He is drawn to Ieshua and is convinced that he is not only innocent but has been cold-bloodedly framed by Caiaphas. Pilate hates Caiaphas, both as a morally corrupt priest and as an unscrupulous nationalist politician who would not hesitate to destroy Pilate--and who threatens to do so.

Faced with this inescapable choice, Pilate chooses--and out of cowardice (or in Sartrean terms, Bad Faith) he opts for evil by giving in to Caiaphas. Pilate's punishment is to *know* that when faced with the supreme moral dilemma of his lifetime he made the wrong choice. He stands for all men who similarly fail.³² But as Vinogradov points out, Bulgakov does not share Sartre's ultimate pessimism. Bulgakov modifies the rigor of his existential imperative by saying that as long as even a few individuals continue to fight the good fight, there will come a moment in time when a man of great vision, insight, and strength of will--The Master--will discern the whole truth of Pilate's act and his agony at having committed it. From an alliance between complete understanding (The Master) and selfless love (Margarita) will flow compassion, man's greatest weapon in the unceasing conflict between good and evil. Bulgakov's conception of the moral roles which he gives to the novel's two eponymous characters is neatly summarized by an aphorism coined by a modern American writer, John Updike: "As long as there is one upright man, as long as there is one compassionate woman, the contagion may spread and the scene is not desolate."³³

Notes

Matthew XXVI, XXVII. Bulgakov acknowledges his debt to the Evangelist by making him a character in the novel.

For example, in the short stories collected under the title *Diavoliada*, and in the novella *Rokovye Iaitsa* (1925).

In part, perhaps, a consequence of the fact that Bulgakov died before finishing his revision of the final draft.

For many valuable clues toward "de-coding" some of Bulgakov's concealed references to Soviet reality, see L. Rzhetskii "Pilatov grekh: o tainopise v romane M. Bulgakova "Master i Margarita,"" *Novyi zhurnal*, No. 90 (1968), pp. 69-80.

In an otherwise wide-ranging chapter that deals with *The Master and Margarita*, this question is ignored by A. Vulis in his *Sovetskii satiricheskii roman: evoliutsiia zhanra v 20-3-e gody* (Tashkent: Nauka, 1965), pp. 250-71.

See, for instance, L. Skorino, "Litsa bez karnavalnykh masok," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 6 (1968), pp. 24-42. In his bolder and more percipient study of the novel, V. Lakshin circles around the issue but does go so far as to call Ieshua "an image of spiritual freedom": see V. Lakshin, "O romane Master i Margarita," *Novyi mir*, No. 6 (1968), pp. 284-311.

D. J. Hunns, "A Soviet Acceptance of Biblical Jesus Christ?," *The Times* (London), 1 March 1975. There is no reference to this article in Ms. Proffer's otherwise admirable *International Bibliography of Works by and about Mikhail Bulgakov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976).

In addition to his evident debt to the evangelist St. Matthew, Bulgakov also borrowed from at least one of the non-canonical or apocryphal gospels, namely the so-called "Gospel of Nicodemus," also known as *Acta Pilata*. This work is Bulgakov's source for the names of the two thieves crucified alongside Ieshua Ha-Notri: Dismas and Gestas. In both of the English translations of *The Master and Margarita* (Ginsburg; Glenny), the name Gestas was incorrectly transliterated from the Russian as Hestas.

I. Vinogradov, "Zaveshchanie mastera," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 6 (1968), pp. 43-75. This

article was printed as the second of a series of three essays in the form of a "disputation" between two critics of differing views; Skorino (see above, fn. 6) presented her case, followed by Vinogradov's rebuttal, followed in turn by Skorino's final reply.

Ibid., pp. 54-55.

Note Vinogradov's oblique way of referring to Jean-Paul Sartre.

For biographical material on Shestov, see *Grani*, No. 45 (1960) and No. 46 (1961).

The universities and the bar (as well as many other public institutions of Imperial Russia) were subject to the *numerus clausus*, and the number of Jews admitted to them was very small.

For several years of which Shestov lived in Western Europe.

A bibliography of Shestov's works is to be found in Lev Shestov, *Potestas Clavium*, trans. and ed. Bernard Martin, Appendix II (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 406-16.

A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 34.

M. Bulgakov, "Avtobiografiia," in B. Brainina and A. Dmitrieva, eds. *Sovetskie pisateli: Avtobiografii* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966), p. 86.

A proposed edition of these lectures was announced in B. Martin's bibliography of Shestov (see fn. 15 above) in 1968, but the edition has not yet been published.

Bulgakov, "Avtobiografiia," p. 85.

Statement to the present writer by the novelist Viktor Nekrasov, fellow-Kievan and admirer of Bulgakov, who visited the latter's sister shortly before being obliged to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

L. Shestov, "Penultimate Words," in *Chekhov and other Essays* (trans. of *Nachala i kontsy*) (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 92.

M. Bulgakov,, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. M. Glenny (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 21-23.

J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant, essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 37-108.

Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, pp. 26-29.

Vinogradov, p. 56.

Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten: 2. Abschnitt*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902), IV (1911), 414-21.

M. Warnock, *Existentialism* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 5.

A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's TIMAEUS* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), pp. 678-79.

Faust: Der Tragödie erster Theil, in *Goethes Werke*, gen. ed. Sophie von Sachsen

(Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887-19??), XIV, 67.

Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 357.

If we suspect that here Bulgakov is very close to a Manichaean position, we are probably correct. In keeping with his habit of leaving clues scattered about in the narrative, Bulgakov makes Woland refer to "Herbert Aurilachs" (Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 14); Aurilachs was a Manichaean apologist.

The fate of eternal remorse which Bulgakov allots to Pilate has a close analogy in Sartre's play *Huis Clos* (Known in the U.S. edition as *No Exit*, in the British version as *In Camera*), where hell is an eternity of having to face, without evasion or escape, the consequences of one's wrong moral choices.

J. Updike, Book review in *The New Yorker*, 27 Dec. 1976.