



Darkness Visible: Bulgakov and Milton

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Professor A. N. Gorbunov of the Moscow State University argues that Bulgakov, while writing his last novel, may not specially have thought about Milton, but his poetry in spite of this could have remained in the Russian writer's memory as a kind of a cultural frame or an inter-text.

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At the present time critics have already written very much about Mikhail Bulgakov's novel "The Master and Margarita", and they have in detail analyzed various sources the writer used while working on the book. Milton's poetry is usually not mentioned among these sources. We should notice however that Bulgakov who was born in a professor's family and got a solid pre-Revolutionary education must have read Milton in his childhood or his youth. (Milton together with Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe was then in Russia among the most famous West European poets whom every lover of literature had to know).

Probably while writing his last novel Bulgakov did not specially think about Milton, but his poetry in spite of this could have remained in the Russian writer's memory as a kind of a cultural frame or an inter-text. Echoes of Milton's poetry could have also reached Bulgakov indirectly through West European or Russian Romantics. In any case there are interesting parallels between "The Master and Margarita" and Milton's epics some of which we shall try to discuss in this article.

These parallels do not only concern Woland, Bulgakov's version of Satan, though it is better to begin with him. Woland's likeness to Goethe's Mephistopheles catches the reader's attention at once – such is the author's purpose. It is emphasized already in the epigraph to the novel:

*...and so, who are
you after all?
- I am part of the power
which forever wills evil
and forever works good.*

As the commentators say Bulgakov has apparently translated these famous lines from Goethe's "Faust" into Russian himself.

L. M. Yanovskaya in her book on Bulgakov has shown the way the writer stresses this likeness in Woland's appearance and in some of his phrases playing also on the likeness with musical and fine arts images based on Goethe – Gunod's opera and M. M. Antokolsky's sculpture. At the same time the critic quite rightly notices: "the images of Goethe's Mephistopheles, Charles Gunod's Mephistopheles, Shalyapin's Mephistopheles, Antokolsky's Mephistopheles play an auxiliary role in the novel: they as it were show the faces in which Woland has already appeared in art; moments of his existence in the past; they are witnesses of our meetings with him. Witnesses that are, however, imperfect and in Bulgakov's interpretation inaccurate. For in reality Bulgakov's Woland does not resemble any of his literary predecessors". (1)

In other words, between all these Mephistopheles' and Woland there exists a certain dialectics of attraction – repulsion: from the old and familiar Bulgakov makes something new and personal. If we return to the epigraph, then Woland really "works good" in the novel. He saves the manuscript of the novel about Pontius Pilate and Jeshua Ha-Notsri and helps the Master and Margarita to unite. But all these actions have a different motivation than the actions of Goethe's Mephistopheles. In "Faust" Mephistopheles is depicted as a spirit of negation, a spirit of skepticism, who does not let the world, run by God, immerse in somnolence; he moves the world forward and so in the final analysis he becomes God's helper, the partner not only of Faust who always strives after light, but also of Goethe's God who is understood as a principle of absolute good. In this way Mephistopheles' evil is relative and becomes part of good. There is no such relation of good and evil in "The Master and Margarita".

Bulgakov has his own personal view of the world. Good and evil are very important to him, but in his interpretation they are quite different both from the New Testament and Goethe's Faust. We shall speak of this later in more detail. Now it is important to notice that Woland is an absolute master of the nightly, dark world of the novel where

he himself decides whom to punish and whom to pardon, though he is capable of appreciating the Master's disinterested devotion to his work and real love of the heroes. Woland resembles Milton's Satan in his enigmatic grandeur, his full might and his tyrannical power over his world, though the already mentioned dialectics of attraction – repulsion works here too. Using the alien to Bulgakov language of modern criticism, the writer deliberately or, may be, even without knowing it plays upon Miltonic discourse the way he played upon Goethe's discourse.

In one of the last chapters Levi Matvei who dislikes Woland calls him "Spirit of Evil and Sovereign of the Shadows". (2) Woland describes these words as "nonsense": "You pronounced your words as if you refuse to acknowledge the existence of either shadows or evil. But would you kindly ponder this question: What would your good do if evil didn't exist, and what would the earth look like if all the shadows disappeared?" (3) However Woland's answer which Levi Matvei calls "sophistical" leaves open the question what is evil the spirit of which Woland embodies and who are the shadows whose sovereign he is.

Let us remember that Milton's Satan was an absolute master of Hell as the domain of evil that broke with good, and that the creatures over whom the Arch-Enemy exercised his power were fallen angels whom after the fall were to join the sinners' souls in the form of shadows. We shall be so bold as to suppose that in "The Master and Margarita" the hell ruled by Woland is this side of the earth. It embraces the entire sublunary world, but primarily it is Moscow which Messire with his strange fantastical retinue visited one hot spring day.

Bulgakov who through his father was acquainted with many Kiev teachers of theology in his young days must have known the doctrine of evil as an imperfect, false being, imperfect and false because of its separation from the only source of good – God. It was formulated by St Augustine in his polemics with the Manicheans in his early works. Later on it was developed by Western scholastics, in particular, by Thomas Aquinas who taught that evil had no real being, but was only the absence of the positive, of what ought to be. We think that this doctrine found its peculiar echoes in "The Master and Margarita". In the novel it is Moscow with its Big Terror the allusions to which one constantly finds in the text and its "Godless" five year plans whose aim was to eliminate religion in the USSR which appears as this false, absurd being separated from the only source of good – God.

At the very beginning of the book Woland who has suddenly appeared out of the blue hears Berlioz explaining to Ivan Bezdomny that "Jesus as an individual had never existed on earth at all and all the stories about him were fabrications, myths of the most standard kind" (4) says:

"Was I mistaken when I heard you say that Jesus never existed on earth?"...

"No, you were not mistaken," Berlioz replied courteously. "That's exactly what I said."

"Ah, how interesting!" exclaimed the foreigner.

"What the devil is he after?" thought Bezdomny with a scowl.

"And do you agree with your friend?" queried the stranger, turning to Bezdomny on his right.

"A hundred percent!" confirmed Bezdomny who loved pretentious, figurative expressions.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed the uninvited discussant, and then, looking around furtively for some reason, and muffling his already low voice, he said, "Excuse my persistence, but I understand you to say that you don't believe in God either?" He made his eyes pop in mock fright and added, "I swear I won't tell anyone."

"That's right, we don't believe in God," answered Berlioz with a faint smile at the tourist's fear, "but we can talk about it freely and openly."

The foreigner leaned back on the bench and practically squealed with curiosity as he asked, "You mean you're atheists?!"

"Yes, we are," answered Berlioz with a smile, while Bezdomny thought with irritation, "He's sticking to us like glue, the foreign pest!"

"Oh, how delightful!" cried the amazed foreigner, turning to look first at one writer and then the other.

"In our country atheism comes as no surprise to anyone," said Berlioz in a polite and diplomatic way. "The majority of our population made a conscious decision long ago not to believe the fairy tales about God." (5)

In the country where the majority of the population has made a conscious decision long ago not to believe the fairy tales about God there is no, nor can there be any spiritual light. "Darkness visible" (The Miltonic image of hell) reigns in the absurd, satirical world of the Stalin Moscow where materialistic interests have completely subdued spiritual values. In this visible darkness the very existence of Muscovites reminds one of the familiar to Bulgakov from his childhood Old Testament picture of hell as a big yawning abyss where the souls of the dead, both sinners and righteous men, have a phantasmal existence without remembering God and without praying to Him. (The doctrine that God will destroy the gates of the abyss and free the souls of righteous men became known not long before Christ's advent).

The numerous characters of the Moscow part of the novel often mention devils, but they do not use God's name, or use it either as a kind of swearing or out of superstition. However they do not believe in devils either and rely entirely upon themselves. And Satan who has visited his private domain punishes this impudent self-reliance.

"They are like people anywhere, - Woland says about Muscovites, - They love money, but that has always been true... People love money, no matter what it is made of, leather, paper, bronze, or gold. And they are thoughtless... but, then again, sometimes mercy enters their hearts... they are ordinary people... On the whole, they remind me of their predecessors... only the housing shortage has had a bad effect on them..." (6)

The housing shortage is a special misfortune of the Soviet, Stalin Moscow. As for mercy, then pagans who do not know God are familiar with it, and as the reader learns later on it does not belong to Woland's "department". But Woland exposes love for money, selfishness, greed and other materialistic interests in his kingdom throughout the whole book showing their falsehood and absurdity, their essential non-being. Here Woland appears in the already familiar from "The Book of Job" role of Satan as a general prosecutor watching over the order on the earth.

The image of Moscow as a netherworld is present in a latent form already on the first page of the novel where the author describes an unusual for springtime heat when "the sun had left Moscow scorched to a crisp and was collapsing in a dry haze somewhere behind the Sadovoye Ring". (7) But the word hell itself sounds later in a chapter called "The Incident at Griboyedov". Here it is very appropriate as the MASSOLIT located at "Griboyedov House" in spite of its claims to unite "the engineers of human souls" is really the very center of Moscow anti-spirituality where the falseness of being manifests itself in all its satiric fullness. Everything is turned upside down in this place. Talent is recognized by the availability of ID cards which "a pale and bored citizeness in white socks and a white beret with a tassel" checks at the entrance, and so-called writers, possessed with "an ordinary desire to live like a human being", do all their best to get and use privileges allowed to them.

"At exactly midnight, something in the first room crashed, followed by ringing, shattering, and thumping sounds. And at once a thin male voice began to shout

despairingly to the music, "Hallelujah!" These were the sounds of the renowned Griboyedov jazz ensemble. Sweat-covered faces seemed to light up, the horses painted on the ceiling seemed to come to life, the light in the lamps seemed to glow brighter, and suddenly, as if freed from their chains, both rooms started to dance, with the veranda following suit.

Glukharev began dancing with poetess Tamara Polumesyats, Kvant began to dance, as did the novelist Zhukopov, with a movie actress in a yellow dress; Dragunsky, Cherdakchi, tiny Deniskin, and gigantic Bosun George all danced, and the architect Semeikina-Gall, a beauty, danced in the tight embrace of an unknown man in white burlap trousers. The regulars danced and so did their guests, Muscovites and out-ofowners too...

Bathed in sweat, the waiters carried foaming mugs of beer above the dancers' heads, yelling hoarsely and venomously, "Sorry, sir!" Somewhere, orders were being shouted through a megaphone, "One shashlyk! Two zubrovkas! Tripe polonaise!" The thin voice no longer sang but wailed, "Hallelujah!" The crash of the jazz band's cymbals was sometime muffled by the crash the dishes made as the dishwashers sent them down a slide into the kitchen. In a word, hell." (8)

These dances anticipate and at the same time parody Satan's Grand Ball. They begin exactly at midnight with a despairing shout "Hallelujah!", an exclamation which in Hebrew means "Praise ye the Lord" and is often used in Church services. This exclamation is here lowered, twisted into a wail and turned upside down as in a black mass. The people who "as if freed from their chains" dance in self-oblivion to the sounds of the jazz band are completely devoid of spiritual being, resemble puppets and are in a strange way similar to the shadows that will later come to Woland's ball. In reality almost all the inhabitants of Bulgakov's Moscow seem such shadows, little figures devoid of the third dimension. Each of them has his own, sometimes very striking satirical individuality, but taken together they look like puppets from a carnival show. The elements of carnival, grotesque and satire are inextricably mixed in them. That is why the reader does not feel any compassion to them and only laughs at their absurd difficulties and even at their imaginary or sometimes real misfortunes. The only exception is an episode at Satan's grand ball when the reader may shudder with Margarita. Woland seeing Berlioz's head lying on a dish says:

"Mikhail Alexandrovich," said Woland quietly to the head, and then the eyelids of the slain man opened, and Margarita shuddered when she saw the eyes on the dead face were alive and full of thought and suffering. "Everything came true, didn't it?" continued Woland, looking into the head's eyes. "Your head was cut off by a woman, the meeting never took place, and I'm living in your apartment. That is a fact. And a fact is the most stubborn thing in the world. But now we're interested in facts-to-be, rather than this already accomplished fact. You were always an avid proponent of the theory that after his head is cut off, a man's life comes to an end, he turns to dust, and departs into non-being. I have the pleasure of informing you in the presence of my guests – although they actually serve as proof of a different theory altogether – that your theory is both incisive and sound. There is even a theory that says that to each man it will be given according to his beliefs. May it be so! You are departing into non-being, and, from the goblet into which you are being transformed, I will have the pleasure of drinking a toast to being!" (9)

Ex nihil nihil est. Berlioz who believed in non-being is turned into non-being. However, is Woland's punishment so cruel? Many Buddhists dream of escaping from the vicious circle of reincarnations exactly by turning into non-being. And then is not Berlioz's non-being the lower form of peace which the tired Master seeks? Appearing in Stalin Moscow Woland's retainers – Korovyov-Fagot, Azazello, Cat Behemoth and beautiful Hella with a scar on her throat – get used to the new surroundings very quickly and start feeling at

home. But they are indeed at home and can amuse themselves as they like. This is what happened to Milton's fallen angels of "Paradise Lost" when they found themselves in hell and got used to it. There "each his several way / Pursues, as inclination or sad choice / Leads him..."

*Part on the Plain, or in the Air sublime
Upon the wing, or in swift Race contend,
As at th' Olympian Games or Pythian fields...
Others with vast Typhoean rage more fell
Rend up both Rocks and Hills, and ride the Air
In whirlwind; Hell scarce holds the wilde uproar...*

The amusements of Woland's suite are, of course, very different from the epic games of Milton's fallen spirits and correspond to the time and place of the Moscow part of the novel. With the help of all kinds of devilish tricks and transformations Woland's retainers mock Muscovites revealing the essential paltriness of their base interests. A very good example of it is a performance of black magic at the Variety Theatre when the merry company turns a deck of cards into a shower of rubles (the money will become paper later on), tears off and puts in its proper place the head of the master of ceremonies and opens a store for ladies (the dresses bought there will disappear into the air after the performance). There are many such scurvy tricks on the pages of the novel, and most of them serve the same purpose as the black magic performance. In all these episodes the phantasmagoria sprouts into the Moscow mode of life, transforms it and shows its grotesque absurdity.

Like Satan in "Paradise Lost", Woland also has his magic palace. In Milton's poem it is a huge building risen out of the earth "like an Exhalation" and looking like "a Temple, where Pilasters round / Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid / With Golden Architrave":

*Th' ascending pile
Stood fixt her stately highth, and straight the doers
Op'ning thir brazen foulds discover wide
Within, her ample spaces, o're the smooth
And level pavement: from the arched roof
Pendant by subtle Magic many a row
Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets fed
With Naphta and Assphaltus yielded light
As from a sky.*

Woland's palace which also appears "by subtle Magic" in apartment 50 on Sadovoye Ring has its own pillars, halls and starry lamps, a tropical forest with redbreasted, green-tailed parrots clung to liana vines, walls of red, pink and milky-white roses, champagne fountains and monstrously large pools. But the decoration of the palace, described not without the influence of E.T. A. Hoffman's short story "The Golden Pot", (10) is again far from Milton's classical models and nearer the place and time of the Moscow part of the novel. In the very luxuriousness of Woland's ball there is something excessive, a little tasteless, smelling of the Soviet New Economic Policy of the early twenties and so ironically lowered, estranged, which would have been absolutely impossible for Milton.

And, finally, both Milton and Bulgakov describe a solemn procession, a parade of the inhabitants of hell. In "Paradise Lost" it is a parade of the fallen angels who have the names of pagan gods – their list is stylized in the epic manner imitating the list of ships in Homer's "Iliad":

*Say, Muse, thir Names then known, who first, who last,
Rous'd from the slumber, on that fiery Couch,
At thir great Emperors call, as next in worth*

*Came singly where he stood on the bare strand,
While the promiscuous croud stood yet aloof?*

The guests at Satan's grand ball are people, or shadows who were once people and now are raised from dust for one night of merriment in the whole year. What in Milton's poem catches the imagination by its epic grandeur in Bulgakov's novel is lowered in a comic manner, turned into "one huge blur" (a huge pancake in the original):

"Neither Gaius Caesar Caligula, nor Messalina aroused Margarita's interest now, nor did any of the other assorted kings, dukes, cavaliers, suicides, poisoners, gallow birds and procuresses, jailers and cardsharps, executioners, informers, traitors, madmen, detectives, corrupters of youth. Their names all got jumbled in her head, their faces melted into one huge blur, only one face lingered tormentingly in her memory, the face of Malyuta Skuratov, framed by a truly fiery-red beard". (11)

Like the Stalin Moscow inhabitants, Woland's guests are two-dimensional and look like puppets. But then they are shadows in the proper sense of the word. So the borders of the netherworld and the earth are blurred and fused in one fantastic dimension. Hell reigns both here and there.

In this "darkness visible" only the main characters, The Master and Margarita, seem three-dimensional "real" people. From all other Moscow citizens the Master is marked out by his total integrity and whole-hearted devotion to his calling. The timeserving and preoccupation with material interests which characterize all others are absolutely alien to him, and that is why he is so lonely and defenseless in Bulgakov's Moscow. The habitués of "Griboyedov House" rejected and made a laughing-stock of him. And how could they at the height of "godless five year plans" accept his novel about Pontius Pilate that put the problems of spiritual being in the very center of the narrative? Critics like Latunsky and Ariman and the writer Mstislav Lavrovich fulminated against the novel in the articles that had typical for the time titles "An Enemy under the Editor's Wing" or "A Militant Old Believer" proposing "to strike a blow against Pilatism". All this had fatal consequences for the Master. He was left without any means of support, gave way to fear (such articles were usually followed by an arrest at that time), and fell ill with a mental disease. Even love could not save him then, and he burned the manuscript of his novel. After this evidently followed a real arrest and placing him in a psychiatric hospital. In Bulgakov's Moscow that lives by purely material interests there is really no place for the Master. (In one of the drafts for the novel not only the flat on Sadovoye Ring, the Master's basement apartment, Torgsin shop and "Griboyedov House", but the whole city was to be burned in purifying flames).

As for Margarita she is marked out by her total devotion to her feeling for the Master. I. L. Galinskaya saw in the heroine the incarnation of eternal femininity the idea of which, in her opinion, went back to G. Skovoroda and V. Solovyev. (12) (Let us remember that at the end of Goethe's "Faust" Gretchen leading the hero into the realm of light became such an incarnation too.) Bulgakov's Margarita, however, rather embodies earthly femininity which combines sensuality, mercy and selfless love. In this respect she reminds us more of the original mother of mankind, Eve, and Milton's Eve in particular. But even more - of Dante's Francesca whose love is stronger than death. However if Francesca and Paolo make one inseparable whole even in hell, the Master and Margarita are separated in the "darkness visible" of Moscow life. Like Dante's characters they will be united only after death.

The omnipotent in this sublunary world Woland, who like a true satirist opens the grotesque absurdity of Moscow life, says that mercy is not "the business of his department". But he has an artistic flair and is able to recognize real art and real love - traits which are quite alien to Milton's Satan, but very close to his numerous literary transformations of the XIX century. That is why Woland with a benefactor's large

gesture saves the Master's burnt manuscript and helps the lovers to find each other. However there is something of a witch in Margarita, and the Master in his turn does not ask God's help, but only wishes he met Satan whom he recognized in Woland from Ivan Bezdomny's account. The meeting takes place later on, and in this context Woland's reward seems quite natural.

Parallels with Milton can be found also in the so called ancient or rather Hebrew, or New-Testament, part of the book. It is quite understandable as the New-Testament part is not an inserted novella, but a continuation and a development of the Moscow part narrative. In any case the same "darkness visible" covers Yershalaim as it covers Moscow, and the same, or similar, totalitarian power rules both capitals. But what in Moscow was depicted through a prism of satirical grotesque in Yershalaim is shown directly, without any ambiguity. Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, is a cruel tyrant who inspires fear to all around him. (If there are any allusions to Stalin in the novel one must look for them here, in the character of Pilate). In Judea there is an excellent secret police with an extremely skillful Afranius at its head, and there are their own informers and agents provocateurs (Judas). In V. Y. Lakshin's words, watching a single combat between Pontius Pilate and the vagrant philosopher called Yeshua Ha-Notsri and witnessing his terrible execution later on we find ourselves amid the same problems of good and evil, impotence and power of human will with which the author was preoccupied in his narrative of Woland's adventures in Moscow. (13)

However the main parallel with Milton is realized in the figure of Yeshua Ha-Notsri. Bulgakov evidently used this Aramaic form of Jesus' name specially to oppose his hero to the New Testament Jesus of Nazareth, because as in Milton's epics Yeshua in the novel is different from his prototype in the Gospels.

In "Paradise Lost" the Messiah (the second Hypostasis in the bosom of the Holy Trinity) obviously plays a subordinate role in comparison with God the Father while in "Paradise Regained" Christ does not remember his glory in heaven and makes sure of his messianic calling only at the end of the poem when he has overcome his temptations in the wilderness. Such an attitude was theoretically grounded in Milton's long Latin treatise "De Doctrina Christiana" where many scholars see traces of the Arian heresy.

Bulgakov goes further than Milton who like all Protestants worshiped the word of the Bible. In "The Master and Margarita" the New Testament evidence is called into doubt. Bulgakov's Yeshua says about Levi Matvei: "There's someone who follows, follows me around everywhere, always writing on a goatskin parchment. And once I happened to see the parchment and was aghast. Absolutely nothing that was written there did I ever say. I begged him, 'For God's sake burn your parchment!' But he snapped it out of my hand and ran away". (14) And more: "Those good people... are ignorant and have muddled what I said. In fact, I'm beginning to fear that this confusion will go on for a long time. And all because he writes down what I said incorrectly." (15)

Unlike the New Testament Jesus Christ whose genealogy goes back to King David confirming his messianic calling, whose parents we know and whose brothers and sisters are mentioned in the Gospels, Yeshua is absolutely alone. When Pilate asks him: "Who are you by birth?" Yeshua answers: "I don't know exactly...I don't remember my parents. I've been told that my father was a Syrian..." (16) Yeshua has no disciples. He is only followed by Levi Matvei. With him Yeshua enters Yershalaim by foot on the eve of his crucifixion and nobody greets him as a Messiah. Like the Master, Yeshua is not only alone; he is defenseless and cannot accept compromises. But if the Master does not want to forgo the freedom of his art, Yeshua upholds spiritual truth.

Leaving aside the well-known details of the Gospels narrative, Bulgakov shows Yeshua as a man who seems not to know anything about his Messianic calling. Yeshua is a vagrant philosopher akin to prophets who ceased appearing in Judea for five centuries and for

whom the Jews waited so eagerly at that difficult moment of their history. Yeshua's teaching so far as we can judge about it from the novel mainly deals with eschatological problems. Thus Yeshua states that "temple of the old faith will fall and that a new temple of truth will be created". (17) There was nothing really new in it. The prophets spoke about it - for example, Ezekiel who described the vision of a new temple where God's glory would return and where God would dwell forever.

Yeshua also teaches that "every kind of power is a form of violence against people and that there will come a time when neither the power of Caesars, nor any other kind of power will exist. Man will enter the kingdom of truth and justice, where no such power will be necessary." (18) These words cannot really be called a sermon of Christian anarchism as some critics believe. (19) Yeshua here again speaks of the apocalyptic kingdom which is "not of this world". Isaiah told of such a kingdom already in the VIII century b. c. when he prophesied the time when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (XI, 6). In such a kingdom neither the power of Caesars nor any other kind of power is, indeed, necessary. But, of course, Yeshua's words can be easily given a political sense and treated as an insult to Emperor Tiberius. That is what frightens Pilate so much and predetermines Yeshua's death.

One can trace an obvious connection with The New Testament only in the ethical side of Yeshua's teaching, in his statement that "there are no evil people in the world" and that even the centurion Mark, whom they call the Ratkiller, a cold and convinced executioner, "would change drastically" if Yeshua "could just talk to him". In these words one can hear distinct echoes of Christ's Sermon on the Mount abolishing the Old Testament lex talionis ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"): "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mathew, V, 44). But it is ethics and not dogma tics. In Yeshua's words there is absolutely no connection with the idea that he is the long expected Messiah who has come to take the sins of the world on him and by his death expiate them. It is very difficult to see God-Man in Yeshua.

Nonetheless in the single combat of the omnipotent procurator and the defenseless vagrant philosopher it is the latter who gains victory. For, indeed, God' power "is made perfect in weakness".

Pontius Pilate is a skeptic. He reasons rather in concrete than in abstract categories. As in the Gospels the procurator asks: "What is truth?" (John, XVIII, 38). But in the Gospels Christ himself embodies the truth ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John, XIV, 6) which makes people free ("the truth will make you free", John, VIII, 32). That is why Jesus does not answer the procurator - the truth stands before him. In the novel Yeshua answering Pilate in the manner of the procurator goes from the general to the concrete:

"The truth is, first of all, that your head aches, so badly, in fact, that you're having fainthearted thoughts about death. Not only are you too weak to talk to me, but you're even having trouble looking at me. That I, at this moment, am your unwilling executioner upsets me. You can't think about anything and the only thing you want is to call your dog, the only creature, it seems, to whom you are attached. But your suffering will soon end, and your headache will pass." (20)

The headache, indeed, soon passes, and Pilate recognizes in Yeshua "a great physician". But not the Messiah. The feeling of other reality comes to Pilate only after Yeshua's crucifixion when the sleeping procurator addresses the vagrant philosopher, who seems to have remained alive, the words of the Gospels wise criminal: "Yes, please, don't forget, remember me, the son of an astrologer-king," implored Pilate in his sleep. And when the pauper from En-Sarid, who was walking beside him, gave him a nod of assent, the cruel procurator of Judea wept and laughed with joy in his sleep." (21)

Pilate's dream became possible because of the miracle that Yeshua had performed while still alive. He managed to make the lonely, embittered and absolutely disappointed in people Hegemon taste love. This love burst out in sleep when all the obstacles stopped existing and the cruel procurator wept and laughed with joy. It is true that for Pilate, who lived in "darkness visible" and in many respects embodied this darkness, cowardice – "the most terrible sin" – proved stronger than his love. The procurator betrayed his love and could not save Yeshua. But remorse will torture Pilate all his life, and all his life and after his death when the moon is full and he is tormented by insomnia he will feel shame and remorse, and hate his immortality and unprecedented fame ("When people remember me, they will immediately remember you too!").

There is one more Miltonic discourse in the novel. It is a motif of flight. In fact there are two flights in "The Master and Margarita". The first of them is Margarita's joyous flight over the spring earth which marks her liberation from the captivity of her family life and her immersion into the fantastical world of freedom ("Invisible and free!"):

"Margarita bent the bristle end of her broom downward, so that the tail end rose toward the rear, and after drastically reducing her speed, she headed down to the ground. This downward slide, as if on an airborne toboggan, gave Margarita an intense thrill. The earth rose up to meet her, and out of the formless, once black mass emerged the mysteries and charm of the earth during a moonlight flight. The earth was moving toward her, and Margarita was already bathed in the scent of the greening forests. She was flying over the very mists of a dewy meadow, then over a pond. A chorus of frogs sang beneath Margarita, and from somewhere in the distance came the inexplicably heart-rending wail of a train." (22)

Such a flight reminds one of Gogol's characters who came into contact with evil ones (blacksmith Vakula and Khoma Brutus) and of their flights over the earth. The second flight is quite different. It is the heroes' last flight with Woland and his retainers whose appearance has drastically changed. This time they fly on black apocalyptic horses in the outer space as Milton's Satan sometime swam spreading "his Sail-broad Vannes" through a sea of chaos:

*Illimitable Ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,
And time and place are lost; where eldest Night
And Chaos, Ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternal Anarchie, amidst the noise
Of endless wars...*

With both Milton and Bulgakov it is a destiny making flight. Satan by crossing the ocean of chaos and finally getting to the earth, "hanging in a golden Chain / This pendant world" which looked "in bigness as a Starr / Of smallest Magnitude close by the Moon", can realize his perfidious plan. Bulgakov's heroes by flying through the outer space will find eternal peace.

In the office for the dead which Bulgakov knew from his early childhood we can hear the following words: "Heavenly kingdom, eternal peace". In the Christian, and especially Russian Orthodox, view these notions are indivisible. One can find eternal peace only in the heavenly kingdom "where there is no illness, nor sorrow, nor sighs, but endless life". But Bulgakov pulls these notions apart, and the Master is given eternal peace without getting into the heavenly kingdom. Addressing Woland Levi Matvei says:

*"He has read the Master's work," began Levi Matvei, "and asks that you take the Master with you and grant him peace. Is that so difficult for you to do, Spirit of Evil?"
"Nothing is difficult for me to do", replied Woland, "as you well know".*

He was silent for a moment and then added, "But why aren't you taking him with you to the light?"

"He has not earned light, he has earned peace", said Levi in a sad voice. (23)

Why has the Master not earned light and what kind of peace is granted to him? Critics have put forward different opinions on this score. Thus L. M. Yanovskaya thinks that the peace which the tired Master is granted is akin to a sleep as in Lermontov's famous poem where the lyrical hero in his eternal sleep breaths quietly while a sweet voice sings him of love and a green oak-tree shakes its leaves over his grave. 24 But using Hamlet's words no one knows "in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil".

We think that the critics who write of an active kind of peace granted to the Master are closer to truth. Let us remember that Woland says that in his abode the Master will write by candlelight with a quill pen or sit over a retort in the hope of creating a new homunculus. Margarita pictures their eternal home in a different way:

"Listen to the silence... Listen and take pleasure in what you were not given in life – quiet. Look, there up ahead is your eternal home, which you've been given as a reward. I can see the Venetian window and the grape-vine curling up the roof. There is your home, your eternal home. I know that in the evenings people you like will come to see you, people who interest you and who will not upset you. They will play for you, sing for you, and you will see how the room looks in candlelight. You will fall asleep with your grimy eternal cap on your head, you will fall asleep with a smile on your lips. Sleep will strengthen you, you will begin to reason wisely. And you will never be able to chase me away. I will guard your sleep". (25)

In fact both Woland and Margarita speak about the same. Unlike Faust and Wagner, who actually created the homunculus, the Master is not a scientist, but an artist, and his retort is his writer's work. Then silence in his eternal home is the silence of free creation and the guests who will visit the Master are probably the characters of his books.

The Master's eternal refuge is not in the kingdom of light, but it is out of the reach of darkness, or rather on its borders. Approaching their eternal home the heroes see "the promised dawn" which begins "immediately, right after midnight moon".

But what kind of place is it? One may agree with the critics who identify it with the first circle of hell in Dante's "Divine Comedy", with the Limbo, where the souls of the non-baptized infants and of righteous pagans stay without feeling any tortures, but without knowing the true light:

*Here, as mine ear could note, no plaint was heard
Except of sighs, that made th'eternal air
Tremble, not caus'd by tortures, but from grief
Felt by those multitudes, many and vast,
Of men, women, and infants.
(translated by H. F. Cary)*

But it is here that Dante is greeted by four great poets of ancient time: Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan. Virgil's abode is here too. If it is so and if the Master finds himself in the Limbo where his guests may be these poets, he has a very choice company.

Nonetheless the sighs caused by grief that Dante hears in the Limbo may also be heard in the Master's refuge. For from now on he will always write into the absolute darkness of his desk, and no one, except Margarita, will be able to appreciate what he has written.

Why the Master has not earned the entrance to the kingdom of light where Dante goes in the last part of "The Divine Comedy"? M. O. Chudakova thinks that the reason is "the eternal atonement of someone who started...seeking Satan's help and thus cast in his lot with diabolic forces".²⁶ This cannot be denied. It is also wellknown that the Master is an autobiographical figure which reflected Bulgakov's thoughts about himself and his fate. Perhaps the writer who had been brought up in the strictly Orthodox tradition, but later left the Church, in the difficult period of writing his last novel felt unworthy of the heavenly kingdom and dreamt only of peace. It is also worth considering that in the novel there are two characters who write their books about Yeshua – the Master and Levi Matvei. Unlike the Master, Levi Matvei, who allegedly distorted Yeshua's image, nonetheless earned the kingdom of light. May be the point is *how* the Master and Levi Matvei saw Yeshua. If in Mathew's Gospel Jesus was unequivocally shown as God-Man, the Messiah who came to save the world, the Master depicted him rather as a man-god. This could have also affected the fate of the Master who "guessed" so much, but by no means all.

From the conversation of Woland and Levi Matvei one can gather the impression that there is a large abyss between the kingdom of light and the sublunary world and that both these "departments" live their own life communicating with the help of messengers. Such notions of the world were not original. They appeared very early, soon after the origin of Christianity. They were developed by Gnostics and later by Albigenses. These views were based on dualism and expressed with the help of myths and philosophic speculations where the ideas of Christianity and Judaism, the teachings of Platonism, Pythagoreans, Zoroastrianism and primitive culture were curiously mixed up. Gnostics believed in the existence of two supreme godheads, the god of light and good who created the invisible world, and the god of darkness and evil who created the visible world. According to another version evil was created by Lucifer, God's firstborn child, and later Lucifer by an act of free will created the visible world and even human body, though he could not give the spirit of life to it.

Hence the two hostile worlds – the world of spirit and the world of flesh. Some critics have already written about the connection of the novel with Gnostic ideas, in particular I. L. Galinskaya, who analyzed various hypothetical allusions to Albigensianism and a possible influence of Grigory Skovoroda's dualistic philosophy on the writer.²⁷ However the question to what extent dualism determined the author's views in the novel remains open. Did God really, using Job's words, "hid His face" giving "the earth into the hands of the wicked", both in the Stalin Moscow and by analogy in Yershalaim? We think it is not really so. The rays of light in fact break through the "darkness visible" of Moscow life. Without them the mercy of the Variety Theater spectators and especially of Margarita (towards the boy who woke up in the house where Latunsky had an apartment, towards Frieda and later towards Pilate) would have been impossible. For mercy "does not belong" to Woland's "department".

Without these rays the love of the main characters would have been impossible either. Nor the Master's art, where light shines even if with reflected rays. And, in the end, even the request with which Yeshua's messenger Levi Matvei comes to Woland is equal to an order.

But there is another light in the novel – the light of poetic inspiration. (One more and this time the last Miltonic discourse). The blind poet of "Paradise Lost" wrote about it, thinking it the gift of heaven:

*So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.*

With the help of such light Bulgakov penetrated the "darkness visible" of Moscow and Yershalaim. The rays of this light shine on the pages Milton's epics and Bulgakov's novel. And it is this celestial light of inspiration that ensures the vertical dimension of "Paradise Lost" and "The Master and Margarita" which both have divine and human planes of narrative and lets Milton and Bulgakov to pursue "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme".

Notes

- 1 Yanovskaya L. M. Bulgakov's Way in Literature, Moscow, 1983, p. 277.
- 2 Bulgakov Mikhail. The Master and Margarita, translated by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor, Ardis, 1995, p. 305. All further quotations are from this edition.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 ibid, p.5.
- 5 ibid., p. 7.
- 6 Ibid., p.104.
- 7 ibid., p.3.
- 8 ibid., p.50.
- 9 ibid., p.233.
- 10 Galinskaya I. L. The Enigma of Well-Known Books, Moscow, 1986, p.89.
- 11 Mikhail Bulgakov, op. cit., p. 230.
- 12 Galinskaya I. L., op. cit., p.85.
- 13 Lakshin V. Y. M. Bulgakov's Novel "The Master and Margarita" // Novy Mir, 1968, 6, p. 296.
- 14 Bulgakov M., op. cit., p.16.
- 15 op. cit., p. 16.
- 16 A. Zerkalov thinks that the detail that Yeshua's father was from Syria, then a Roman province where Aramaic was spoken and where were many Jewish settlements (Arabs did not exist at that time), Bulgakov took from the Talmud. If it is really so then Bulgakov does not share the book's skeptical attitude to Christ. See Zerkalov A. The Gospel from Mikhail Bulgakov, Ann Arbor, 1984, p. 82.
- 17 Bulgakov M., op. cit., p.17.
- 18 ibid., p.22.
- 19 Milne L. M. The Master and Margarita: A Comedy of Victory, Birmingham, 1977, p.8.
- 20 Bulgakov M., op. cit., p.17.
- 21 ibid., p.272.
- 22 ibid., p. 207.
- 23 Ibid., p.305.
- 24 Yanovskaya L. M., op. cit., p.314.
- 25 Bulgakov M., op. cit., p. 325.
- 26 Chudakova M. O. Mikhail Bulgakov's Life, Moscow, 1988, p.382.
- 27 Galinskaya I. L., op. cit., passim.