



**Of Dreams, Devils, Irrationality,  
and The Master and Margarita**  
Judith M. Mills

In this essay, Mills explores traditional Russian literary elements as well as modern psychoanalytic dream theory in *The Master and Margarita*. Published in *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, pp. 303-27. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989

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The Master and Margarita

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**Webmaster**

Jan Vanhellemont  
Klein Begijnhof 6  
B-3000 Leuven

+3216583866  
+32475260793

A literary work establishes its place within a tradition and assumes its unique character when traditional devices or motifs are put to new or idiosyncratic use. *The Master and Margarita*<sup>1</sup> is both traditional and highly unique. It draws copiously from the Russian literary tradition: the title story reiterates the strong woman/weak or superfluous hero theme that was so fully developed in the nineteenth century; the first person narrator intrudes repeatedly, recalling the novel's beginnings and Pushkin's style; in unmistakably Gogolian fashion bureaucrats' foibles are unmasked; and, the double rears its heads once again.

Bulgakov uses the dreams and hallucinations that have fulfilled a variety of narrative objectives throughout Russian and world literature. Lermontov's Demon reappears as obvious master of earthly matters. In one or another of their guises, Russian literature has had an abiding interest in the irrational and the fantastic. Both are central to this novel. Like the overwhelming majority of significant Russian works, *The Master and Margarita* is bound to its social context, grapples with it, and comments upon it.

The novel's title story is its most untampered with, and so its most assuring traditional, element. It is the level of the novel most likely to evoke the reader's initial interest and sympathy, but it is the least interesting of Bulgakov's adaptations. Similarly the treatment of the bureaucrats sets a traditional motif in a new time period, but functions primarily to forge links with a long standing and very familiar convention.

More fruitful territory in the search for Bulgakov's unique contributions to the Russian tradition is his use of the dream, the devil, and the irrational. Focusing on the relationships of these three prompts a reading of the novel that may be controversial but also intriguing and, I hope, compelling for the uniqueness and for the conceptual unity it reveals.

*The Master and Margarita* with its mix of stylistic tones, plots, and settings, seems both complex and unstrung. One answer, the most facile, to the charge that the novel lacks cohesion is that the narrator who reveals himself so engagingly from time to time, is the creator in total control of his fictional work. He is writing a story and makes no pretensions to realism. Another answer is that by interpreting the novel as a story propelled by a dream much light can be thrown on its underlying cohesion and its meaning.

The dream reveals the subconscious struggle of one character and, by analogy, of the entire society, to come to conscious terms with a new reality. Dream analysis reveals Bulgakov's attempt to embody in novel form his examination of the social psychology of a critical period in Soviet history.

## Intimations of a Dream

The novel makes frequent reference to dreams, to hallucinations, to losing and regaining consciousness, and to oddities that are dream-like. The poet Ivan passes in and out of consciousness often enough to leave the reader wondering when the dream-state begins and ends. Ivan may be dreaming continually, his waking in itself part of the dream proper.

When the first installment of the Pilate story ends, Ivan passes his hand over his face as if he is just regaining consciousness. This is the first hint that Ivan may be dreaming and it is the first of a number of similar references. Later, when Ivan is a troubled inmate in the sanitarium, he receives injections that send him into a calm and peaceful euphoria. When the Master emerges to talk with him for the first time, he is about to sleep. The Golgotha story is presented as Ivan's dream. The novel closes with another phase of that dream in which the Pilate story is replayed and brought to its conclusion.

Other characters also hallucinate or dream: the doorman at Griboedov House (481-82/72), Pilate (445/28), Likhodeev, whose chapter (7) opens with a hangover and ends with his loss

of consciousness.

A number of the incidents have a dream-like quality. Ivan first interrupts a lady's bath, then takes a swim in the Moscow River, and then, to the accompaniment of strains from *Eugene Onegin* that follow him wherever he goes, he treks across Moscow in his underwear (Chapter 4). Similarly Likhodeev lands in Yalta in his nightshirt (521/118). Clothing that vanishes (568/169-70), people who sing unwillingly in chorus (607-08/205-06), a dead man who sends invitations to his own funeral (612/210)--all of these reflect the embarrassments, lack of control, and jumble of sequencing associated with dreams. And, when the luxuriously furnished, well equipped and progressive asylum in which Ivan finds himself is measured against Soviet reality of the late 20s and early 30s, it seems decidedly unreal, fanciful and a product of wishful dreaming.

If one is attentive to existing critical readings of the novel, it is reasonable to come to the conclusion that the novel employs both displacement and condensation, each characteristic of dreams<sup>2</sup>. Displacement, defined as "the rapid transfer of energy from one idea to another" (Altman 1969: 12), is evidently a factor if one accepts the analyses of time and motif correspondences attributed to the depictions of Moscow and Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The critical literature also speculates that Jerusalem is a surrogate for Moscow, with all the cross-referencing of political and social commentary that this implies.<sup>4</sup>

Condensation is the process that produces the composite figures in mythology and also in dreams (Altman: 10). The most striking example in the novel is Woland, who bears features of Mephistopheles, but who is also seen by some readers as a glorified version of Stalin.<sup>5</sup> Instances of condensation in the form of "doubles" multiply as my analysis unfolds.

Beyond the novel's references to dreaming, the events that are dream-like and the devices that are characteristic of dreams, the opening incidents imply that the dream plays a key structural role. These early incidents can be read as a variation of the medieval dream vision.<sup>6</sup> In both the medieval dream vision and in the novel, a poet, overtly in a dream in the former and perhaps in a dream in the latter, sets out on a quest. The medieval poet seeks love. The poet Ivan seeks Woland. In the modern version the spring morning of the medieval poet's dream becomes an oppressively hot spring evening, but in each case the setting is in nature: birds, trees and flowers in the one and linden trees at Patriarchs' Ponds in the other.

The poet in the medieval vision follows a river to a walled garden which bars all unpleasantries that might intrude upon an ideal love. Ivan, too, in his frenzied search for Woland is drawn to a river. But here it is not the clear and lucid stream that winds unfailingly to the sought after garden but the oil-slicked Moscow. Wet and with only his underwear for cover, Ivan emerges from it to go to the writers' haven, Griboedov House, which bars all but card-carrying members of MASSOLIT. Griboedov's is, however, a false garden. Besieged by his mania to find Woland and dressed in so unseemly a fashion, Ivan is quickly banished from this inner sanctum and is whisked off to another, the psychiatric clinic. There he breaches the wall and tells his story about Woland to the doctor, assuring his detention there. He is promised relief from his turmoil and receives the first of a series of injections that will bring him peace and clarity of vision.

The idyllic setting of the dream vision now appears with no distortions. Ivan is safely ensconced in the asylum. He looks out on a gay spring wood across a river which sparkles in the midday sun. Just as the medieval poet learns the rules he must follow to achieve his love once he is safely in the garden, so Ivan through the figure of the Master will not only find the object of his search--Woland, but he will begin the process of learning to live with the insights he gains.

As I have hinted in the foregoing discussion, it is possible to look at the entire novel as a

dream--the poet Ivan's dream--of which all these other elements are a part and in which all of the other characters are actors. Taking that as the premise upon which the remaining analysis hinges, the novel becomes Ivan's story, the tale of how he comes to deal with creativity, solves the problem of coping with Stalinist society, reconciles himself to reality which has been given a new twist under a new regime, and then works out a self-justification of his accommodation: at the end of the novel Ivan has stopped writing poetry and has become an historian and philosopher, by definition in that period one of the pillars upon which the new order builds its credibility.

## The Dream's Nature

At the novel's opening Ivan and the editor Berlioz meet on a hot hazy summer evening in Moscow at a deserted Patriarchs' Ponds in an atmosphere that may produce mirages or induce one to doze under the shade of the cooling linden trees. Woland appears. He challenges Berlioz's "rational" explanation of the mythic nature of the Gospels and the argument that Jesus never existed, and then he tells the first installment of the Jerusalem story.

It is only at the end of that story segment, ostensibly told by Woland, that Bulgakov first makes direct reference to a dream. It is then that Ivan rubs his hand over his face like a man who has just regained consciousness and realizes it has grown dark (459/44). Is Ivan finishing a dream? If so, when did it begin? As Woland started the story? Or, perhaps, well before that? Is he really at Patriarchs' Ponds with Berlioz or is Berlioz, too, part of the dream? There is no sure answer to these questions.

By literary convention an awakening can signify the start of a dream as well as the end. In this case it may well signify only another stage of a dream the beginning of which Bulgakov has not chosen to reveal to the reader.

What is the significance of Ivan's dream? Dreams have a variety of uses as literary devices and equally as many functions as human experiences. "Dreams may give expression to ineluctable truths, to philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions &" (Jung 1933: 12-13) and they may help the individual experiencing them to achieve psychic equilibrium.<sup>7</sup> They may also synthesize experience and seek solutions to the problems of conscious experience.<sup>8</sup>

Ivan's dream functions in all of those ways for him.<sup>9</sup> As the novel opens, he is confronted with some very disturbing problems, the most obvious being, stated broadly--how to give full reign to his creativity in a setting hostile to its insights, and stated more narrowly--how to write about the roots of religion in such a way as to please the chairman of the literary association and presumably then to pass the censorship. His choice, defaming Jesus rather than denying his existence, does not meet with Berlioz's approval. This is the conflict that troubles Ivan initially and produces the agitated psychological state that motivates his dream.

The dream, however, takes no easy route to its final conclusion. Instead, as Jungians assert dreams can do, it leads his subconscious deeper into philosophical inquiry, revealing more problems as it unfolds. As evidenced in Ivan's recurrent troubled dreams on the nights of the full moon, it leaves his psyche to struggle painfully again and again for the final solution.

In this aspect, Ivan's dream can be treated as a variant of the dream vision which we can designate the creative dream vision and which has a twentieth century Russian precedent in Zamiatin.<sup>10</sup>

I choose the designation creative dream vision because what Ivan experiences is a special insight that comes to him in dream-form, and that dream is generated by the problems

confronting an individual engaged in the creative process. The creative dream vision as developed by Bulgakov, and by Zamiatin before him, takes as premises that creativity is essentially an irrational process, not controllable either by the writer or by external regulations and regulators, and that the irrational impulse disrupts the equilibrium of the individual experiencing it.

In Zamiatin's *We*, the irrational energy of creativity is unleashed when the Builder of the Integral puts pen to paper and first senses the flush of inspiration. Living in and loyal to the quintessentially rational state, he, like Ivan, must contend with his counter-reality, the irrational world he discovers in the dream-like state of creative inspiration.

Zamiatin's novel, for all of its attractiveness, is far less complex in its vision than Bulgakov's. The solution to the problem raised in *We* is not a positive one: in a rational controlled setting, irrational creativity must be repressed by the creative individual or the powers that be will intercede to extirpate it--the lobotomy. The only hopeful element is that creativity will more than likely continue to burst the rational limits.<sup>11</sup>

Ivan's creative dream vision is triggered by the clash between the rational and the irrational. It begins when his poem on Jesus' life is questioned on rational scientific grounds. He has accepted the historicity of the Gospels, although he has bent them to what he perceives as the dictates of the times: he has painted Jesus negatively. Ivan has, however, sinned against the current ideological bias in depicting him as altogether alive and vital. Invoking myth studies fed by both Marxism and Higher Criticism, Berlioz contests Jesus' existence and the accuracy of the New Testament writings. Ivan's work, no matter what its intent, represents a challenge to materialism in its prevailing definition.

Ivan is called a second-rate poet,<sup>12</sup> but he is not without some talent: It is difficult to say what trips Ivan up--his unfamiliarity with the subject matter or the force of his imaginative powers (425/5). His portrayal of Jesus is powerful enough and the force of his inspiration substantial enough to evoke the conflict between the scientifically rational and the creatively irrational that becomes central to Ivan's dream and to the novel.

Ivan internalizes that conflict as he anticipates official reaction to his work in the figure of Berlioz who is incorporated into the dream as the manifestation of that official displeasure. The young poet knows the rules well enough to understand he has a problem. He is also troubled by the implications of his work because he is a loyal adherent of his state's current ideology. But his creative inspiration breaks the rules.

That creative energy is objectified in the dream as Woland--the product of the clash between Ivan's inclination to accept the current definition of rationality and the disruption caused by creative and irrational impulses. As such Woland is a deeply imbedded part of Ivan. That creative energy--Woland--will have a devastating effect on Berlioz and the entire society. Ivan anticipates Berlioz's reaction when Berlioz becomes the first to recognize one manifestation of the irrational, Woland's crony, dressed in a checkered jacket and a jockey cap. Like Ivan himself, that embodiment of the irrational wears checks (Woland's friend's jacket--Ivan's cap). Berlioz first finds it all strange and somewhat comical. But then, as the more stately and serious Woland himself appears, the vision becomes both intriguing and threatening. No amusing dismissible peccadillo this, but a subversive force with potential to undermine the status quo.

Woland is creative irrational energy. Just as Ivan's creativity did in his poem, Woland affirms God's and Jesus' existence. However, he musters no rational arguments or proofs. Woland denigrates attempts to prove God's existence as nonsense that makes even Kant look a fool. Nor is there any need for different points of view on the issue. Woland says of Jesus: "He simply existed, that is all" (435/16). It is a matter of belief alone, irrational and unscientific.

Woland may well be the first manifestation of the schizophrenia he predicts Ivan will suffer. As such he is the first instance of doubling in the novel. Just as Woland claims to have witnessed the events of the crucifixion, so too, in his creative imagination, did Ivan. Woland was there, but so was Ivan. This poem about Jesus is a new reality, created in Ivan's imagination and no less real than the contemporary material world in which Ivan lives.<sup>13</sup> With the appearance of Woland, Ivan stands with the Serapion Brethren, affirming the reality of the imagination's creations and relying on his "lawless" unconscious for inspiration."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, when Woland tells the first part of the Jerusalem story, he loses his accent: is Ivan, comfortable now within the context of his creative work, able to use his own voice and not the accented alien tones that would necessarily color his presentation when placed before a Berlioz?

At the end of the first chapter and at the very start of the dream Ivan is confronted with the dilemma not only of how or even whether it is desirable to write in a politically acceptable mode but of the whole question of irrational creativity's function and meaning, its impact on human existence, its implications for the Soviet 20s and 30s, and his relation to it for the rest of his life.

## **The Dream's Lessons**

By no means does Ivan accommodate easily to the new burden of his creative imagination. He is greatly agitated by its appearance and by its resistance to Berlioz's arguments. He is determined to find Woland, capture him and have him deported as an undesirable foreigner, or, even worse, a returned emigre. The power of irrational creativity to undercut--or cut the head off of--Berlioz terrifies Ivan and he races around town in full panic. But just as Berlioz cannot argue successfully against Woland, Ivan cannot capture and eliminate him. The seed has been planted; he has felt the power of creative energy; now he must deal with it.

He takes the first step once he approaches the protected garden of the psychiatric clinic. Here he begins to cleanse himself of his earlier false literary aspirations and this allows him full entry into the haven of the asylum. He denounces the poet Ryukhin as a petty kulak who parades as a proletarian and writes bad poetry. Ivan's schizophrenia that emerges fully a bit later is taking stronger hold. Ryukhin is not unlike the rule-following Ivan, writing as he thinks he should write and presumably adapting to the changing rules of the game. He understands the expedient very well.

Ryukhin is in his early thirties, Ivan's age at the end of the novel. In Ryukhin, another manifestation of "doubling," Ivan may be seeing himself ten years or so hence and rejecting the role he might have assumed had his encounter with Woland not occurred. Ivan will not follow in Ryukhin's footsteps. He will turn his energies in other directions.

Ivan chooses to write no longer not only because he cannot be a submissive hack but also because, despite some considerable talent, he does not have sufficient skill to put his irrational creative insights into literary form. After settling into the psychiatric clinic, he tries to write down his experience with Woland: no form satisfies him. His business-like manner and rational reporting cannot encompass his irrational and creative experiences. His style is the acceptable style of the period. He now knows that there is more to creativity than his skills will accommodate. To invoke Zamyatin's terms, Ivan's major art, the product of a hypnotic trance and a lawless subconscious that overturns man's conception of the world, is betrayed by his minor art, the consciously mastered technique that permits the fine execution of the former (Zamyatin 1970:159-64). If he is true to himself, Ivan will have no choice but to abandon a literary career.

This decision does not mean, however, that he loses his link with the creative irrational. That

link is permanently forged when he splits in two. The new Ivan replaces the old Ivan who was so troubled by the unusual and the irrational. The new Ivan accepts the reality of Woland. He also accepts, calmly and comfortably, the designation "fool," intoned by the invisible Woland, for doing so. He is a fool by the standards of scientific dialectical materialism. A modern day reversal of the "fool for Christ," he becomes a "fool for Satan." In time he will bear witness, publicly, no less so than did the traditional fools for Christ. Ivan may stop writing but his creative imagination continues to work and in his creative dream vision to seek deeper meaning to what his inspiration is revealing to him.

It is when Ivan splits into the old and new Ivan that the conflict between the rational and irrational comes to a head. Ivan opts for the irrational, although his formal decision to abandon writing comes only after he has the opportunity to talk with the Master. Even were he to hone his minor art to become capable of embodying the "truths" opened to him through his creative imagination, he could only expect to experience for himself the Master's fate. The Master serves as another projection of himself as Ivan examines one possible future course of action in his dream.

The Master who has written a novel analogous to Ivan's poem is accused of Pilatism and of attempting to smuggle an apologia for Jesus into print. He is attacked by critics and, in despair, burns his manuscript. Certainly the Master had other options open to him: to struggle or to write of other topics. Woland suggests that he write of everyday matters (708/305). The Master answers that these things are simply not interesting. Once having tasted the powers of "major art," neither the Master nor Ivan can turn to the "minor" art of addressing topical questions (Kern and Collins 1975: xvii). What it is possible to do palls by comparison with what a writer is driven to do.

But, the Master will not struggle. He denounces his manuscript and will not retell any of its parts. He says he hates the novel and will have nothing more to do with it. He seems guilty of cowardice, the worst of all sins in Pilate's estimation. On the other hand, could anyone stand up to the pressures that would be brought to bear? Is struggling a real option, either for the Master or for Ivan? The political arena is no more under the writer's control than is his creative imagination.

The Jerusalem novel treats the political issue. Yeshua himself is a pawn in the hands of political power. Pilate accedes to Kaiyapha's wish that Yeshua not be released lest he incite the people to rebellion and the city suffer when Roman legions be unleashed upon it. Pilate can't take a chance and acts against his instincts and conscience. Likewise in the Stalinist regime's calculations, the poet-writer is better sacrificed, lest his writing cause dissent and rebellion. In his dream the obstacles blocking Ivan's path are set out clearly for him and they take him a step closer to his own solution.

The Master guesses that Ivan's poems are poor and Ivan admits that they are. They make a pact that Ivan will write no more (549/150). The side of Ivan that the Master represents urges him to surrender and abandon his vision.

The Master's, however, is not the final word. He, too, has his counterforces. One is Woland. The Master is the reverse image of Woland, bearing the "M" on his skullcap to Woland's "W" on his calling card (the "dvojnoe v" 434/15). He has, like Woland, mastered a number of foreign languages, and both of them make claims to being historians. But, the Master abandons the struggle and receives as his eternal reward a peaceful limbo where life is perfectly quotidian. In contrast, Woland stands as a permanent witness to the spiritual and its power to override rational and scientific laws. He serves always to agitate, to point to the uncontrollable and the spiritual, and so to perpetuate the sense of the irrational. In each of these figures Ivan finds intimations of his future path. It remains to be seen which of the dream images will be Ivan's model.

Woland is one counterforce to the Master. Margarita is the other. The classic strong woman attached to the weak man, she is irrevocably bound to him, will not and would not choose to surpass him and will share his fate. But, at the same time, she is the spirit that will keep the novel alive no matter what the author wills or what she has to do to make that possible. Only she or Woland or Ivan introduce the various episodes of the Jerusalem story. She is that spark of energy that keeps the creative imagination, its insights, and its products vital even in a disheartened novelist or poet. And, in saving the Master's novel about Jerusalem, she becomes the catalyst that keeps Ivan probing for answers as he moves through his dream, for it is in the working out of the novel that he finds them.

Ivan came to the conclusion early in his dream that although he could accept the irrationality represented by Woland, he could not foster it openly by continuing to write. The Jerusalem story, however, shows him different faces of the irrational and how it may function.

Yeshua denies the rational common sense conclusions about human nature that have prompted the establishment of legal systems in society when he claims that there are no bad people in the world. Even Ratkiller's hardened heart could change when given care and attention (444/27). Yeshua's statement, an ultimate profession of faith in the goodness and resiliency of human nature, is an irrational one. Pilate cannot accept this reading of humanity. No less irrational is Yeshua's prediction that in the kingdom of truth and justice there will be no need for Caesars or other rulers. He holds that all form of authority represents coercion over men and will pass (447/30). To Jerusalem, that outcome is inconceivable and the prediction represents a call to rebellion. The result is Yeshua's arrest.

Within his own lifetime, Yeshua's irrationality achieves very little: he is executed by those humans he claims are essentially good.

Yeshua's impact comes later, but only as the result of another form of irrationality. It is Matthu Levi, assiduously following Yeshua and taking endless notes, who will leave the legacy that will influence humanity through the centuries. Yeshua pleads with him to burn the parchment filled with words never said (439/21-22). Matthu will accept no censorship not even from the person whose words and actions he is relating. As he writes, he transforms truth, that is, what has ostensibly happened in everyday material reality, to create another reality that will dramatically influence human culture and belief.<sup>15</sup> Is Matthu deceiving humanity or acting for its betterment by "remolding man's conception of the world"? Whatever the answer to that question, it is evident that the creative imagination and the written word have great power and that this power derives neither from accuracy in description nor the writer's integrity or spiritual depth. Creativity rears its head sometimes in strange places. Nonetheless, the Jerusalem story shows Ivan that what for centuries will pass for history can, like art, transform the world.

The most stunning display of irrationality in the Jerusalem novel belongs to Pilate. He makes a leap to faith that wipes out his past history and gains him eternal light. The first intimation of that possibility comes to Pilate in a dream. Because he walks and talks with Yeshua, he concludes that the execution had to have been a misunderstanding. In the final episode of the novel finished in Ivan's dream on the night of the full moon, Pilate makes the ultimate irrational act of faith.<sup>16</sup> He begs to be told the execution never did take place. When he is assured it did not, he believes and proceeds along the moonlit path to the light, granted him for eternity.

Ivan's dream, through the working out of the Jerusalem novel, shows him the power of belief to change reality and to wipe out a past filled with even the most heinous of crimes. The facts of the everyday material world mean very little in the world of the spirit. Rational rules of cause and effect can be put aside by a powerful and motivated spiritual energy that reaches



toward beliefs and truths that supercede material reality. Even the ostensible historian, reaching toward the same spiritual truth, exceeds the limits of historical accuracy. The idea, the belief, the irrational creative force is all.

Although the lessons of Jerusalem seem far distant from Ivan's life in the Stalinist Soviet Union, there are parallels in the two settings as well as applications for the lessons he has learned.

## **Irrationality and Moscow**

The Gogolian Moscow scenes stand apart from the Jerusalem story and the trials of the Master and Margarita, so much so as to seem virtually extraneous to the story lines that criticism most frequently takes as its foci. One function they have is to provide variety in tone and comic relief from the more serious issues treated in the other plots. Reminiscent of Gogol's work, the scenes are repetitive motifs: they catalogue the petty vices of Moscow in the late 20s and 30s. Moscow is as full of these petty banal flaws as any vigorous successor to Gogol might wish, and, as they are put on display and punished, they provide ample opportunity for slapstick comedy and fantastic antics.

The real question is why Bulgakov considered them necessary to the novel. They do supply the social context for the more serious questions treated in the other stories. They also attest to a reassuring permanency of the social personality of the Russian majority. Grand evil on this level is rare, but petty vices Russia will always have with her. The unmasking and punishments produce no permanent change, whether it be at the hands of the Revizor or of the engaging Behemoth. Life goes on as usual despite disruptions. Whatever might unsettle the status quo can readily be adjusted to or explained away as is Woland's crew at the end of Bulgakov's novel.

Clearly, the image of the average Russian presented in this novel is little different from the one found so frequently in literature: whether he is the peasant outwitting the landowner or a participant in a flourishing Soviet second economy, he is one who will find his way around the rules and around those who would punish his petty foibles.

Significantly, though, from time to time, unmaskings and punishments do occur. Woland and his followers are the vehicle for accomplishing this here. It is Woland's character and the role he plays, especially in Moscow, that provides the clue for establishing links between ***The Master and Margarita*** and contemporary Soviet society. Woland, then, is both a manifestation of Ivan's creativity and the intimation of a force about to enter into and have devastating impact on the broader social scene. In my interpretation's schema, Woland is Bulgakov's connecting link between the individual and broader social and political experience.

Critics take rather differing views of Woland when he is considered in the context of contemporary Moscow. Some see this world as Woland's world--a stage filled with farcical puppets manipulated by a dark force (Piper 1971: 152). Proffer (1984: 530) seems to agree that dark forces are at work in Russia and that Bulgakov identifies the sources. However, she stops short of distinguishing them herself. Others take a benign view of the magician and his role. Haber (1975: 389) says he reveals the deadness of life in Moscow. Proffer (1984: 557) identifies him as God's assistant who is "no doubt expiating a very serious sin," the qualifying clause being something of an interpolation arising not from the novel itself but from traditional theological understandings of Satan. Others interpret him as a positive force. Vinogradov (1968: 61) says Woland's function is to test men's mettle: can they be true to themselves. Lakshin (1975) calls Woland a moralist (260) who metes out justice (269). He says that Woland mocks those who pay lip service to social responsibility and yet lead mindless lives (Lakshin 1975: 281). Proffer (1984: 556) calls him a god of vengeance who punishes real

evil, although she also notes (1973: 557) that his justice is cruel for he does not believe that all men are good. Lowe (1978: 261) sees other nuances: "Woland's major function in the novel is to remind the inhabitants of Moscow that the world is irrational (regardless of what Marxism teaches), and that the primal forces in that world are irrational ones, the most important of which are love and compassion."<sup>17</sup>

Although it is difficult to document Woland's being at the base of the "evils," petty or otherwise, so rampant in Moscow, some other elements in these interpretations are convincing. Woland does not tempt the Muscovites to do evil, but he does provide opportunities for them to show their true colors. When they do and those colors prove dark, they are punished, most frequently by their embarrassments. The punishments invariably suit the natures of the crimes. More severe punishments (of Baron Meigel) also fall to Woland's jurisdiction, but there is room for mercy and compassion (Frieda) as well. Woland gives the Master every chance to reclaim his novel and take up the challenge to struggle to bring it to fruition. He oversees the fates of all the characters (and, as I will argue leads Ivan to his), whether by deciding them or foretelling them. He is lord and judge over humanity in Moscow.

Woland has been compared to Mephistopheles and Dostoevsky's devil in the *Brothers Karamazov*,<sup>18</sup> but I would see him instead as a twentieth century variation of Lermontov's Demon. He is ruler of material reality, like Demon, but not so limited in his spiritual capacities. Unlike Demon, or another variation on him in Andreev's *Anthema*, he is not constrained by a debilitating rationality, the weighing and measuring of the legalistic mind that is not capable of spiritual depth, love, understanding and compassion.

On the other hand, Woland is not so "irrational," so given to idealism as is Yeshua. He knows that all men are not good and that there are laws of spiritual or divine justice which will deliver them to the fates they most deserve. He is not averse to playing a role in that context. This is how he functions in the Moscow scenes as well as in the other parts of the novel.

Whether or not this makes Woland one aspect of the divine and Yeshua another<sup>19</sup> is not fully relevant to the interpretation being developed here. Nonetheless, what the novel does present is two quite different views of human nature: Yeshua's idealistic hope for mankind and Woland's far more realistic assessment. Much more relevant to my interpretation is whether the Moscow scenes are part of Ivan's creative dream vision and if so, why they are. I would propose that they *are* part of the dream vision. They are Ivan's projection of the unsettling and disruptive effect that a visit from irrational creative energy would have on everyday life. Tables could be turned, punishments for foibles and more serious evils could be meted out, and some regrouping would have to take place before the citizenry would find itself firmly on its feet again.

Ivan feels not only his own creative energy but is sensing on the horizon another creative energy, also symbolized by Woland, which will have equally as disruptive effects on his society.

## Shadows of Stalin

Criticism has detected intimations of Stalinism in *The Master and Margarita*. There is the disappearance of Likhodeev and the sealed doors of the apartment (Proffer 1984: 555), the gifts first bestowed (the clothing at the magic performance/the new promise of the first Five Year Plan) and then taken away (the clothing disappears/the terror) (Piper 1971: 147), the immediate and devastating effects of denunciations (Proffer 1984: 555), the correspondence between Pilate's interrogation of Yeshua and the show trials (Proffer 1984: 539). Proffer (1984: 539-40) notes that Stalin is never alluded to directly in Bulgakov's novel, but that Jerusalem reflects in many ways, most especially, in its tyrannical procurator, realities of the Soviet 30s.

Stalin may not be alluded to directly in *The Master and Margarita* but his presence as the shaper of the society that is the setting for the novel cannot be denied. Most critical observations of Stalin's shadows note incidents or characterizations that seem to refer to arrests and the totalitarian nature of his regime. Lowe (1978: 261-62) takes a somewhat different approach. He calls the novel a parody of a utopian society--a Stalinist Russia predicated on miracle, mystery and authority. There is parody and satire in the novel and there is also miracle and mystery, the latter akin to what I have been calling irrationality.

I want to look now at those broader implications of Stalinism and how they relate to the insights Ivan gains in his creative dream vision, the insights which in turn will prompt him to change his role in society from poet to historian/philosopher.

The Stalinist period professed to be rational and scientific as any good variant of Marxism-Leninism must. But, as time progressed, more and more intellectual fancy footwork would have to be done to maintain that illusion. At its height Stalinism displayed aspects of the irrational very much like those found in Bulgakov's novel.

Katerina Clark (1981: 137) uses language congruent with this interpretation when she notes the move from the positivism of the early years of the first Five Year Plan to attacks on it, beginning in the early 30s, as pseudo-objectivism. In favor instead at that point was the belief that changes could be achieved in society by "leaping off the mundane ground of the feasible." "Although these leaps were officially grounded in theory, once the leaper took to the air he was already in the realm of the fantastic" (Clark 1981: 137). In his poem Ivan leaps from the mundane ground of positivism and finds himself in the realm of the fantastic.

By the mid-thirties the system of knowing in the Stalinist state had developed into a form of Neo-Platonism. Empirical knowledge represented only insubstantial appearances, and it was possible for some, most especially Stalin and his circle of cognoscenti, to "know" a higher reality (Clark 1981: 141).

Gustav Wetter (1958: 219-20) observes that Marx would turn over in his grave at Stalin's understanding of historical materialism. In the Stalinist recension of the Marxian formulation, social development would be determined by wide ranging moral and spiritual factors and these factors, such as consciousness, organization, will and determination, would gain in significance as the stage of achieved communism came closer. In a simple five words: mind would prevail over matter. And, as Stalin claimed to have discovered new "laws" by virtue of his special insights, mind would prevail over scientific laws that could be verified in reality.

Tucker (Rigby 1966: 57-67) notes that in the later years of his regime the Stalinist impulse culminates in "transformism," that is, the will to change reality through political means. While Stalin argued for the recognition of immutable objective scientific laws shaping social processes, he also argued for the power of the mind to intervene and master them. At its peak, transformism meant that most of "reality" would be made to conform to Stalin's mind.

It is the impulse against positivism and the grasping for higher realities through creative insights and spiritual energy--irrational by positivist lights--that Ivan may be sensing as the novel opens. He is ahead of his peers in recognizing the conflict on the horizon. The Jerusalem novel points out for him all of its implications for the Stalinist culture of the 30s at the intellectual/creative levels of life (how Stalin will make *his* inspiration felt) and the Moscow scenes show him how ordinary reality will be affected.<sup>20</sup>

In the Moscow scenes, the early impact of Stalin's accession to power is clearly felt. As he consolidated his authority, Stalin returned to a revolutionary radicalism that had been lost or was at least dormant during NEP.<sup>21</sup> The period from 1928-31, characterized as the cultural

revolution (Fitzpatrick 1978b: 11), or the second revolution (Treadgold 1972: 258) initiated the attack on the privileges and status quo of the NEP period. One of the early indications of an ideological shift in the offing was the intensifying of the literary arguments among the various factions which had been allowed to compete during the 20s. Certainly, Ivan's attack on Ryukhin for being a kulak parading as a proletarian could be placed anywhere from late 20s to early 30s. Kulaks and the bourgeois intelligentsia, who may have tried to pass themselves off as proletarians, would be uprooted to make way for the new Soviet intelligentsia.

The denunciation of the Master for trying to smuggle his apologia for Jesus into print could on the one hand have been inspired by the positivism that Berlioz seems to signify for Ivan, but that novel would be no more welcome during the cultural revolution of the early Stalin years. Because it was a time when militant atheism underwent a particularly strong revival,<sup>22</sup> poems or novels with religious themes became especially vulnerable, whereas by the mid-30s there is something of a softening.<sup>23</sup>

In the interests of the rapid development of the economy, Stalin would make demands on the society at large to put aside the ease and privileges enjoyed by some during the NEP period (notably the Fellow Travelers in the opinion of some proletarian writers' groups<sup>24</sup>). "Cultural revolution carried the message that conciliators of the peasantry, conciliators of the intelligentsia, bureaucrats & Nepmen, kulaks, cafe-haunting *literati*, wreckers, expropriated capitalists, and foreign spies were all on the same side in the political struggle and collectively represented the "rightist danger" to the Party" (Fitzpatrick 1978b: 17).

Ivan is in tune: he fears Woland might be a foreign spy. He is dead wrong. But it is in this context that Woland's cronies have their field day. They serve Stalinist ends and unmask the bourgeois foibles of bureaucrats and writers. Bulgakov's satire in the Moscow chapters is without doubt an attack on bourgeois values rampant in the capital city in the heat of the development of Stalin's second revolution--the "revolution from above."

The second revolution and restatement of revolutionary radicalism was disruptive to a nation which had just reached pre-war levels of economic productivity. The established order of things would be changed in radical and, to those who were reaping the benefits of NEP, seemingly irrational fashion. The kulaks and Nepmen would lose more than their clothing in the ensuing years.<sup>25</sup>

However, in different historical periods and different cultural contexts, different figures emerge to assail the collective conscience. In *The Master and Margarita* Woland and his retinue function in that way. In the context of the second and cultural revolution, Stalin took on the task of trying to keep the basic principles of the revolution alive. The means to that end are sometimes gentle chidings (money turns to soda pop bottle labels or privileges are lost) but sometimes far harsher measures (Baron Meigel and purges).

Stalin combines in his actions the several guises of irrationality found in the Jerusalem novel as well as the combination of Woland's pragmatism and his affirmation of spiritual power. Where Yeshua may believe that all men are good, Woland puts them to the test and does not stint on recrimination. Stalinism exhibits an idealism similar to Yeshua's, hoping that a socialist society could temper human personalities to accept unquestioningly and accommodate harmoniously to the state's needs and objectives. It was, however, as pragmatic as Woland: it would see to it that the idealistic hopes *would* come to pass. Failure to cooperate meant certain punishment.

No less adept at myth-making than Matthu Levi, Stalin, during these years, would also create the history and the milieu to motivate his citizenry. Facts would not be obstacles in the attempt to reach the ideal essence of a higher reality. "At this time, as at no other, the

boundaries between fiction and fact became blurred. In all areas of public life & the difference between fiction and fact, between theater and political event, between literary plot and factual reporting, all became somewhat hazy" (Clark 1981: 146-47). History was rethought. The work of earlier historians was put aside. Original sources were no longer studied and facts were no longer verified: they needed only to conform to Stalin's views of history (Medvedev 1971: 499-500).<sup>26</sup> Like Woland, Stalin needed no proofs, and like Matthu, Stalin bent facts to his needs (Piper 1971: 152). Like Matthu's, his tactics had impact and have left an indelible legacy. When immersed in the ethereal realms of true belief, proofs are unnecessary.

Stalinism did not stop with the mere bending of historical fact. It rivals Pilate's stunning act of faith and leap to irrationality: believing makes it so and on that firm foundation one proceeds. Pilate could hope and then accept the assurance that the crucifixion never occurred. Stalin would deny factual experiential reality to build his own ideal world.

Denial of reality meant the suppression of sociology from the mid-30s until well after Stalin's death: studies of society would turn up problems that Stalin preferred to believe did not exist. During the cultural revolution, the leap to belief meant the death of the mental health movement: labor under socialism could not produce levels of stress that would lead to mental breakdown (Joravsky 1978: 114-15). Later yet the denial of known and verifiable reality in favor of "higher laws and truths" would lead to the undermining of genetics. Joravsky (108) says that the period of the cultural revolution was replete with *proizvol*--willful illogic, in a word, irrationality.

Stalin, like Yeshua in the Jerusalem novel, may have become shrouded in myth (Proffer 1984: 523), but the myths in each case would have substantial impact on human lives. In one of the Moscow scenes Bengalsky tries to undermine Woland's magic act by attributing the "special effects" to hypnosis. Whether or not Woland achieves his ends through hypnosis is not the important question: no matter what the answer, Bengalsky loses his head. The irrational can have real impact.

The Muscovites may have suffered from mass hypnosis from which they are cured in the end. Nonetheless, what they have experienced, no matter what measures they take to deny it, will have impact on reality. Not unlike the vision of the Apocalypse in Briusov's "Kon' bled," this vision may seem fleeting, impossible and irrational, but it will come to pass.

Stalin, like Woland, casts a shadow that will lend his perspective to twenty-five years and more of Soviet life. And like Woland's, Stalin's shadow by virtue of where it falls and what it punishes will define what is held to be the "good."

## Conclusions

Bulgakov has captured the major elements of the *Zeitgeist*. The elements themselves are mixed: there is the power of irrational creativity and the shadow cast by the pragmatist who will achieve his ends by eliminating the opposition.<sup>27</sup> He has raised significant questions both for that period of Soviet history and for universal consideration. Most broadly, he has considered the role that the irrational plays in human affairs and concluded that its impact is significant. More specifically, he has grappled with the impact that irrationality would have on historical scientific materialism.

The conflict is played out in the poet Ivan and in his creative dream vision that sets out for him potential paths to follow and points him toward the resolution of the conflict in his own life. He could not become a disciple of the Master and opt out of participating in the creative energy that was engulfing his society. He will cooperate with the power of the creative irrational that has so enthralled him. He will join the creative force by becoming an

historian/philosopher doing through those disciplines what he might have done through literature if that path had not become closed to him by the special circumstances of the times.

Ivan will become a disciple not of the Master but of Stalin. He will follow Stalin's star just as Matthu and Pilate followed Yeshua's, as Banga followed Pilate's, and as Margarita followed the Master's. Like the others, it would seem, he will share the fate of his master. What that fate will be is not at all clear from the novel. *The Master and Margarita* could be read as Bulgakov's tribute to Stalin as the significant creative irrational force that could change Russia's and perhaps even humanity's vision of reality.

The novel could also be read as an apologia for Stalin and whatever consequences may flow from his irrational energies. Bulgakov's moral position is somewhat murky. Lakshin (1975: 281) notes that he portrays moral conflicts but does not resolve them. Yeshua would seem to function as the essence of the good for the novel in its entirety,<sup>28</sup> yet Yeshua's disciples--the lying Matthu and the cowardly Pilate--are examples of how the good is served by shadowy means in the rough and tumble of human living. Can similar good ends be served by the tyrannical Stalin? Later in the Soviet period, Orthodox theologians will argue that "the Soviet atheist regime, although denying God's will, carries it out in creating a new just society" (Lane 1978: 36). Certainly Woland, the traditional adversary of all that is good, in this novel seems to do God's will and to be himself, despite the shadows he casts, a disciple of Yeshua.

Ivan, nonetheless, casts his lot with Stalin, perhaps believing with Woland that: "Everything will turn out right. That's what the world is built on" (797/386).

## Undoing the Conclusions

There's a good deal of magical ointment spread about in *The Master and Margarita*. There must be a fly caught in it somewhere.

Ivan has chosen his profession on the basis of the revelations of his creative dream vision. He has had an insight into spiritual truth and into some means of accommodating to it in the everyday world. He seems to have acclimated, yet the end of the novel finds him wakeful and troubled at the full spring moon. He relives his conflict once again and in the dream that follows brings the Pilate story to its final conclusion. It is in this part of the dream that Pilate makes his irrational plea to be told the crucifixion never happened. He believes when he is told it did not. Margarita assures him that this is the true ending and that all things end this way. And Ivan sleeps blissfully for the remainder of the night.

It is clear that in the early part of the novel, Ivan struggles against the insights his creative vision brings to him. Initially he rejects Woland/Stalin as dangerous: his reaction is what the an average Muscovite's might be: it is best to resist the new and creative. Ivan does change his views in the course of his dream vision, but each of his moves to accommodate are preceded by the intervention of hypnotism or of injections.

In the first instance the doctor Stravinsky, staring into his eyes, repeats hypnotically that Ivan will be helped in the asylum and that he will find peace (509/103). Ivan awakens to find himself looking out over the clear stream that parallels the one in the medieval dream vision.

Again, after having tried to set down his experiences with Woland, he is troubled by a thunderstorm and the doctor appears to give him an injection (531/130). This injection triggers Ivan's split into two and his subsequent acceptance of Woland in all of his irrationality.

The last injection mentioned in the novel is administered by Ivan's wife on the night of the

spring full moon. It brings to him the blissful sleep and the dream in which Pilate also finds peace.

The injections cast a somewhat different light on Ivan's accommodation to irrationality and the creativity of Stalinism. Indeed, he is being helped along in his dreaming by the medication that may well be functioning like the lobotomy in *We*. His dream anticipates in a very concrete way the means Stalinism will use to draw its disciples round it: enthusiasm, all encompassing propaganda, coercion--all serving the purpose of assuring its citizens that they are blissfully happy and participating in the "good."

Ivan, foreseeing in his dream vision the pressures that can be brought to bear, takes the path of least resistance. With this twist, his dream can be said to function less as a means to reveal how irrationality can serve the good and to point him in the direction of accepting its contemporary manifestation, than as his formulation of an apologia for the solution his subconscious devises to justify the accommodation that he now knows he must make.

The struggle, then, on the nights of the spring full moon, reenacts the battle which Ivan lost. Perhaps he should have followed the Master. But, he always has the way out of the dilemma that Pilate discovers at the dream vision's conclusion. He, too, can set belief against reality and hope against fact that what he chose to do never really happened.

### *Notes*

Page references to the novel are first to the Soviet edition (Bulgakov 1973) and second to the Ginsburg translation (Bulgakov 1967). The characters' names appear as they do in Ginsburg.

Freud (1959: 174ff.). Altman (1968: 10) defines condensation as the fusion of two or more ideas or mental images and he discusses and gives examples of displacement on pp. 12 ff. Proffer (1984: 539) uses the concept of displacement in the context of her discussion of the similarity between Moscow and Jerusalem but not with the dream connotations. She seems to use it to mean that the author placed certain incidents expected for one location in the other.

See especially Beattie and Powell (1978) and Proffer (1973) for substantive discussions.

Proffer (1984: 530) both suggests this and takes other critics to task (564 and 647, fn. 45) for making what she considers too extreme a statement of the identity.

Proffer (1973: 562, fn 27) notes this and calls Piper's (1971) discussion unconvincing.

Hieatt (1967:14-18) provides the framework for this discussion.

Ullman (1979: 57-58) charts a comparison between Freud's and Jung's views on dreams. Jung (1933: 20) claims that as the conscious mind assimilates what is revealed by the unconscious, the dissociation of the personality comes to an end. Ivan will experience this when his two personalities are reconciled after he has split in two.

Wolff (1952: 223) as discussed in Hieatt (1967: 51-52).

It has been suggested that Ivan's "dream" is akin to a daydream. In that "everything will turn out all right" for Ivan and in that Ivan's dream could be said to split his ego into many part-egos, Freud's consideration of the relationship of creative writing to day-dreaming is significant (*SE IX*: 150-51). Even more fruitful in this regard would be an investigation of the novel relative to Bulgakov's creativity. Bulgakov is less interested in being faithful to the

scientifically defined nature and elements of a dream than in using a device, long a literary staple, to reveal subconscious processes at work in individuals and in Soviet society in the late 20's/early 30s.

Leatherbarrow (1975) uses the concept of the creative visionary and discusses the threat the creative imagination can be but produces quite a different reading of the novel from the one being developed here.

Zamiatin (1952) and (1983).

Proffer (1984: 535) calls him a rather untalented young poet.

Leatherbarrow (1975) also discusses the reality of dreams and illusions.

Gary Kern and Christopher Collins (1975: xvii) comment on and summarize Zamiatin's thoughts on creativity.

Lakshin (1975: 254) notes Matthu's creativity.

Margarita's begging Woland for the restoration of the manuscript which she knows full well has been destroyed is a similar expression of faith in the power of spiritual power to undo what has been done in physical reality.

Lowe's interpretation applies to Margarita as one inhabitant of Moscow, but readers would be hard pressed to find such effects on the bulk of the citizenry.

Proffer (1984: 643-44 fn. 38) annotates the major articles treating the parallels to *Faust*. See Lowe (1978) for comparisons with the *Brothers Karamazov*.

Proffer (1984: 552) discusses the possible Manichean cast to Bulgakov's views in the novel. She also rejects the divinity of Yeshua (1984: 557).

Katerina Clark (1981: 146) discusses the two orders of reality perceived in the Stalinist culture of the 30s. They encompassed two orders of human beings as well--ordinary and extraordinary.

See Tucker (1969) for a general discussion and specifically (1969: 200-03) for his summary of the flaws in the Trotskyite argument that Stalin personified Soviet bureaucracy and his analysis that Stalin in a real way represented links with the Leninist past.

Lane (1978: 27-28) notes that the period of the late 20s and 30s was a particularly bleak one for Christianity in the Soviet Union.

Treadgold (1972: 346) notes that Demjan Bednyj was attacked for not giving a positive enough evaluation of Christianity's contribution to early Russia.

Maguire (1968: 192) notes the resentment felt by those loyal to the revolution when those who had a faulty understanding of it profited under the policies which may it quite possible for them not only to publish but to fare quite well in the marketplace.

Certainly new groups with a resurgence of bourgeois attitudes would establish themselves and persist into the present (Dunham: 1976). So the petty foibles so favored by Russian satirists reemerge perennially to provide fruitful material for writers over the centuries.

Medvedev cites on the same pages a work on Soviet historiography that treats *The History of*



*the CPSU: A Short Course* and notes that the work was written in the form of axioms that needed no proof but should only be internalized. See Schapiro's treatment of the same topic (1971: 475-77).

Bulgakov's relationship to Stalinism was complex. He enjoyed Stalin's protection yet could not do the kind of writing he would have liked. Proffer (1984: 407 ff.) discusses the possibility that Bulgakov was contemplating writing a play in honor of Stalin's sixtieth birthday. Proffer (1984: 521) notes that in *Batum* Stalin undergoes a sort of Calvary and is called a "demon" by his prison guards. For whatever his personal reasons (and these are varied as they are interpolated by criticism), Bulgakov could write about Stalin in a positive way.

Proffer (1984: 541) notes that Bulgakov had little respect for organized religion and those who wield religious power. This, apparently, did not prevent him from taking Jesus as an ideal figure, no more than it prevented Blok from choosing the Jesus to lead the Red Guards in "Dvenadcat". Criticism also measures characters against Jesus, for example: Haber (1975:401-02) and Skorino (1968: 39).

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