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***The Master and Margarita:* Satan, Savior from Evil**

Abstract

The countless interpretations of *The Master and Margarita* emphasize the most disturbing thought for the readers. This is an amazingly simple and moving truth: from the clutches of the Soviet Empire which destroys the Master only Satan can release him. The Master's saviour is the spirit of evil. In this article I would like to show Bulgakov's rich and ambiguous topography of evil, then to expand view of the topography of good.

Keywords

Master and Margarita, Good, Evil, Godsend

I have returned once again to the great book *The Master and Margarita* to learn that my fascination with Mikhail Bulgakov will not easily go away. My previous reading of the work was developed in a dissertation that tracked the storyline of extraordinary events witnessed by the residents of Moscow. The arrival of Woland, and his entourage, at the capital of the Soviet Empire

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had caused supernatural events to drop down as if from out of a sleeve, triggering a provocative question: what does this all mean? Supernatural powers have become part of the life of Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz—the editor of a literary monthly and the literary association of Moscow Massolit’s chairman of the board—who was not accustomed to seeing unusual phenomena (необыкновенным явлениям [...] не привык). The following characters of the novel, after having met Woland, are irrevocably called on to explain the meaning of the extraordinary events they had witnessed. I would like to just add that the strategies of coping with the supernatural present in Mikhail Afanasyevich’s novel have been questioned by Margarita’s true, faithful and eternal love for her Master, a love greater than all theories and intellectual constructs combined.

My return to this literary work, which is not only great but also especial, in order to think about the problem of evil this time, is therefore an involuntary proof of an unflagging infatuation which I am willing to admit to, and which I would like to share with the readers. Paraphrasing the words of master Bulgakov, I want to call out loudly again: Follow me, reader, follow me and I will show you the “leaven of the truth” about Bulgakov’s vision of evil. Let us put into motion the hermeneutic circle by moving between the whole and fragments of the work so as to gain impetus—and momentum is necessarily needed here—so that the textual world will show us the entire richness of Bulgakov’s topography of evil.

By putting the hermeneutic circle into motion, I am going to evoke a widespread belief regarding the whole work. The countless interpretations of *The Master and Margarita* emphasize the most disturbing thoughts of the readers. This is an amazingly simple and moving truth: the clutches of the Soviet Empire had been destroying the Master by means of literary mediocrities, informers, and other appropriate services, from which only Satan, named in the novel as Woland, can free him. The Master’s savior is the Lord of Darkness, the spirit of evil. The evil that saves! Bulgakov himself leads us to this intriguing non-obviousness, placing the satanic words from Goethe’s *Faust* into the motto of his book: “That power I serve which wills forever evil yet does forever good.”

It is amazing that the Prince of Darkness and his entourage come to help the Master, and not the good and omnipotent God. Let us stop and examine his assistants. “The satanic company [...] small, mixed and simple-minded (общество, [...] небольшое, смешанное и бесхитростное)”, consists of a cat-Behemoth: giant like a hog, black as soot or a raven, a trickster entertaining Woland, and also the demon-page whom the narrator calls the great-

est jester that there has ever been; then Koroviev-Fagot: a mocking Magus and wizard, the self-proclaimed 'Woland's translator,' who is also a funny scoffing regent of the church choir and a knight with a dark unsmiling face. The rude Azazello belongs to Woland's entourage as well: the perfect, sometimes brutal executioner of Woland's commands, a demon of the waterless desert and a murderer-demon too. Finally, Hella: a beautiful witch and vampire, furthermore, she is most often naked and promiscuous, Woland's servant with a scar on her neck.

In order to consider—I am not afraid to say so—the widely used interpretation of the novel that treats evil as a power that ultimately does good, one must ask the question: what are Bulgakov's powers of evil and what is the infirmity, if you can say so, of good? Before we take this particular idea of substituting good for evil, and their confusion, we will take a closer look at the powers of evil. Let us try first to introduce Bulgakov's rich and ambiguous topography of evil, so as to expand our view on the topography of good. The powers of evil remain in multiple dependencies; they struggle with each other creating a dynamic area, which is governed by a specific logic. The space of good creates a completely different logic. Only by clarifying these two areas will we be able to ask the question about what happens when good meets evil.

The first step is related to the question 'where does the evil reside in the novel?' Let us add that by pointing to the subsequent "places" inhabited by evil we will inevitably be led to an answer to the question: what is the power of evil that has rooted itself in such a place?

Evil Has Many Names

I would like to point out three areas related to the dwelling of evil. The first is the evil of a communist totalitarian system; I would like to define the second one as the area of the evil of human weaknesses. The third area has its own specific address. From a certain Wednesday, which is also the Wednesday of the 14th day of the spring month Nisan, evil inhabits Moscow flat No. 50 at 302a Sadovaya Street.

1) Let us start with systemic evil. The novel of Bulgakov is penetrated by omnipresent fear, whose source is the kingdom of evil—the communist Leviathan. An internally coherent system that takes its own logic of horror is revealed before us here; a system from which there is no escape. Evil, which penetrates the Soviet State, manifests itself throughout its state services and agencies, militia, secret agents, prosecutors, informers, and unquestioning

supporters. The communist system, its totalitarian oppressiveness, brutally penetrates all aspects of human life, leaving no sphere neutral, free of threats, safe, and providing relief. The constant threat of search, arrest, disappearance, deportation, but also death dispensed by the punishing hand of proletarian “justice,” is present. The events in Moscow are shrouded by an atmosphere of omnipresent fear of negative possibilities. Anyone can be accused because anyone is a potential rebel against authority. It is a constant threat of danger too real to forget, lurking behind every knock on a door or ring of a bell, in each face of passersby. Bulgakov excellently, although for his own security in a veiled way, reveals the atmosphere of terror prevailing in the Soviet Empire in the late twenties and thirties of the twentieth century. Mass arrests in the thirties intensify the atmosphere of widespread fear. The search by militia at Bulgakov’s house, the confiscation of the diary he was writing, the arrest of his erudite friends, the travel ban from going abroad, the loss of jobs, or the constant uncertainty of tomorrow are only a part of the rich range of measures which the totalitarian state used against him and his friends.

Let us take a closer look at those fragments of the work that indirectly reveal the ominous effect of the structure of collective horror, a systemic evil that squeezes into the tiniest recesses of human life. Here is the first meeting of Margarita with Azazello: Margarita, sitting on a bench and looking at a funeral procession with the body of Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, is approached by a stranger. Responding to his comment that he was sent to her “on a certain case,” she replies with the question: “Have you come to arrest me?” In the unpublished version of the book, the appalled Margarita asks: “Are you from the GPU?” (Государственное Политическое Управление при НКВД РСФСР, ГПУ НКВД РСФСР—State Political Administration of the NKVD; it is a political militia before which every citizen of the Soviet Empire trembled). Another fragment, which is the opposite of the story above, is also worth mentioning. When, after Satan’s retreat, Margarita returns with her recovered Master to the basement of a house in one of the alleys near Arbat, an intruder appears looking for Aloysius Mogarych, a snitch informing the state on the Master in order to take his flat. When responding to the question of the uninvited guest: “Aloysius—are you there, Aloysius?,” Margarita lies: “Aloysius [...] was arrested yesterday” and then asks: “Who wants him? What’s your name?” The terrified intruder disappears immediately.

In *The Master and Margarita*, disappearances and arrests, often unsubstantiated, are bread and butter. The curse of disappearing tenants vexes subsequent owners of the ill-fated flat No. 50 at 302a Sadovaya Street. At the

beginning, the first tenant taken by a “polite militiaman” disappears from the flat of a jeweler called de Fougère, Anna Frantzevna; after two days, the second tenant, named Belomut, does not come back. Subsequently, the following people disappear: citizen Belomut’s wife, then Anna Frantzevna, the owner of the apartment, and finally her trusted servant Anfisa. The flat is searched for diamonds and sealed.

There are more arrests in the novel. Let us recall the character Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, the chairman of the tenants’ association, arrested not for bribery (he accepted a bribe from Koroviev), but for possessing dollars. Bulgakov burned a fragment of his book concerning the interrogation of Bosoi for fear of repression after the arrest of a family friend and playwright, Nikolai Erdman. The description of the arrest was replaced with Bose’s dream, which was used, in a metaphorized form, to describe the scene of interrogation of black-market money changers. It should be added that Timothy Kondratievich Kvastsov was also detained. His voice was used by Koroviev to denounce the chairman of the block committee.

The arrest replaces the witness’s summons for interrogation. All those who could in any way be responsible for the scandalous performance at the Variétés theater were arrested. Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev, the director of the Variétés theater, while returning from Yalta after sending him to go to the devil by Azazello, is arrested by the militia at the airport. Another detainee was Kitaitsev, the director of the programs department of the Theatrical Commission, who “swore by all the saints” that he did not know anything about Likhodeyev’s relationships with Woland. The militia also came for Prokhor Petrovich, the chairman of the Entertainments Commission. The financial director of the Variétés—Grigory Danilovich Rimsky was also arrested. He fled to Leningrad after being nearly killed and sent to the after-life by Hela—a corpse with dark spots on her chest—and by the theater administrator Ivan Savyelich Vareukha, who was transformed into a vampire scout. The financial director was found by the militia in Leningrad, arrested and questioned, and then escorted in a guarded wagon to Moscow. The militia also arrested Vareukha. Nikolai Ivanovich, the tenant of the house where Margarita lived, did not escape arrest as well. He was a man with a face resembling a pig and came to Satan’s rout in the role of a hog. Even the meticulous “modest and calm” chief accountant of the Variétés theater, Vassily Stepanovich Lastochkin, was arrested because he brought an income from the box office to the Commission for Theatrical Spectacles and Light Entertainment. Finally, Anna, called the Plague, was arrested; she spilt the sunflower oil on which Berlioz slipped, who was run-over by a tram.

The only person called for interrogation at the headquarters of the NKVD at Lubyanka, in a matter of great emergency as you may imagine, was a high ranking official, an honorary guest at Woland's performance, the chairman of the Moscow Theaters Acoustics Commission, Arkady Apollonich Sempleyarov. Everybody not arrested after meeting the satanic entourage was forcibly placed into the psychiatric clinic of Professor Stravinsky. Let us add that the forcible displacement of people, who were problematic for the Soviet authorities, into psychiatric hospitals was an often-used practice. Such methods were used both in the times of Bulgakov and after World War Two.

The evil of the communist monster shows its menacing face as a universal snitching system. The symbolic figure who represents this system of spying is Baron Meigel, whose is tasked with invigilating foreigners. Another shady character is Aloysius Mogarych. All we know about Mogarych is that he befriends the Master only to report on him (that he holds, among other things, illegal literature). After Master arrest Mogarych finally takes over his flat. The character of the block committee chairman named Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, whom Woland calls a "sly rogue," is also worth recalling. The duties of people performing such a function were to follow residents and report on them to relevant services.

Systemic evil is also revealed as the overwhelming power of communist ideology that permeates the entire novel. This irreligious ideology has its followers and promoters. Above all, it has its own guards which were mentioned before as the institutions and functions related to culture: the directorate of the Variétés theater, the Moscow Theaters Acoustics Commission, the Commission for Theatrical Spectacles and Light Entertainment. They constitute an ideological sieve which serves to filter out contents that do not meet the politically correct ideological requirements. According to the ideological sieve, there is no magic—everything must be explained through the action of natural forces. During Woland's group's magic show at the Variétés theater, ideological purity had been guarded by the announcer George Bengalsky who had demanded the demystification of the magic used during the performance. The playbill mentions the total unveiling of magic; Ivan Savyelich Varenuška also expected its unmasking when claiming that the magic show "is a very smart move. All the fun is in showing how it is done—how the mysteries are unmasked."

Let us recall the beginning of the novel, the conversation between the poet Bezdomny and Berlioz, the editor of the literary monthly and also the chairman of Massolit, one of the largest literary associations of Moscow. The conversation about the anti-religious poem about Jesus written by Bez-

domny has the style of propaganda instruction; it is about how to describe the character of Jesus. Bezdomny "painted" Jesus "in very black colors," but unfortunately, he showed him as existing, contrary to the prevailing propaganda view that the character of Jesus is a "mere invention, pure myth."

Finally, the key motif of the novel: an overwhelming ideological machine destroys the Master. Here is a brief description of the path of destruction. The oppressive sequence of events leading to the destruction of the Master begins with the refusal to publish his entire work. The publication of only a fragment of his book evokes the fury of the supporters of anti-religious propaganda. The writer Mstislav Lavrovich demands a merciless crackdown on pilatism and its hack writer. The critic Ariman calls the Master an "enemy under the editor's wing," who "had tried to drag into print an apologia for Jesus Christ." The Master mentions that it is nothing compared to what the critic Latunsky wrote in the article "A Militant Old Believer." This article was followed by more attacks on the Master, reinforcing his fear of being arrested. Then, a mental illness has appeared and a terrifying fear of the tentacles of an agile and cold octopus that creeps straight into the heart of the Master. This is the symbol of the loop of the system of evil, entwining and tightening its grip around the Master, which ultimately dooms him. The loops of evil are: attacks in the press, denunciations, the arrest of the Master, his three-month deferment to prison, kicking him to the curb and then his homelessness in January and the frostbite of the toes of his left foot; finally, mental illness and a stay in the psychiatric clinic of Professor Stravinsky. The typical methods of censorship and destruction used by the Soviet system against writers, whose creative work did not fit into its ideological scheme, were applied to the Master.

2) I call the second type of evil the evil of defect. *The Master and Margarita* can be read as a symphony on human weaknesses, written for many voices. Moscow is a spoiled city. A particular comment on this issue is captured by Woland's words spoken in the Variétés theater: "Well, now, replied the magician reflectively. They're people like any others. They're over-fond of money, but then they always were [...] Humankind loves money, no matter if it's made of leather, paper, bronze, or gold. They're thoughtless, of course [...] but then they sometimes feel compassion too [...] they're ordinary people (the Muscovites—KM), in fact they remind me very much of their predecessors, except that the housing shortage has soured them [...]" In this way, Bulgakov took the liberty of using a veiled criticism of the housing situation in Moscow at that time; some families often lived in one flat, and shared a kitchen and bathroom. Let us draw only one conclusion from

this subtle assessment of human nature. The residents of Moscow were deprived beyond the norm.

Bulgakov leads us through the events in Moscow, from one place to another, never forgetting to describe human frailties. There are so many examples that I shall mention only some of them without a detailed description. Here they are: 1) the greed of the audience of the Variétés theater, 2) the coquettish lewdness of the lady encountered in her flat by Bezdomny during his pursuit of Woland, 3) the quarrelsomeness of the neighbors in one of the Moscow tenement houses. The tenants were overheard by Margarita during her flight over the city, 4) the thievery, adventurism and gossiping of Anna the Plague, 5) the drunkenness of a lover of bodily pleasures—Likhodeyev, the director of the theater, a man about whom it is said in theatrical circles that he is not a “bouquet of violets,” 6) the belligerence of Prokhor Petrovic, the chairman of the Entertainments Commission (the institution of censorship is hidden under this name), all too often evoking the powers of hell, and who also has an affair with his secretary; additionally a liar (doing nothing, he explained to Koroviev that he was busy and could not see him), 7) the ignorance of the poet Bezdomny, 8) the union of Massolit writers is a union whose members allocate various types of benefits to themselves, a group of people focused on entertainment and the struggle for privileges, 9) the cunning and slyness of Maximilian Andreyevich Poplavsky, Berlioz’s uncle employed at the planning office, 10) the boorishness and monstrous stinginess of the Varétés theater barman, Andrei Fokich Sokov, 11) the nepotism and affection for women of the chairman of the Moscow Theaters Acoustics Commission, Arkady Apollonich Sempleyarov, 12) Ivan Savyelich Varenuha’s, a surly and arrogant wriggler, tendency to lie. It is impossible to forget about the most severe defect manifested, not in Moscow, but in Jerusalem; the defect that has reached Pilate and that he will never forget—cowardice. Let us recall Judas who betrays Yeshua Ha-Notsri, and also Niza the desired woman of Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. Finally, I would like to mention the shady figure of Arthanius.

3) It is time to turn to the demonic powers of evil, which—as Anna says—are located at flat No. 50 on the fourth floor in the house at 302a Sadovaya Street. What do we know about the evil forces that prevail in Moscow? We know that they move freely in time and space, have insight into human consciousness, and have knowledge about the recesses of the human soul. They are immortal forces that cannot be killed or arrested; they bring the power to influence the human world with them, affecting the fate of individual protagonists, causing large-scale damage. The presence of the

demonic forces in Moscow is “really a terrible thing! Besides four gutted buildings and hundreds of people driven out of their minds, several people had been killed.” Woland and his entourage uphold complete freedom of unlimited action in Moscow. Their powers are greater than the power of the communist state and its services. The powers of the state system of evil do not compare to the Dark Lord and his band. Let us recall only the unsuccessful attempts of the state’s services to arrest the entire gang, to kill Koroviev and Behemoth or the repeated attempts to capture Woland.

Fighting within the Area of Evil-What Happens to the Bad?

We are primarily interested in the dynamics of mutual relations in the area of evil outlined above. Let us start with the relationship that connects systemic evil with the evil of human frailties. An organized system of evil preys on human frailty, it accuses and enslaves through fear. Józef Tischner in his *Philosophy of Drama* showed that authorities in the totalitarian state accuse and condemn using fear and deceit. Accusation does not exclude anyone; everyone is in danger because everyone is a potential rebel. At the same time, systemic evil tempts and lures. It is an invitation to participate in power and lures with the benefits connected with it, but it also absorbs those who succumb to it by making them its one of own tools. That is why systemic evil is founded in human weaknesses. What would the ominous power of the Communist Leviathan be without a whole crowd of beneficiaries of the system, agents or informers who succumb to its sinister charm? The literary critic attacking the Master, the man who reports on him, or another person who comes to arrest him—all these people are drawn in by systemic evil, becoming messengers of the kingdom of evil; people are like the cold tentacles of the octopus that the Master had dreamed about, as emerging from the system of evil that entwines the poor wretch.

What does the third power bring to the world of evil powers? The answer is found in one word—war; this is a war of evil with evil. The demonic powers of Woland and his entourage clash with both the powers of the totalitarian state and the evil of individual human frailties, and more accurately they strike at a horrendous alliance; the alliance of the organized system of evil that accuses and lures with the evil of those who let themselves be drawn into the system, succumbing to fear and temptation. It has been emphasized many times before that the demonic powers of Woland’s band dispense justice in the hearts of those for whom systemic evil prevailed the most. The penalty remains roughly in proportion to the fault, the bigger

the fault the greater the punishment. Baron Meigel was killed directly by the hands of Asasello at the great Satan's Rout; the Lord of Darkness calls him an "eavesdropper and spy," a man who is "spying and eavesdropping as much as he could." Woland is, I am not afraid to say so, like a god of justice who punishes human weaknesses. The Prince of Darkness does not lead to temptation (this systemic evil threatens and also tempts), but punishes according to the logic of justice founded on the dependence between the extent of guilt and the severity of the punishment.

The demonic powers clash with the kingdom of evil not only by dispensing justice to its human tentacles. Evil forces, by destroying the order created by the totalitarian power, reveal its weakness. The powers of the kingdom of evil, which for good reason arouse fear among people, are completely powerless against the Mage's group. Further attempts to crack down on Woland's band do not end in success, but in a fire, which arouses a smile on the reader's face. It is worth mentioning that fires and destruction have a symbolic nature in the novel; fire is a symbol of purification (that is how the fire in the Master's flat should be understood), or it is a symbol of punishment (for this reason the house of Griboyedov, which is the seat of Massolit, is burned); fire also destroys the store which exchanges foreign currency. Flames also engulfed the flat No. 50 at 302 Sadovaya Street, which previously became the place of Woland's residence.

The actions of Woland and his entourage, revealing the impotence of the totalitarian power, simultaneously strike at the ideological order of the state founded on an irreligious vision of the world. The ideological interpretation is founded on a naturalistic paradigm according to which supernatural, extraordinary powers that could violate the natural order of the world is questioned. Everything that happens in the world has natural causes. The point is that the presence of Woland and his entourage in the capital of a totalitarian state, among the people subordinated to the communist system, is a brazen challenge to the belief that there are no things and events in conflict with the materialistic understanding of the world.

We cannot ignore the fact that the demonic powers of evil save the ingenious Master from the oppressive hands of the totalitarian monster; the system took his own name away from him, brought a sea of sufferings to him, and ultimately pushed him into schizophrenia. When the Prince of Darkness brings back Margarita to her beloved Master and he finally appears in the infamous apartment number 50, Woland comments his condition using only one sentence, important for these analyses: "they fixed him good (ero хорошо отделили)." The power of the Lord of the Darkness is confirmed by

Margarita's words, which she uttered after she has recaptured the Master, that is when her Beloved was sleeping in their tiny apartment in a small room and she read a manuscript of the Master's work: "Nothing vanished, the all-powerful Woland really was all-powerful and Margarita was able to leaf through the manuscript to her heart's content, till dawn if she wanted to, stare at it, kiss it and re-read the words."

Could Woland, the Lord of the Darkness, be a god of justice who does not do good involuntarily (like Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*), but in accordance with the rules of justice, no matter how it is interpreted? The thesis suggested by the question is not completely unreasonable. At least one premise supports it. Let us recall it now! One of the tentacles of the systemic octopus is the literary critic with the nonaccidental name Ariman, who calls the Master an "enemy under the editor's wing," mentioned above. There is nothing accidental in Bulgakov's novel. Does it not reveal to us a composite of religious and philosophical ideas, which Mircea Eliade calls "the Manichaeism tendency" (Eliade 1984, 257), when considering it as an integral part of European spirituality? The name Ariman refers to dualistic Gnosticism that recognizes the world as a place of struggle between the powers of good and the forces of evil. Ariman, the supreme deity of darkness, appears in Mazdeism. In the religion that Mani preached, the Prince of Darkness, the god of evil, bears the name Ariman who from the beginning co-existed, without being mixed, with the good god of light. The battle between good and evil begins when desire is born. Ariman, the ruler of darkness, seeing how wonderful the light is, had the desire to have it. The powers of darkness from below forced their way up, beginning the cosmic mingling of good and evil. From that moment on, two gods would fight for world domination. The pessimistic vision of the world included humans ruled by the Prince of Darkness, and is connected with the hope that the particles of light imprisoned in the material world would eventually be released and return to the Father of Light. The powers of darkness would be separated again by an impassable limit from the Light. Let us add, in passing, that from the days of Irenaeus, Christianity fought with the dualism of Hellenistic Gnosticism by proclaiming the existence of the only one omnipotent God as the creator of heaven and earth.

In the novel *The Master and Margarita* the critic Ariman is not a god of evil but he is "on duty", serving the systemic powers of evil. Could it be that Woland and his entourage were at god's service, if not to the god of good then at least to the god of justice?

The Name of Good

The answer to the question above has a preliminary condition. We must first ask where, in the novel by Bulgakov, good resides and what it ultimately is.

1. Where does good reside? The first answer is as follows: good, overwhelmed by systemic evil, seems to be absent. Good resides in heaven. This is not a joke. The good God is like *deus otiosus* (passive god—Latin). In the history of religious studies, a concept emerged that announces, in some religions, the existence of the idea of a uranic god who has become withdrawn and does not interfere in the affairs of this world. Bulgakov's good and omnipotent God is like the heavenly *deus otiosus*, the absent creator of the world and legislator who is not an object of worship and who is invoked only when the greatest misfortunes and catastrophes happen. The absence of a good God in Moscow is so radical that it is confirmed by silence. The motif of the absent God is explicitly voiced, not in Moscow, but in Jerusalem during the execution of Yeshua Ha-Notsri. Matthew the Levite demands from the omnipotent God the shortening of the suffering of Yeshua by sending immediate death to him. A lack of response provokes Levite's protest directed at the silent weak God:

'I curse you. God!' In a hoarse voice he shouted that God was unjust and that he would believe in him no more. 'You are deaf!' roared Matthew. 'If you were not deaf you would have heard me and killed him in the instant! [...]' He shouted that his faith was ruined, that there were other gods and better ones. No other god would have allowed a man like Yeshua to be scorched to death on a pole. 'No, I was wrong!' screamed the Levite, now quite hoarse. 'You are a God of evil! Or have your eyes been blinded by the smoke of sacrifices from the temple and have your ears grown deaf to everything but the trumpet-calls of the priests? You are not an almighty God! You are an evil God! I curse you. God of robbers, their patron and protector!'

The first manifestation of goodness is therefore its weakness and absence. But what about the second?

2) Here is the second answer: the good is called Yeshua Ha-Notsri. He is a man "who had never done anyone the least harm in his life;" moreover, he claims that there are no bad people. Additionally, it is worth comparing the declaration of Yeshua, that all people are good, with the words of Jesus from *The Gospel According to Mark*. Jesus, after hearing the words "Good Teacher" addressed to him, answers: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mk, 10, 17-18). Let us go back to Yeshua Ha-Notsri. The thing is that "a philosopher proclaiming peace," as Pilate called him, when nailed to the cross on Mount Golgotha, gives a special testimony to

mercy when, just before his death, he asks for water for his companion of torture, Dismas: "Yeshua turned aside from the sponge. He tried to make his voice sound kind and persuasive, but failed and could only croak huskily. 'Give him a drink too'". Let us say this firmly. One should not equate Yeshua Ha-Notsri with the Jesus of the New Testament. Yeshua is not a divine Logos, a Messiah, incarnate God, etc. [...] Bulgakov's Yeshua is cleansed from the tiniest traces of divinity, stripped of the aura of holiness. There is no denying that he is an *example* of mercy. It reminds us of Józef Tischner interpretation of Pelagianism. In his interpretation of the Pelagian doctrine, humans finds in themselves the ability to free themselves from the clutches of evil. The only thing that they need is a good example. Such an example of mercy is Bulgakov's Yeshua, a man who did no harm to any other person.

The example of mercy finds its followers in the novel. Mercy comes to the fore during the performance at the Variétés theater. After Behemoth cut off the head of the announcer, George Bengalsky, a voice comes from the theater hall, it becomes an initiation of the acts of mercy:

'For God's sake stop torturing him!' a woman's voice from a box suddenly rang out above the turmoil and the magician turned towards the sound. 'Well, ladies and gentlemen, shall we forgive him?' asked Faggot, turning to the audience. 'Yes, forgive him, forgive him!' The cries came at first from a few individual voices, mostly women, then merged into a chorus with the men. 'What is your command, messire?' Faggot asked the masked professor. 'Well, now,' replied the magician reflectively. 'They're people like any others. They're over-fond of money, but then they always were [...] Human-kind loves money, no matter if it's made of leather, paper, bronze or gold. They're thoughtless, of course [...] but then they sometimes feel compassion too [...] they're ordinary people, in fact they remind me very much of their predecessors, except that the housing shortage has soured them [...]' And he shouted the order: 'Put back his head.'

Margarita gives testimony to mercy twice. For the first time, when she does not demand, as a reward for being present at Satan's rout, the return of her Master. Margarita demands that the kerchief with a navy-blue border should not be delivered to a certain Frida every day. The unfortunate woman suffocated her child with this kerchief in the forest, pushing it into its mouth. Not only the deed of Margarita is important for our deliberations, but also Woland's reaction:

'So there only remains one thing—to find yourself some rags and use them to block up all the cracks in my bedroom.' 'What do you mean, messire?' said Margarita, puzzled. 'I quite agree, messire,' interrupted the cat. 'Rags—that's it!' And the cat banged its

paw on the table in exasperation.' 'I was speaking of compassion,' explained Woland, the gaze of his fiery eye fixed on Margarita. 'Sometimes it creeps in through the narrowest cracks. That is why I suggested using rags to block them up [...]'

Margarita's second act of mercy is connected with Pilate, chained to a rock and tormented by insomnia for hundreds of years because of his cowardice, who repeats that he cannot find any peace. Let us recall the conversation of Margarita and Woland:

'Twenty-four thousand moons in penance for one moon long ago, isn't that too much?' asked Margarita. 'Are you going to repeat the business with Frieda again?' said Woland. 'But you needn't distress yourself, Margarita. All will be as it should; that is how the world is made.' 'Let him go!' Margarita suddenly shouted in a piercing voice, as she had shouted when she was a witch.

Good shows itself in acts of mercy. It is solely the work of human beings. However, it should not escape our attention that, in the novel by Bulgakov, mercy which "will sometimes come into the heart of man" is not a gift of a good God. Silence is God's weakness. It is fulfilled as the absence of divine mercy. God does not save from evil. God's mercy is missing not only in the world; it is not even in the "heart of man". The silence of God means the absence of the gift of grace, which is to do good. The human ability to do good can only be strengthened by the "power" of a good example.

Goodness (Mercy) and Demonic Evil in Relation with Each Other

So, what is the relationship between good, which is mercy, with demonic evil? Here is the powerless mercy which lacks the force needed to actively oppose evil—it is unable to fight against evil; at the same time it acts in accordance with the order of good that never compels to but appeals to freedom, it gives a good example. In the face of such goodness, the demonic powers of Woland remain in a relationship that is not so much that of hostility but rather that of a respectful dislike. Mercy and the demonic forces of justice apply the principle of not getting in the way. Woland does not fight against mercy, but he clogs up the cracks with rags so that mercy does not get into the places where the demonic powers of justice rule. Where there is room for mercy, there is no room for justice.

By contrasting the mercy of Yeshua Ha-Notsri and his followers with the justice of the Prince of Darkness and his entourage, we involuntarily recall Hellenistic Gnosticism, this time in the version of the anti-Semite, Marcion.

Marcion's dualism is founded on the opposition of the Old Testament God Yahweh, the creator of the world and also the God of Law and Justice, and the evangelical good God of the New Testament who is love. The good God sends his Son the Redeemer. Yahweh, deprived of mercy, avenges himself on God's Son by handing Him over to the persecutors. Humankind, which was redeemed by the Son, still continues to be oppressed, under the rule of the Creator God of the Old Testament.

The difference is however fundamental. Woland does not attack mercy. In the novel by Bulgakov, the demonic powers of justice and the weakness of mercy coexist separately in their own worlds, they do not exceed the boundary that delimits the jurisdiction of each party. The conversation between the Lord of Darkness and Matthew the Levite—the messenger of Light, is a kind of confirmation of such an interpretation of their mutual relations. During this conversation, the fate of Margarita and her beloved Master is settled:

Then something made Woland turn his attention to a round tower behind him on the roof. From its walls appeared a grim, ragged, mud-spattered man with a beard, dressed in a chiton and home-made sandals.

'Ha!' exclaimed Woland, with a sneer at the approaching figure. 'You are the last person I expected to see here. What brings you here, of all people?'

'I have come to see you, the spirit of evil and the lord of the shadows' the man replied with a hostile glare at Woland.

'Well, tax-gatherer, if you've come to see me, why don't you wish me well?'

'Because I have no wish to see you well' said the man impudently.

'Then I am afraid you will have to reconcile yourself to my good health' retorted Woland, his mouth twisted into a grin.

'As soon as you appeared on this roof you made yourself ridiculous. It was your tone of voice. You spoke your words as though you denied the very existence of the shadows or of evil. Think, now: where would your good be if there were no evil and what would the world look like without shadow? Shadows are thrown by people and things. There's the shadow of my sword, for instance. But shadows are also cast by trees and living things. Do you want to strip the whole globe by removing every tree and every creature to satisfy your fantasy of a bare world? You're stupid.'

'I won't argue with you, old sophist', replied Matthew the Levite.

'You are incapable of arguing with me for the reason I have just mentioned—you are too stupid' answered Woland.

The powerless mercy that appeals to freedom seems helpless before the powerful forces of the systemic leviathan, yet it is not threatened by the demonic powers of justice. It must be said, with surprise, that Woland's attitude towards the Kingdom of Light is amazingly passive. The demonic forces

do not only not attack the area under the jurisdiction of mercy, but what is more, Woland permits acts of mercy. This was the case in the Variétés theater; it was also the case when mercy “has rooted” itself in Margarita’s soul. As if that was not enough, in the extremely unfriendly conversation between Woland and Matthew the Levite, the point is not for one side to defeat the other, but only to acquire mutual recognition. Levite’s stupidity consists in proclaiming that it is possible to have light without darkness.

The war takes place between Woland and the communist system of evil. It must be noted, however, that the demonic powers of Woland do not violate the foundations of the organized system of evil. Woland wins the battle, but he does not win the war. The destruction of an organized system of governance, which was performed by the Magus and his entourage, was limited in scope. As the narrator says: “Years passed and people began to forget about Woland, Koroviev and the rest. Many things changed in the lives of those who had suffered at the hands of Woland and his associates, and these changes [were—KM] minor.” These relevant fragments of the novel show, properly and unfortunately, that everything has returned to the systemic standard. The totalitarian system has done a lot to make it happen. Few traces of transformation for the better (e.g. Varenuška does not lie talking over the phone. He also gains immense popularity and widespread recognition because of his kindness) have little importance.

And yet there is still hope. The dominion of systemic evil is not the last chapter of the human story. The above observation suggests that the novel by Bulgakov has a trace of deformed messianic hope; moreover, only in a rudimentary formulation that does not make a clear and explicit idea. But it is true. I think that hope in the times of an evil system’s reign is only an aberration in relation to the “natural” order of this world; it is an order that governs itself with the logic of mercy. Here are the words of hope that Woland directs towards Margarita: “Everything will be as it should be, that is how the world is made (Все будет правильно, на этом построен мир).”

While writing this text, apart from the original text, I used the English translation of Michael Glenn (Published by Collins and Harvill Press, London 1967) and four available translations in Polish by: a) Irena Lewandowska and Witold Dąbrowski, b) Andrzej Drawicz, c) Leokadia Anna Przebinda, Grzegorz Przebinda and Igor Przebinda, d) Barbara Dohnalik. Quoting the excerpts from the book, I used Michael Glenn’s translation. I made changes, based on my own accountability, where necessary.

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