

...
A NEWLY REVISED TRANSLATION BY
RICHARD PEVEAR AND
LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY
FOREWORD BY
BORIS FISHMAN
...



THE MASTER AND MARGARITA

Nothing in the whole of literature compares with *The Master and Margarita*. One spring afternoon, the Devil, trailing fire and chaos in his wake, weaves himself out of the shadows and into Moscow. Mikhail Bulgakov's fantastical, funny, and devastating satire of Soviet life combines two distinct yet interwoven parts, one set in contemporary Moscow, the other in ancient Jerusalem, each brimming with historical, imaginary, frightful, and wonderful characters. Written during the darkest days of Stalin's reign, and finally published in 1966 and 1967, *The Master and Margarita* became a literary phenomenon, signaling artistic and spiritual freedom for Russians everywhere.

This newly revised translation, by the award-winning team of Pevear and Volokhonsky, is made from the complete and unabridged Russian text.

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'Beautiful, strange, tender, scarifying, and incandescent . . . One of those novels that, even in translation, makes one feel that not one word could have been written differently . . . *Margarita* has too many achievements to list—for one thing, a plot scudding with action and suspense, not exactly a hallmark of Russian literature. . . . This luminous translation [is] distinguished by not only the stylistic elegance that has become a hallmark of Pevear and Volokhonsky translations but also a supreme ear for the sound and meaning of Soviet life. . . . It's time for *The Master and Margarita* to rise to its rightful place in the canon of great world literature. . . . As literature, it will live forever.'

—Boris Fishman, from the Foreword

PENGUIN CLASSICS  DELUXE EDITION

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV was born in Kiev in May 1891. He studied and briefly practised medicine and, after indigent wanderings through revolutionary Russia and the Caucasus, he settled in Moscow in 1921. His sympathetic portrayal of White characters in his stories, in the plays *The Days of the Turbins* (*The White Guard*), which enjoyed great success at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1926, and *Flight* (1927), and his satirical treatment of the officials of the New Economic Plan, led to growing criticism, which became violent after the play *The Purple Island*. His later works treat the subject of the artist and the tyrant under the guise of historical characters, with plays such as *Molière*, staged in 1936, *Don Quixote*, staged in 1940, and *Pushkin*, staged in 1943. He also wrote a brilliant biography, highly original in form, of his literary hero, Molière, but *The Master and Margarita*, a fantasy novel about the devil and his henchmen set in modern Moscow, is generally considered his masterpiece. Fame, at home and abroad, was not to come until a quarter of a century after his death in Moscow in 1940.

RICHARD PEVEAR and LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY have translated works by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, and Pasternak. They were twice awarded the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Prize, for their translations of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Pevear, a native of Boston, and Volokhonsky, of St. Petersburg, are married and live in Paris.

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MIKHAIL
BULGAKOV

The Master and Margarita



Translated with Notes by
RICHARD PEVEAR *and* LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY

Foreword by BORIS FISHMAN

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Contents

[*Praise for The Master and Margarita*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

[*Copyright*](#)

[*Title page*](#)

[*Foreword by* BORIS FISHMAN](#)

[*Introduction by* RICHARD PEVEAR](#)

[*A Note on the Text and Acknowledgements*](#)

[*Suggestions for Further Reading*](#)

[*Epigraph*](#)

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA

[BOOK ONE](#)

[Chapter 1: Never Talk with Strangers](#)

[Chapter 2: Pontius Pilate](#)

[Chapter 3: The Seventh Proof](#)

[Chapter 4: The Chase](#)

[Chapter 5: There Were Doings at Griboedov's](#)

[Chapter 6: Schizophrenia, As Was Said](#)

[Chapter 7: A Naughty Apartment](#)

[Chapter 8: The Combat Between the Professor and the Poet](#)

[Chapter 9: Koroviev's Stunts](#)

[Chapter 10: News from Yalta](#)

[Chapter 11: Ivan Splits in Two](#)

[Chapter 12: Black Magic and Its Exposure](#)

[Chapter 13: The Hero Enters](#)

[Chapter 14: Glory to the Cock!](#)

[Chapter 15: Nikanor Ivanovich's Dream](#)

[16 The Execution](#)

[Chapter 17: An Unquiet Day](#)

[Chapter 18: Hapless Visitors](#)

[BOOK TWO](#)

[Chapter 19: Margarita](#)

[Chapter 20: Azazello's Cream](#)

[Chapter 21: Flight](#)

[Chapter 22: By Candlelight](#)

[Chapter 23: The Great Ball at Satan's](#)

[Chapter 24: The Extraction of the Master](#)

[Chapter 25: How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Kiriath](#)

[Chapter 26: The Burial](#)

[Chapter 27: The End of Apartment No. 50](#)

[Chapter 28: The Last Adventures of Koroviev and Behemoth](#)

[Chapter 29: The Fate of the Master and Margarita Is Decided](#)

[Chapter 30: It's Time! It's Time!](#)

[Chapter 31: On Sparrow Hills](#)

[Chapter 32: Forgiveness and Eternal Refuge](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Notes](#)

Foreword

‘Lord help me to finish the novel.’

—MIKHAIL BULGAKOV, 1931

‘Don’t fall apart, don’t fall, don’t crawl . . .’

—BULGAKOV, IN A FINAL CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND, 1940

‘So that they know . . . so that they know!’

—BULGAKOV, IN THE DYING HOPE THAT *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA*
WOULD BE PUBLISHED ONE DAY, 1940

Were it a kinder world, this edition of Mikhail Bulgakov’s (mee-ha-EEL bool-GA-kov) beautiful, strange, tender, scarifying, and incandescent novel *The Master and Margarita* would be commemorating its seventy-fifth rather than fiftieth anniversary, for the author finished it in 1940, just as his own brief life was ending. But in the Soviet Union of the time—then concluding one of the most grotesquely violent decades in history, certainly when it comes to a nation’s dogged obliteration of its own people—the fate of authors like Bulgakov was so precarious that he was fortunate to die of natural causes. Finally finished after twelve years of work, he said to his wife, Elena, from his deathbed: ‘Now it deserves to be put in the commode, under your linens.’ She did not even try to get it published.

The novel spans several summer days—ah, summer in Moscow!—during which the capital is visited by the Devil himself, trailed by a piebald entourage: two baroquely disfigured henchmen, a naked seductress named Hella, and an easily insulted giant cat with a fondness for vodka and guns. Registering himself as a foreign ‘artiste’ specializing in black magic—one of the novel’s sweet ironies is that the dean of deception is just about the only truth-teller in town—Woland (as the novel’s Devil is known) proceeds to expose, via a series of séances at the Variety Theater, the vanity, greed, and servility that continue to rule even in socialist Moscow. But this is a warm-up. Woland is in Moscow for Margarita, an unhappily married woman who once loved the Master, the author of a novel about Pontius Pilate, who consigns Christ to the cross despite being morally awed by Him (and whose portrayal could not fail to summon comparisons to a certain present-day dictator). The Master burned most of the manuscript after it was turned down by a publisher and, saving the authorities the trouble,

consigned himself to a mental asylum in secret from Margarita. At Woland's invitation, Margarita goes through hell—literally—for the chance to find her beloved. We follow the story with periodic detours to the day of Christ's execution in Jerusalem.

But this tells you nothing. *The Master and Margarita* is one of those novels that, even in translation, makes one feel that not one word could have been written differently. I've read it half a dozen times now, in three translations and in the original, and its mystery has only increased. Trying to explain what makes it transcendent is like explaining what one cherishes about someone with whom one is in love. Yes, she is kind and trustworthy, but that's not really it. It's like those ten-ruble notes that Woland rains down on his ravening audience at the Variety—they change into bottle labels the next day. You try to hold the novel's face, and it turns away once again.

It was Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* that, in high school in suburban New Jersey, inaugurated my return to a heritage I'd been doing my best to ignore since immigrating to the States a decade before, but it was *The Master and Margarita* that brought me back, in college, to my native tongue. It may have been the first novel I read in Russian, having been too young for novels when we left the Soviet Union, and it was the reason I decided to major in Slavic languages and literatures; why I went off to intern at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow one college summer; and why today I speak Russian, then atrophying to half-croaks and mumbles, with native fluency. That first reading of *The Master and Margarita* is bittersweet to recall for many reasons. At eighteen, I idolized the Master. When I read it today, I see the Master as the one who gave up and Woland as the one complex enough to engage with the world as it really is. (As Bulgakov writes, 'But no, no! The seductive mystics are lying, there are no Caribbean Seas in the world, no desperate freebooters sail them, no corvette chases after them, no cannon smoke drifts across the waves. There is nothing, and there was nothing! There is that sickly linden over there, there is the cast-iron fence, and the boulevard beyond it . . . And the ice is melting in the bowl, and at the next table you see someone's bloodshot, bovine eyes, and you're afraid, afraid . . . Oh, gods, my gods, poison, bring me poison!')

The novel is revolutionary not because of political daring—Bulgakov was not a political person, and though he was not oblivious to the terror unfolding around him, he wished primarily to be left alone to practice his art. It is revolutionary because of that art. His plays (he was foremost a playwright) banned in the 'real' world, Bulgakov used every freedom inside the covers of his 'sunset' novel. These pages bristle with a deeply informed—Bulgakov was a gentle destroyer—indifference to every dogma, whether historical, religious, political, or artistic. Bulgakov's earthbound Christ—he is not even Christ in these pages, but a man named Yeshua—ignores the mythology of the Gospels and Soviet atheism both, as does a Satan figure who is munificent and majestic rather than petty and evil. The Pilate narrative is equally dark on the rules: It migrates from one teller to

another, from speech to novel-inside-a-novel to dream. Few novels have incorporated fantastical elements into straight realism, the absurd into the sane, as hilariously and boldly as this one. (Long before there was Latin American magic realism, there was Soviet magic realism. It was a lot funnier.)

But what other style could fit a world where heaven was now, indeed, hell? What kind of diabolical sorcery could compare to the millions disappeared by Stalin and his security apparatus? What demonic variety show could compare to the spectacle of the Soviet show trials of the 1930s? The novel's galling, and finally unacceptable, play was to propose that in a place like the USSR, justice was with the dark forces: the gospel according to the devil. And who is a writer if not a perpetrator of black magic? As Woland is 'part of that power which eternally/wills evil and eternally works good', as Goethe's *Faust* has it—as Woland's existence proves the existence of a God the Soviet state has abandoned—so the writer tells lies in order to say something true.

• • •

Initially, Bulgakov's talent exonerated his politically questionable background. The author epitomized the Russian intelligentsia snuffed out by the Bolsheviks, of which his contemporary Vladimir Nabokov was also a member—impossibly cultured, preoccupied with the fate of the nation, conservative but not reactionary, liberal but not revolutionary, full of laughter but not irony, receptive to Europe but molecularly Russian, and devoted above all to a kind of proud, earnest, fastidious, and humane decency. It wasn't progressive enough, but it was beautiful. '[Bulgakov's] earliest memories included his father playing cards, his mother getting ready to go to the theater, guests around a table—everything as it should be', as Ellendea Proffer renders a quintessential tableau of the milieu in her biography of the author.

A personage no other than Stalin counted himself an admirer—he attended one of Bulgakov's plays fifteen times. And when the art commissars started in on Bulgakov's work for its nuanced perspective on his vanishing class—of the 301 reviews that Bulgakov, as thin-skinned as the cliché about writers has it, had counted by 1930, 298 were negative—it was Stalin himself who interceded on the writer's behalf.

Some totalitarians prefer to conceal themselves behind the machinery of the state, but, like the cannibal who lovingly cradles his victim as he digs around for his heart, Stalin liked conversing with his terrorized children. He was an intimate murderer. So when Bulgakov, as skilled at despair as at the written word, reached a nadir in 1930 and burned an early draft of *Margarita*, it was to Stalin he wrote, asking permission to emigrate if his country could not find use for his talents.

Bulgakov could not bend. It wasn't for lack of trying—he didn't believe that a Russian writer could function outside his homeland, and tried sincerely to write a

play with the right message. (The closest he came, a play about Stalin's early years, was banned by the dictator himself.) If the unbending could not figure out how, they would be broken. But Bulgakov's great fortune was that, for some reason, he was allowed to live, though relatively little of his work reached the public, a death of a different kind. ('I ask that it be taken into account', Bulgakov wrote in a draft of the letter to Stalin, 'that for me not being allowed to write is tantamount to being buried alive.') The dictator called several weeks later. 'What—have you gotten very tired of us?' he asked the playwright, a rhetorical question if ever there were one. He offered Bulgakov a job in a Moscow theater so there would be no more letters.

• • •

Bulgakov wrote about his time with not only the viciousness of a satirist but also the tenderness of a native son. In these pages, I smell the Soviet Union of not only the 1930s but also the 1980s, when I was growing up there—a testament to that nation's stagnancy and also to Bulgakov's perception. He is an incomparably rich and detailed observer—intending to do full justice to the moon, a symbolic linchpin of this novel, he sat by the window night after night recording its changing appearance and 'moods'. The Soviet Union in American accounts tends to be a deprived, and depraved, hell, but there was also much that was sweet, and sheltered, about it, and this book's portrayal of that country touches the bone for an exile. So does the novel's evocation of that subtle Soviet sense of living with eyes and ears everywhere; of how sinners find crumbs even at a table set for the new saints of socialism; and of the integrity that survives, miraculously, even in such circumstances. So that the Muscovites mocked in the early part of the book receive, as well, a kind of hidden sympathy. No human being deserves the trauma of a life in a place like the USSR, and that person's ultimate judgment must take that into account.

Margarita has too many achievements to list—for one thing, a plot scudding with action and suspense, not exactly a hallmark of Russian literature—but I am devoted especially to the way its openhearted, un-ironic celebration of art and love lives alongside such a dark-souled, too-knowing chronicle of the evil that nests inside the same human heart. And to the revenge—on the hacks, the yes-men, the snitches, the hypocrites—that the novel declines to rise above.

Margarita is not interested in sainthood; even as its heroine soars, naked, above Moscow on a broom, shattering the windows of the critics who have savaged the Master to advance their own careers, the novel's feet are as soil-bound as its Christ. Because it loves that soil, because that soil has been hijacked, and because it is running with blood. (' "Don't be afraid, Queen, the blood has long since gone into the earth. And where it was spilled, grapevines are already growing."')

Until now, *The Master and Margarita* has been something of a cult classic. Maybe it's the humor: America grew up on vaudeville and slapstick, more youthful and accessible forms, whereas Russian humor is winking and wry, at home between the lines; there's a knowing beat before the laugh. If not that, then the many Russian names the author flings at the American reader. But the early effort is worth it—and, thanks to this luminous translation, newly revised for this edition and distinguished by not only the stylistic elegance that has become a hallmark of Pevear and Volokhonsky translations but also a supreme ear for the sound and meaning of Soviet life, there has never been better help along the way. In 2016, it's time for *The Master and Margarita* to rise to its rightful place in the canon of great world literature. (As an aside, let it inspire American authors with its openness to sentiment, its unashamed passion, its dedication to the loftiest questions.) In the past fifty—no, seventy-five—years, it has, surely against its own wishes, proved its bitter prescience about the way of the world again and again. The twentieth century—which ended with Bulgakov's homeland selecting a petty devil as its leader—may have made it too easy. May the twenty-first prove its political preoccupations obsolete. But as literature, it will live forever.

BORIS FISHMAN

Introduction

Mikhail Bulgakov worked on this luminous book throughout one of the darkest decades of the century. His last revisions were dictated to his wife a few weeks before his death in 1940 at the age of forty-nine. For him, there was never any question of publishing the novel. The mere existence of the manuscript, had it come to the knowledge of Stalin's police, would almost certainly have led to the permanent disappearance of its author. Yet the book was of great importance to him, and he clearly believed that a time would come when it could be published. Another twenty-six years had to pass before events bore out that belief and *The Master and Margarita*, by what seems a surprising oversight in Soviet literary politics, finally appeared in print. The effect was electrifying.

The monthly magazine *Moskva*, otherwise a rather cautious and quiet publication, carried the first part of *The Master and Margarita* in its November 1966 issue. The 150,000 copies sold out within hours. In the weeks that followed, group readings were held, people meeting each other would quote and compare favourite passages, there was talk of little else. Certain sentences from the novel immediately became proverbial. The very language of the novel was a contradiction of everything wooden, official, imposed. It was a joy to speak.

When the second part appeared in the January 1967 issue of *Moskva*, it was greeted with the same enthusiasm. Yet this was not the excitement caused by the emergence of a new writer, as when Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* appeared in the magazine *Novy Mir* in 1962. Bulgakov was neither unknown nor forgotten. His plays had begun to be revived in theatres during the late fifties and were published in 1962. His superb *Life of Monsieur de Molière* came out in that same year. His early stories were reprinted. Then, in 1965, came the *Theatrical Novel*, based on his years of experience with Stanislavsky's renowned Moscow Art Theatre. And finally in 1966 a volume of *Selected Prose* was published, containing the complete text of Bulgakov's first novel, *The White Guard*, written in the twenties and dealing with the nearly contemporary events of the Russian civil war in his native Kiev and the Ukraine, a book which in its clear-sighted portrayal of human courage and weakness ranks among the truest depictions of war in all of literature.

Bulgakov was known well enough, then. But, outside a very small group, the existence of *The Master and Margarita* was completely unsuspected. That certainly accounts for some of the amazement caused by its publication. It was thought that virtually all of Bulgakov had found its way into print. And here was not some minor literary remains but a major novel, the author's crowning work.

Then there were the qualities of the novel itself—its formal originality, its devastating satire of Soviet life, and of Soviet literary life in particular, its ‘theatrical’ rendering of the Great Terror of the thirties, the audacity of its portrayal of Jesus Christ and Pontius Pilate, not to mention Satan. But, above all, the novel breathed an air of freedom, artistic and spiritual, which had become rare indeed, not only in Soviet Russia. We sense it in the special tone of Bulgakov’s writing, a combination of laughter (satire, caricature, buffoonery) and the most unguarded vulnerability. Two aphorisms detachable from the novel may suggest something of the complex nature of this freedom and how it may have struck the novel’s first readers. One is the much-quoted ‘Manuscripts don’t burn’, which seems to express an absolute trust in the triumph of poetry, imagination, the free word, over terror and oppression, and could thus become a watchword of the intelligentsia. The publication of *The Master and Margarita* was taken as a proof of the assertion. In fact, during a moment of fear early in his work on the novel, Bulgakov did burn what he had written. And yet, as we see, it refused to stay burned. This moment of fear, however, brings me to the second aphorism —‘Cowardice is the most terrible of vices’—which is repeated with slight variations several times in the novel. More penetrating than the defiant ‘Manuscripts don’t burn’, this word touched the inner experience of generations of Russians. To portray that experience with such candour required another sort of freedom and a love for something more than ‘culture’. Gratitude for such perfect expression of this other, deeper freedom must surely have been part of the enthusiastic response of readers to the novel’s first appearance.

And then there was the sheer unlikeliness of its publication. By 1966 the ‘thaw’ that had followed Stalin’s death was over and a new freeze was coming. The hopes awakened by the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the first public acknowledgement of the existence of the Gulag, had been disappointed. In 1964 came the notorious trial of the poet Joseph Brodsky, and a year later the trial of the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, both sentenced to terms in that same Gulag. Solzhenitsyn saw a new Stalinization approaching, made worse by the terrible sense of repetition, stagnation and helplessness. Such was the monotonously grim atmosphere of the Brezhnev era. And in the midst of it there suddenly burst *The Master and Margarita*, not only an anomaly but an impossibility, a sort of cosmic error, evidence of some hidden but fatal crack in the system of Soviet power. People kept asking, how could they have let it happen?

Bulgakov began work on the first version of the novel early in 1929, or possibly at the end of 1928. It was abandoned, taken up again, burned, resurrected, recast and revised many times. It accompanied Bulgakov through the period of greatest suffering for his people—the period of forced collectivization and the first five-year plan, which decimated Russia’s peasantry and destroyed her agriculture, the period of expansion of the system of ‘corrective labour camps’, of the penetration of the secret police into all areas of

life, of the liquidation of the intelligentsia, of vast party purges and the Moscow 'show trials'. In literature the same struggle went on in miniature, and with the same results. Bulgakov was not arrested, but by 1930 he found himself so far excluded that he could no longer publish or produce his work. In an extraordinarily forthright letter to the central government, he asked for permission to emigrate, since the hostility of the literary powers made it impossible for him to live. If emigration was not permitted, 'and if I am condemned to keep silent in the Soviet Union for the rest of my days, then I ask the Soviet government to give me a job in my speciality and assign me to a theatre as a titular director.' Stalin himself answered this letter by telephone on 17 April, and shortly afterwards the Moscow Art Theatre hired Bulgakov as an assistant director and literary consultant. However, during the thirties only his stage adaptations of Gogol's *Dead Souls* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* were granted a normal run. His own plays either were not staged at all or were quickly withdrawn, and his *Life of Monsieur de Molière*, written in 1932–3 for the collection *Lives of Illustrious Men*, was rejected by the publisher. These circumstances are everywhere present in *The Master and Margarita*, which was in part Bulgakov's challenge to the rule of terror in literature. The successive stages of his work on the novel, his changing evaluations of the nature of the book and its characters, reflect events in his life and his deepening grasp of what was at stake in the struggle. I will briefly sketch what the study of his archives has made known of this process.

The novel in its definitive version is composed of two distinct but interwoven parts, one set in contemporary Moscow, the other in ancient Jerusalem (called Yershalaim). Its central characters are Woland (Satan) and his retinue, the poet Ivan Homeless, Pontius Pilate, an unnamed writer known as 'the master', and Margarita. The Pilate story is condensed into four chapters and focused on four or five large-scale figures. The Moscow story includes a whole array of minor characters. The Pilate story, which passes through a succession of narrators, finally joins the Moscow story at the end, when the fates of Pilate and the master are simultaneously decided. The earliest version, narrated by a first-person 'chronicler' and entitled *The Engineer's Hoof*, was written in the first few months of 1929. It contained no trace of Margarita and only a faint hint of the master in a minor character representing the old intelligentsia. The Pilate story was confined to a single chapter. This version included the essentials of the Moscow satire, which afterwards underwent only minor revisions and rearrangements. It began in much the same way as the definitive version, with a dialogue between a people's poet and an editor (here of an anti-religious magazine, *The Godless*) on the correct portrayal of Christ as an exploiter of the proletariat. A stranger (Woland) appears and, surprised at their unbelief, astounds them with an eyewitness account of Christ's crucifixion. This account forms the second chapter, entitled 'The Gospel of Woland'.

Clearly, what first spurred Bulgakov to write the novel was his outrage at the portrayals of Christ in Soviet anti-religious propaganda (*The Godless* was an actual monthly magazine of atheism, published from 1922 to 1940). His response was based on a simple reversal—a vivid circumstantial narrative of what was thought to be a ‘myth’ invented by the ruling class, and a breaking down of the self-evident reality of Moscow life by the intrusion of the ‘stranger’. This device, fundamental to the novel, would be more fully elaborated in its final form. Literary satire was also present from the start. The fifth chapter of the definitive version, entitled ‘There Were Doings at Griboedov’s’, already appeared intact in this earliest draft, where it was entitled ‘Mania Furibunda’. In May of 1929, Bulgakov sent this chapter to a publisher, who rejected it. This was his only attempt to publish anything from the novel.

The second version, from later in the same year, was a reworking of the first four chapters, filling out certain episodes and adding the death of Judas to the second chapter, which also began to detach itself from Woland and become a more autonomous narrative. According to the author’s wife, Elena Sergeevna, Bulgakov partially destroyed these two versions in the spring of 1930—‘threw them in the fire’, in the writer’s own words. What survived were two large notebooks with many pages torn out. This was at the height of the attacks on Bulgakov in the press, the moment of his letter to the government.

After that came some scattered notes in two notebooks, kept intermittently over the next two years, which was a very difficult time for Bulgakov. In the upper-right-hand corner of the second, he wrote: ‘Lord, help me to finish my novel, 1931.’ In a fragment of a later chapter, entitled ‘Woland’s Flight’, there is a reference to someone addressed familiarly as *ty*, who is told that he ‘will meet with Schubert and clear mornings’. This is obviously the master, though he is not called so. There is also the first mention of the name of Margarita. In Bulgakov’s mind, the main outlines of a new conception of the novel were evidently already clear.

This new version he began to write in earnest in October of 1932, during a visit to Leningrad with Elena Sergeevna, whom he had just married. (The ‘model’ for Margarita, who had now entered the composition, she was previously married to a high-ranking military official, who for some time opposed her wish to leave him for the writer, leading Bulgakov to think he would never see her again.) His wife was surprised that he could set to work without having any notes or earlier drafts with him, but Bulgakov explained, ‘I know it by heart.’ He continued working, not without long interruptions, until 1936. Various new titles occurred to him, all still referring to Satan as the central figure—*The Great Chancellor*, *Satan, Here I Am*, *The Black Theologian*, *He Has Come*, *The Hoofed Consultant*. As in the earliest version, the time of the action is 24–5 June, the feast of St John, traditionally a time of magic enchantments (later it was moved to the time of the spring full moon). The nameless friend of Margarita is called ‘Faust’ in some notes, though not in the text itself. He is also called ‘the poet’,

and is made the author of a novel which corresponds to the 'Gospel of Woland' from the first drafts. This historical section is now broken up and moved to a later place in the novel, coming closer to what would be the arrangement in the final version.

Bulgakov laboured especially over the conclusion of the novel and what reward to give the master. The ending appears for the first time in a chapter entitled 'Last Flight', dating from July 1936. It differs little from the final version. In it, however, the master is told explicitly and directly:

The house on Sadovaya and the horrible Bosoy will vanish from your memory, but with them will go Ha-Nozri and the forgiven hegemon. These things are not for your spirit. You will never raise yourself higher, you will not see Yeshua, you will never leave your refuge.

In an earlier note, Bulgakov had written even more tellingly: 'You will not hear the liturgy. But you will listen to the romantics . . .' These words, which do not appear in the definitive text, tell us how painfully Bulgakov weighed the question of cowardice and guilt in considering the fate of his hero, and how we should understand the ending of the final version. They also indicate a thematic link between Pilate, the master, and the author himself, connecting the historical and contemporary parts of the novel.

In a brief reworking from 1936–7, Bulgakov brought the beginning of the Pilate story back to the second chapter, where it would remain, and in another reworking from 1937–8 he finally found the definitive title for the novel. In this version, the original narrator, a characterized 'chronicler', is removed. The new narrator is that fluid voice—moving freely from detached observation to ironic double voicing, to the most personal interjection—which is perhaps the finest achievement of Bulgakov's art.

The first typescript of *The Master and Margarita*, dating to 1938, was dictated to the typist by Bulgakov from this last revision, with many changes along the way. In 1939 he made further alterations in the typescript, the most important of which concerns the fate of the hero and heroine. In the last manuscript version, the fate of the master and Margarita, announced to them by Woland, is to follow Pilate up the path of moonlight to find Yeshua and peace. In the typescript, the fate of the master, announced to Woland by Matthew Levi, speaking for Yeshua, is not to follow Pilate but to go to his 'eternal refuge' with Margarita, in a rather German-Romantic setting, with Schubert's music and blossoming cherry trees. Asked by Woland, 'But why don't you take him with you into the light?' Levi replies in a sorrowful voice, 'He does not deserve the light, he deserves peace.' Bulgakov, still pondering the problem of the master's guilt (and his own, for what he considered various compromises, including his work on a play about Stalin's youth), went back to his notes and revisions from 1936, but lightened their severity with an enigmatic irony. This was to be the definitive resolution. Clearly,

the master is not to be seen as a heroic martyr for art or a 'Christ-figure'. Bulgakov's gentle irony is a warning against the mistake, more common in our time than we might think, of equating artistic mastery with a sort of saintliness, or, in Kierkegaard's terms, of confusing the aesthetic with the ethical.

In the evolution of *The Master and Margarita*, the Moscow satire of Woland and his retinue versus the literary powers and the imposed normality of Soviet life in general is there from the first, and comes to involve the master when he appears, acquiring details from the writer's own life and with them a more personal tone alongside the bantering irreverence of the demonic retinue. The Pilate story, on the other hand, the story of an act of cowardice and an interrupted dialogue, gains in weight and independence as Bulgakov's work progresses. From a single inset episode, it becomes the centrepiece of the novel, setting off the contemporary events and serving as their measure. In style and form it is a counterpoint to the rest of the book. Finally, rather late in the process, the master and Margarita appear, with Margarita coming to dominate the second part of the novel. Her story is a romance in the old sense—the celebration of a beautiful woman, of a true love, and of personal courage.

These three stories, in form as well as content, embrace virtually all that was excluded from official Soviet ideology and its literature. But if the confines of 'socialist realism' are utterly exploded, so are the confines of more traditional novelistic realism. *The Master and Margarita* as a whole is a consistently free verbal construction which, true to its own premises, can re-create ancient Jerusalem in the smallest physical detail, but can also alter the specifics of the New Testament and play variations on its principal figures, can combine the realities of Moscow life with witchcraft, vampirism, the tearing off and replacing of heads, can describe for several pages the sensation of flight on a broomstick or the gathering of the infamous dead at Satan's annual spring ball, can combine the most acute sense of the fragility of human life with confidence in its indestructibility. Bulgakov underscores the continuity of this verbal world by having certain phrases—'Oh, gods, my gods', 'Bring me poison', 'Even by moonlight I have no peace'—migrate from one character to another, or to the narrator. A more conspicuous case is the Pilate story itself, successive parts of which are told by Woland, dreamed by the poet Homeless, written by the master, and read by Margarita, while the whole preserves its stylistic unity. Narrow notions of the 'imitation of reality' break down here. But *The Master and Margarita* is true to the broader sense of the novel as a freely developing form embodied in the works of Dostoyevsky and Gogol, of Swift and Sterne, of Cervantes, Rabelais and Apuleius. The mobile but personal narrative voice of the novel, the closest model for which Bulgakov may have found in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, is the perfect medium for this continuous verbal construction. There is no multiplicity of narrators in the novel. The voice is always the same. But it has unusual range, picking up, parodying, or ironically undercutting the tones of

the novel's many characters, with undertones of lyric and epic poetry and old popular tales.

Bulgakov always loved clowning and agreed with E. T. A. Hoffmann that irony and buffoonery are expressions of 'the deepest contemplation of life in all its conditionality'. It is not by chance that his stage adaptations of the comic masterpieces of Gogol and Cervantes coincided with the writing of *The Master and Margarita*. Behind such specific 'influences' stands the age-old tradition of folk humour with its carnivalized world-view, its reversals and dethronings, its relativizing of worldly absolutes—a tradition that was the subject of a monumental study by Bulgakov's countryman and contemporary Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, which in its way was as much an explosion of Soviet reality as Bulgakov's novel, appeared in 1965, a year before *The Master and Margarita*. The coincidence was not lost on Russian readers. Commenting on it, Bulgakov's wife noted that, while there had never been any direct link between the two men, they were both responding to the same historical situation from the same cultural basis.

Many observations from Bakhtin's study seem to be aimed directly at Bulgakov's intentions, none more so than his comment on Rabelais's travesty of the 'hidden meaning', the 'secret', the 'terrifying mysteries' of religion, politics and economics: 'Laughter must liberate the gay truth of the world from the veils of gloomy lies spun by the seriousness of fear, suffering, and violence.' The settling of scores is also part of the tradition of carnival laughter. Perhaps the most pure example is the *Testament* of the poet François Villon, who in the liveliest verse handed out appropriate 'legacies' to all his enemies, thus entering into tradition and even earning himself a place in the fourth book of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. So, too, Bakhtin says of Rabelais:

In his novel . . . he uses the popular-festive system of images with its charter of freedoms consecrated by many centuries; and he uses it to inflict a severe punishment upon his foe, the Gothic age . . . In this setting of consecrated rights Rabelais attacks the fundamental dogmas and sacraments, the holy of holies of medieval ideology.

And he comments further on the broad nature of this tradition:

For thousands of years the people have used these festive comic images to express their criticism, their deep distrust of official truth, and their highest hopes and aspirations. Freedom was not so much an exterior right as it was the inner content of these images. It was the thousand-year-old language of fearlessness, a language with no reservations and omissions, about the world and about power.

Bulgakov drew on this same source in settling his scores with the custodians of official literature and official reality.

The novel's form excludes psychological analysis and historical commentary. Hence the quickness and pungency of Bulgakov's writing. At the same time, it allows Bulgakov to exploit all the theatricality of its great scenes—storms, flight, the attack of vampires, all the antics of the demons Koroviev and Behemoth, the séance in the Variety theatre, the ball at Satan's, but also the meeting of Pilate and Yeshua, the crucifixion as witnessed by Matthew Levi, the murder of Judas in the moonlit garden of Gethsemane.

Bulgakov's treatment of Gospel figures is the most controversial aspect of *The Master and Margarita* and has met with the greatest incomprehension. Yet his premises are made clear in the very first pages of the novel, in the dialogue between Woland and the atheist Berlioz. By the deepest irony of all, the 'prince of this world' stands as guarantor of the 'other' world. It exists, since he exists. But he says nothing directly about it. Apart from divine revelation, the only language able to speak of the 'other' world is the language of parable. Of this language Kafka wrote, in his parable 'On Parables':

Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have. When the sage says: 'Go over,' he does not mean that we should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if it was worth the trouble; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something, too, that he cannot designate more precisely, and therefore cannot help us here in the least. All these parables really set out to say simply that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter.

Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables, you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.

Another said: I bet that is also a parable.

The first said: You win.

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable.

The first said: No, in reality. In parable you lose.

A similar dialogue lies at the heart of Bulgakov's novel. In it there are those who belong to parable and those who belong to reality. There are those who go over and those who do not. There are those who win in parable and become parables themselves, and there are those who win in reality. But this reality belongs to Woland. Its nature is made chillingly clear in the brief scene when he and Margarita contemplate his special globe. Woland says:

'For instance, do you see this chunk of land, washed on one side by the ocean? Look, it's filling with fire. A war has started there. If you look closer,

you'll see the details.'

Margarita leaned towards the globe and saw the little square of land spread out, get painted in many colours, and turn as it were into a relief map. And then she saw the little ribbon of a river, and some village near it. A little house the size of a pea grew and became the size of a matchbox. Suddenly and noiselessly the roof of this house flew up along with a cloud of black smoke, and the walls collapsed, so that nothing was left of the little two-storey box except a small heap with black smoke pouring from it. Bringing her eye still closer, Margarita made out a small female figure lying on the ground, and next to her, in a pool of blood, a little child with outstretched arms.

'That's it,' Woland said, smiling, 'he had no time to sin. Abaddon's work is impeccable.'

When Margarita asks which side this Abaddon is on, Woland replies: 'He is of a rare impartiality and sympathizes equally with both sides of the fight. Owing to that, the results are always the same for both sides.'

There are others who dispute Woland's claim to the power of this world. They are absent or all but absent from *The Master and Margarita*. But the reality of the world seems to be at their disposal, to be shaped by them and to bear their imprint. Their names are Caesar and Stalin. Though absent in person, they are omnipresent. Their imposed will has become the measure of normality and self-evidence. In other words, the normality of this world is imposed terror. And, as the story of Pilate shows, this is by no means a twentieth-century phenomenon. Once terror is identified with the world, it becomes invisible. Bulgakov's portrayal of Moscow under Stalin's terror is remarkable precisely for its weightless, circus-like theatricality and lack of pathos. It is a substanceless reality, an empty suit writing at a desk. The citizens have adjusted to it and learned to play along as they always do. The mechanism of this forced adjustment is revealed in the chapter recounting 'Nikanor Ivanovich's Dream', in which prison, denunciation and betrayal become yet another theatre with a kindly and helpful master of ceremonies. Berlioz, the comparatist, is the spokesman for this 'normal' state of affairs, which is what makes his conversation with Woland so interesting. In it he is confronted with another reality which he cannot recognize. He becomes 'unexpectedly mortal'. In the story of Pilate, however, a moment of recognition does come. It occurs during Pilate's conversation with Yeshua, when he sees the wandering philosopher's head float off and in its place the toothless head of the aged Tiberius Caesar. This is the pivotal moment of the novel. Pilate breaks off his dialogue with Yeshua, he does not 'go over', and afterwards must sit like a stone for two thousand years waiting to continue their conversation.

Parable cuts through the normality of this world only at moments. These moments are preceded by a sense of dread, or else by a presentiment of something good. The first variation is Berlioz's meeting with Woland. The second is Pilate's meeting with Yeshua. The third is the 'self-baptism' of the poet Ivan Homeless before he goes in pursuit of the mysterious stranger. The fourth is the

meeting of the master and Margarita. These chance encounters have eternal consequences, depending on the response of the person, who must act without foreknowledge and then becomes the consequences of that action.

The touchstone character of the novel is Ivan Homeless, who is there at the start, is radically changed by his encounters with Woland and the master, becomes the latter's 'disciple' and continues his work, is present at almost every turn of the novel's action, and appears finally in the epilogue. He remains an uneasy inhabitant of 'normal' reality, as a historian who 'knows everything', but each year, with the coming of the spring full moon, he returns to the parable which for this world looks like folly.

RICHARD PEVEAR

CHAPTER 1

Never Talk with Strangers

At the hour of the hot spring sunset two citizens appeared at the Patriarch's Ponds.¹ One of them, approximately forty years old, dressed in a grey summer suit, was short, dark-haired, plump, bald, and carried his respectable fedora hat in his hand. His neatly shaven face was adorned with black horn-rimmed glasses of a supernatural size. The other, a broad-shouldered young man with tousled reddish hair, his checkered cap cocked back on his head, was wearing a cowboy shirt, wrinkled white trousers and black sneakers.

The first was none other than Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz,² editor of a fat literary journal and chairman of the board of one of the major Moscow literary associations, called Massolit³ for short, and his young companion was the poet Ivan Nikolaevich Ponyrev, who wrote under the pseudonym of Homeless.⁴

Once in the shade of the barely greening lindens, the writers dashed first thing to a brightly painted stand with the sign: 'Beer and Soft Drinks.'

Ah, yes, note must be made of the first oddity of this dreadful May evening. There was not a single person to be seen, not only by the stand, but also along the whole walk parallel to Malaya Bronnaya Street. At that hour when it seemed no longer possible to breathe, when the sun, having scorched Moscow, was collapsing in a dry haze somewhere beyond Sadovoye Ring, no one came under the lindens, no one sat on a bench, the walk was empty.

'Give us seltzer,' Berlioz asked.

'There is no seltzer,' the woman in the stand said, and for some reason became offended.

'Is there beer?' Homeless inquired in a rasping voice.

'Beer'll be delivered towards evening,' the woman replied.

'Then what is there?' asked Berlioz.

'Apricot soda, only warm,' said the woman.

'Well, let's have it, let's have it! . . .'

The soda produced an abundance of yellow foam, and the air began to smell of a barber-shop. Having finished drinking, the writers immediately started to hiccup, paid, and sat down on a bench face to the pond and back to Bronnaya.

Here the second oddity occurred, touching Berlioz alone. He suddenly stopped hiccuping, his heart gave a thump and dropped away somewhere for an instant, then came back, but with a blunt needle lodged in it. Besides that, Berlioz was gripped by fear, groundless, yet so strong that he wanted to flee the Ponds at once without looking back.

Berlioz glanced around in anguish, not understanding what had frightened him. He paled, wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, thought: 'What's the matter with me? This has never happened before. My heart's acting up . . . I'm overworked . . . Maybe it's time to send it all to the devil and go to Kislovodsk . . .'⁵

And here the sweltering air thickened before him, and a transparent citizen of the strangest appearance wove himself out of it. A peaked jockey's cap on his little head, a short checkered jacket also made of air . . . A citizen seven feet tall, but narrow in the shoulders, unbelievably thin, and, kindly note, with a jeering physiognomy.

The life of Berlioz had taken such a course that he was unaccustomed to extraordinary phenomena. Turning paler still, he goggled his eyes and thought in consternation: 'This can't be! . . .'

But, alas, it was, and the long, see-through citizen was swaying before him to the left and to the right without touching the ground.

Here terror took such possession of Berlioz that he shut his eyes. When he opened them again, he saw that it was all over, the phantasm had dissolved, the checkered one had vanished, and with that the blunt needle had popped out of his heart.

'Pah, the devil!' exclaimed the editor. 'You know, Ivan, I nearly had heatstroke just now! There was even something like a hallucination . . .'

He attempted to smile, but alarm still jumped in his eyes and his hands trembled. However, he gradually calmed down, fanned himself with his handkerchief and, having said rather cheerfully: 'Well, and so . . .', went on with the conversation interrupted by their soda-drinking.

This conversation, as was learned afterwards, was about Jesus Christ. The thing was that the editor had commissioned from the poet a long anti-religious poem for the next issue of his journal. Ivan Nikolaevich had written this poem, and in a very short time, but unfortunately the editor was not at all satisfied with it. Homeless had portrayed the main character of his poem—that is, Jesus—in very dark colours, but nevertheless the whole poem, in the editor's opinion, had to be written over again. And so the editor was now giving the poet something of a lecture on Jesus, with the aim of underscoring the poet's essential error.

It is hard to say what precisely had let Ivan Nikolaevich down—the descriptive powers of his talent or a total unfamiliarity with the question he was writing about—but his Jesus came out, well, completely alive, the once-existing Jesus, though, true, a Jesus furnished with all negative features.

Now, Berlioz wanted to prove to the poet that the main thing was not how Jesus was, good or bad, but that this same Jesus, as a person, simply never existed in the world, and all the stories about him were mere fiction, the most ordinary mythology.

It must be noted that the editor was a well-read man and in his conversation very skilfully pointed to ancient historians—for instance, the famous Philo of Alexandria⁶ and the brilliantly educated Flavius Josephus⁷—who never said a word about the existence of Jesus. Displaying a solid erudition, Mikhail Alexandrovich also informed the poet, among other things, that the passage in the fifteenth book of Tacitus's famous *Annals*,⁸ the forty-fourth chapter, where mention is made of the execution of Jesus, was nothing but a later spurious interpolation.

The poet, for whom everything the editor was telling him was new, listened attentively to Mikhail Alexandrovich, fixing his pert green eyes on him, and merely hiccuped from time to time, cursing the apricot soda under his breath.

'There's not a single Eastern religion,' Berlioz was saying, 'in which, as a rule, an immaculate virgin did not give birth to a god. And in just the same way, without inventing anything new, the Christians created their Jesus, who in fact never lived. It's on this that the main emphasis should be placed . . .'

Berlioz's high tenor rang out in the deserted walk, and as Mikhail Alexandrovich went deeper into the maze, which only a highly educated man can go into without risking a broken neck, the poet learned more and more interesting and useful things about the Egyptian Osiris,⁹ a benevolent god and the son of Heaven and Earth, and about the Phoenician god Tammuz,¹⁰ and about Marduk,¹¹ and even about a lesser known, terrible god, Vitzliputzli,¹² once greatly venerated by the Aztecs in Mexico. And just at the moment when Mikhail Alexandrovich was telling the poet how the Aztecs used to fashion figurines of Vitzliputzli out of dough—the first man appeared in the walk.

Afterwards, when, frankly speaking, it was already too late, various institutions presented reports describing this man. A comparison of them cannot but cause amazement. Thus, the first of them said that the man was short, had gold teeth, and limped on his right leg. The second, that the man was enormously tall, had platinum crowns, and limped on his left leg. The third laconically averred that the man had no distinguishing marks. It must be acknowledged that none of these reports is of any value.

First of all, the man described did not limp on any leg, and was neither short nor enormous, but simply tall. As for his teeth, he had platinum crowns on the left side and gold on the right. He was wearing an expensive grey suit and imported shoes of a matching colour. His grey beret was cocked rakishly over one ear; under his arm he carried a stick with a black knob shaped like a poodle's head.¹³ He looked to be a little over forty. Mouth somehow twisted.

Clean-shaven. Dark-haired. Right eye black, left—for some reason—green. Dark eyebrows, but one higher than the other. In short, a foreigner.¹⁴

Having passed by the bench on which the editor and the poet were sitting, the foreigner gave them a sidelong look, stopped, and suddenly sat down on the next bench, two steps away from the friends.

‘A German . . .’ thought Berlioz. ‘An Englishman . . .’ thought Homeless. ‘My, he must be hot in those gloves.’

The foreigner gazed around at the tall buildings that rectangularly framed the pond, making it obvious that he was seeing the place for the first time and that it interested him. He rested his glance on the upper floors, where the glass dazzlingly reflected the broken-up sun which was for ever departing from Mikhail Alexandrovich, then shifted it lower down to where the windows were beginning to darken before evening, smiled condescendingly at something, narrowed his eyes, put his hands on the knob and his chin on his hands.

‘For instance, Ivan,’ Berlioz was saying, ‘you portrayed the birth of Jesus, the son of God, very well and satirically, but the gist of it is that a whole series of sons of God were born before Jesus, like, say, the Phoenician Adonis,¹⁵ the Phrygian Attis,¹⁶ the Persian Mithras.¹⁷ And, to put it briefly, not one of them was born or ever existed, Jesus included, and what’s necessary is that, instead of portraying his birth or, suppose, the coming of the Magi,¹⁸ you portray the absurd rumours of their coming. Otherwise it follows from your story that he really was born! . . .’

Here Homeless made an attempt to stop his painful hiccuping by holding his breath, which caused him to hiccup more painfully and loudly, and at that same moment Berlioz interrupted his speech, because the foreigner suddenly got up and walked towards the writers. They looked at him in surprise.

‘Excuse me, please,’ the approaching man began speaking, with a foreign accent but without distorting the words, ‘if, not being your acquaintance, I allow myself . . . but the subject of your learned conversation is so interesting that . . .’

Here he politely took off his beret, and the friends had nothing left but to stand up and make their bows.

‘No, rather a Frenchman . . .’ thought Berlioz.

‘A Pole? . . .’ thought Homeless.

It must be added that from his first words the foreigner made a repellent impression on the poet, but Berlioz rather liked him—that is, not liked but . . . how to put it . . . was interested, or whatever.

‘May I sit down?’ the foreigner asked politely, and the friends somehow involuntarily moved apart; the foreigner adroitly sat down between them and at once entered into the conversation:

‘Unless I heard wrong, you were pleased to say that Jesus never existed?’ the foreigner asked, turning his green left eye to Berlioz.

'No, you did not hear wrong,' Berlioz replied courteously, 'that is precisely what I was saying.'

'Ah, how interesting!' exclaimed the foreigner.

'What the devil does he want?' thought Homeless, frowning.

'And you were agreeing with your interlocutor?' inquired the stranger, turning to Homeless on his right.

'A hundred per cent!' confirmed the man, who was fond of whimsical and figurative expressions.

'Amazing!' exclaimed the uninvited interlocutor and, casting a thievish glance around and muffling his low voice for some reason, he said: 'Forgive my importunity, but, as I understand, along with everything else, you also do not believe in God?' He made frightened eyes and added: 'I swear I won't tell anyone!'

'No, we don't believe in God,' Berlioz replied, smiling slightly at the foreign tourist's fright, 'but we can speak of it quite freely.'

The foreigner sat back on the bench and asked, even with a slight shriek of curiosity:

'You are—atheists?!'

'Yes, we're atheists,' Berlioz smilingly replied, and Homeless thought, getting angry: 'Latched on to us, the foreign goose!'

'Oh, how lovely!' the astonishing foreigner cried out and began swivelling his head, looking from one writer to the other.

'In our country atheism does not surprise anyone,' Berlioz said with diplomatic politeness. 'The majority of our population consciously and long ago ceased believing in the fairy tales about God.'

Here the foreigner pulled the following stunt: he got up and shook the amazed editor's hand, accompanying it with these words:

'Allow me to thank you with all my heart!'

'What are you thanking him for?' Homeless inquired, blinking.

'For some very important information, which is of great interest to me as a traveller,' the outlandish fellow explained, raising his finger significantly.

The important information apparently had indeed produced a strong impression on the traveller, because he passed his frightened glance over the buildings, as if afraid of seeing an atheist in every window.

'No, he's not an Englishman . . .' thought Berlioz, and Homeless thought: 'Where'd he pick up his Russian, that's the interesting thing!' and frowned again.

'But, allow me to ask you,' the foreign visitor spoke after some anxious reflection, 'what, then, about the proofs of God's existence, of which, as is known, there are exactly five?'

'Alas!' Berlioz said with regret. 'Not one of these proofs is worth anything, and mankind shelved them long ago. You must agree that in the realm of reason there can be no proof of God's existence.'

'Bravo!' cried the foreigner. 'Bravo! You have perfectly repeated restless old Immanuel's¹⁹ thought in this regard. But here's the hitch: he roundly demolished all five proofs, and then, as if mocking himself, constructed a sixth of his own.'

'Kant's proof,' the learned editor objected with a subtle smile, 'is equally unconvincing. Not for nothing did Schiller²⁰ say that the Kantian reasoning on this question can satisfy only slaves, and Strauss²¹ simply laughed at this proof.'

Berlioz spoke, thinking all the while: 'But, anyhow, who is he? And why does he speak Russian so well?'

'They ought to take this Kant and give him a three-year stretch in Solovki²² for such proofs!' Ivan Nikolaevich plumped quite unexpectedly.

'Ivan!' Berlioz whispered, embarrassed.

But the suggestion of sending Kant to Solovki not only did not shock the foreigner, but even sent him into raptures.

'Precisely, precisely,' he cried, and his green left eye, turned to Berlioz, flashed. 'Just the place for him! Didn't I tell him that time at breakfast: "As you will, Professor, but what you've thought up doesn't hang together. It's clever, maybe, but mighty unclear. You'll be laughed at."'

Berlioz goggled his eyes. 'At breakfast . . . to Kant? . . . What is this drivel?' he thought.

'But,' the outlander went on, unembarrassed by Berlioz's amazement and addressing the poet, 'sending him to Solovki is unfeasible, for the simple reason that he has been abiding for over a hundred years now in places considerably more remote than Solovki, and to extract him from there is in no way possible, I assure you.'

'Too bad!' the feisty poet responded.

'Yes, too bad!' the stranger agreed, his eye flashing, and went on: 'But here is a question that is troubling me: if there is no God, then, one may ask, who governs human life and, in general, the whole order of things on earth?'

'Man governs it himself,' Homeless angrily hastened to reply to this admittedly none-too-clear question.

'Pardon me,' the stranger responded gently, 'but in order to govern, one needs, after all, to have a precise plan for a certain, at least somewhat decent, length of time. Allow me to ask you, then, how can man govern, if he is not only deprived of the opportunity of making a plan for at least some ridiculously short period—well, say, a thousand years—but cannot even vouch for his own tomorrow?'

'And in fact,' here the stranger turned to Berlioz, 'imagine that you, for instance, start governing, giving orders to others and yourself, generally, so to speak, acquire a taste for it, and suddenly you get . . . hem . . . hem . . . lung cancer . . .'—here the foreigner smiled sweetly, as if the thought of lung cancer gave him pleasure—'yes, cancer'—narrowing his eyes like a cat, he repeated the sonorous word—'and so your governing is over!'

'You are no longer interested in anyone's fate but your own. Your family starts lying to you. Feeling that something is wrong, you rush to learned doctors, then to quacks, and sometimes to fortune-tellers as well. Like the first, so the second and third are completely senseless, as you understand. And it all ends tragically: a man who still recently thought he was governing something, suddenly winds up lying motionless in a wooden box, and the people around him, seeing that the man lying there is no longer good for anything, burn him in an oven.

'And sometimes it's worse still: the man has just decided to go to Kislovodsk'—here the foreigner squinted at Berlioz—'a trifling matter, it seems, but even this he cannot accomplish, because suddenly, no one knows why, he slips and falls under a tram-car! Are you going to say it was he who governed himself that way? Would it not be more correct to think that he was governed by someone else entirely?' And here the unknown man burst into a strange little laugh.

Berlioz listened with great attention to the unpleasant story about the cancer and the tram-car, and certain alarming thoughts began to torment him. 'He's not a foreigner . . . he's not a foreigner . . .' he thought, 'he's a most peculiar specimen . . . but, excuse me, who is he then? . . .'

'You'd like to smoke, I see?' the stranger addressed Homeless unexpectedly. 'Which kind do you prefer?'

'What, have you got several?' the poet, who had run out of cigarettes, asked glumly.

'Which do you prefer?' the stranger repeated.

'Okay—Our Brand,' Homeless replied spitefully.

The unknown man immediately took a cigarette case from his pocket and offered it to Homeless:

'Our Brand . . .'

Editor and poet were both struck, not so much by Our Brand precisely turning up in the cigarette case, as by the cigarette case itself. It was of huge size, made of pure gold, and, as it was opened, a diamond triangle flashed white and blue fire on its lid.

Here the writers thought differently. Berlioz: 'No, a foreigner!', and Homeless: 'Well, devil take him, eh! . . .'

The poet and the owner of the cigarette case lit up, but the nonsmoker Berlioz declined.

'I must counter him like this,' Berlioz decided, 'yes, man is mortal, no one disputes that. But the thing is . . .'

However, before he managed to utter these words, the foreigner spoke:

'Yes, man is mortal, but that would be only half the trouble. The worst of it is that he's sometimes unexpectedly mortal—there's the trick! And generally he's unable to say what he's going to do this same evening.'

'What an absurd way of putting the question . . .' Berlioz thought and objected: