The Master and Margarita

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

Mikhail Bulgakov was one of seven children born to Afanasiy Ivanovich Bulgakov, a prominent Orthodox theologian, and Varvara Mikhailovna Bulgakov, a teacher. Looking beyond the religious environment in which he grew up, Bulgakov developed an early interest in theater and did well in his education, especially drawn to literature by writers such as Gogol, Pushkin, and Dostoyevsky. Bulgakov also trained as a medical physician at Kiev University and, shortly after marrying his first wife, Tatiana Lappa, served with the Red Cross in World War One. He then served in the Russian Civil War, during which he contracted typhus; the disease nearly killed him and made him decide to abandon his career as a doctor. In 1919, Bulgakov began writing for theater and also honed his skills by writing "feuilletons"—short and witty satirical pieces—for newspapers. Most of his plays in the 1920s were banned from production, considered too controversial and provocative by Stalin's censors. Stalin did, however, procure Bulgakov work at a small Moscow theater and even personally enjoyed Bulgakov's *The White Guard*. Around 1924, Bulgakov married again; by the end of the decade he almost left Russia, depressed by the poor critical reception of his work and ongoing battles with Soviet censorship. He married his third wife, Yelena Shilovskaya, in 1932; she was the inspiration for much of the "Margarita" character in *The Master and Margarita*. In the late 1930s, Bulgakov worked as a librettist and consultant at the Bolshoi Theater, but faced the same frustrations that had plagued him before. During these years he worked away on his "sunset" novel, *The Master and Margarita*, veering between confidence in its worth and hopelessness. He died in the Spring of 1940 from kidney problems, almost thirty years before this novel would first be published (thanks to the efforts of Yelena).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Master and Margarita was a risky book for Bulgakov to write, which ultimately explains why it wasn't published during his lifetime. The novel is consistently—and comically—critical of authorities and shows up the follies of a state exerting too much of an interfering influence on its people. Though the text never openly acknowledges that it's set in Stalinist Russia, the clues are certainly there. Russia underwent almost unfathomable changes during Bulgakov's lifetime, shifting from monarchic empire at the time of his birth to the Soviet era at the time of his death. Continuing Vladimir Lenin's Communist project, Joseph Stalin rapidly increased the collectivization and nationalization of Russian agriculture and industry in an attempt to offer a riposte to the success of capitalism in the United States and elsewhere. Ultimately, this top-down approach had grave consequences as the state over reached and Stalin's leadership became increasingly punitive, resulting in the deaths of millions of Russians and in the erosion of individual freedom (a definite target in Bulgakov's novel). With censors quick to ban any work criticizing the state and its leadership, it never looked likely that *The Master and Margarita* could be published at the time. When it eventually was published, after a concerted and determined effort by Bulgakov's third wife, Yelena, the book became an enduring example of how powerful and vital literature can be.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Master and Margarita is a remarkably wide-ranging novel that mixes elements of political satire, dark comedy, magical realism, Christian theology, and philosophy into a unique whole. Its influences are many and its own subsequent influence is worldwide. In terms of Russian influences, likely candidates are the fantastical humor of Nikolai Gogol and the unflinching moral complexity of Fyodor Dostoevsky. The Pontius Pilate sections of the novel, in which Pilate wrestles with the guilt of approving of Yeshua's (Jesus's) execution, show a deep and erudite understanding of theology and Christian texts more generally. Goethe's *Faust*, in which a knowledge-hungry scholar sells his soul to the devil, is especially important to Bulgakov's novel and serves as a kind of framing device, providing the book's epigraph. Critics have also noticed how much the book adheres to the principles of Mennipean satire, a Greek form that took great delight in mocking the airs and pretensions of everyday society—much like Woland and his gang.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Master and Margarita
- **When Written:** 1928-1940
- **Where Written:** Moscow
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Fantasy/Farce/Romance/Satire
- **Setting:** 20th Century Russia and Yershalaim (Jerusalem) c. AD 30
- **Climax:** Satan's Ball
- **Antagonist:** Woland
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Alternate Titles. Bulgakov had numerous earlier titles for *The Master and Margarita*, many of which placed more emphasis on Woland's role in the book than the two titular characters. These included "Woland's Guest Performances" and "An Engineer's Hoof."

Rock and Roll. The novel was the inspiration behind The Rolling Stones' 1968 hit, "Sympathy for the Devil."

PLOT SUMMARY

The Master and Margarita has two main settings: 1930s Moscow and Yershalaim (Jerusalem) around the time of Yeshua's (the Aramaic name for Jesus) execution. The book opens with the first of these, as two writers, Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz and Ivan "Homeless" Ponyrev, discuss a poem written by the latter. Berlioz, who is the chairman of the writers' union Massolit, criticizes Ivan for making Jesus seem too real in his writing. Berlioz explains why Jesus never existed but is interrupted by the arrival of a "strange professor," who the reader later learns is Woland (Satan). This foreigner insists that Jesus did exist, and that he was there when Pontius Pilate approved his crucifixion. Even more mysteriously, the strange professor casually informs Berlioz that he will be decapitated that day. Woland then narrates the first part of the Pilate story.

In Yershalaim, Pontius Pilate, the Roman authority in the city, is presented with Yeshua Ha-Nozri, who is accused of inciting public unrest and wanting to overthrow the Emperor. Pilate is intrigued by Yeshua's radical compassion for all of mankind and deep down is resistant to condemning him to death but is forced to do so in order to avoid the repercussions that would come with sparing him.

Back in Moscow, Woland's prediction comes true as Berlioz slips on sunflower oil and falls beneath a tram, losing his head. Ivan tries to chase after Woland and his accomplices—Koroviev and the big black cat, Behemoth—but loses them. Through a comedy of errors, he ends up at Griboedev's, the building housing Massolit, and tries to tell his fellow writers what's happened. His hysterical manner and the fantastical nature of his story, however, land him in Dr. Stravinsky's insane asylum.

The next day, Styopa Likhodeev, the director of the Variety theater, wakes up in his apartment on Sadovaya street. He has a terrible headache and is surprised to see a strange man in his room—Woland. The stranger seems to explain the events of the previous day, stating that Styopa had agreed to put on Woland's black magic show at the theater, even producing a contract with Styopa's signature on it as proof. Woland then introduces his entourage: Koroviev, a man with a single fang called Azazello, and a huge talking cat called Behemoth. Woland informs Styopa that they will be taking over his apartment. Styopa is then instantly transported thousands of miles away to Yalta.

The Variety theater's financial director and administrator—Grigory Danilovich Rimsky and Ivan Savalyevich Varenukha respectively—try to find out both why Styopa isn't there and more about the mysterious Woland's planned performance. They are baffled by a series of telegrams from Yalta purporting to be written by Styopa, who couldn't physically have travelled such a long distance since being at the theater the previous day. Woland sends Hella, a beautiful redheaded succubus, to turn Varenukha into a vampire.

That evening, Woland and his entourage perform at the theater. Their show amazes the Muscovites, as they marvel at the decapitation and "re-capitation" of Bengalsky, the hapless master of ceremonies. Koroviev makes money rain down from the theater and gives out the latest fashionable items to the Muscovite women.

At Stravinsky's clinic, meanwhile, Ivan meets the master, a fellow patient. The master listens to Ivan's story about Woland and believes him entirely, while also telling his own about how he ended up in the clinic. The master had met the love of his life (Margarita, though the master refuses to name her at this point) when they were both married. They lived together secretly while he worked in his novel about Pontius Pilate. When the critics rejected his work across the board, the master burned the manuscript, fled his apartment and checked into Stravinsky's clinic.

Ivan later dreams the next part of the Pilate story. This section centers on the actual execution of Yeshua, which is watched from afar by his one disciple, Matthew Levi. When an executioner offers Yeshua a drink of water as he hangs on the cross, Yeshua insists it be given to one of the other dying men. Once the soldiers have dispersed, Levi cuts down Yeshua's body and leaves with it.

"Book Two" of the novel opens with the narrator's promise to show the reader a "true, faithful, eternal love." The reader is then introduced to the master's "secret wife" and true love, Margarita. She pines for the master and reads the charred remains of one his notebooks. Later that day (now Friday, the third day of the Moscow storyline) Margarita happens upon the funeral of Berlioz, whose head has reportedly been stolen. She meets Azazello, who sets up a meeting between her and Woland, hinting that this might help her find the master (whom he reveals to still be alive). He gives her a special cream to rub on herself at midnight.

The cream turns Margarita into a witch, and she flies over Moscow to meet Woland and his entourage. On the way, she destroys the official residences of the Massolit writers and is joined by her housemaid Natasha. Natasha, too, has become a witch, and rides a hog (which is really Margarita's transformed neighbor, Nikolai Ivanovich). When she meets Woland, Margarita is tasked with being the hostess at his full moon

spring ball—Satan's Ball. Here she receives a long line of guests, all of whom committed evil acts during their lifetimes. At the ball's climax, Margarita and Woland drink blood from Berlioz's severed head. Woland addresses the head as he turns it into a cup, sending it into "non-being" (teasing Berlioz for his naive atheism).

In reward for her services, Woland offers to grant Margarita her deepest wish. Rather than choosing something to do with the master, she opts to save one of the tortured souls that she met at the Ball. Woland then offers her another wish, which Margarita uses to summon the master, causing him to instantly appear. The master is dazed at first, but soon overjoyed to be reunited with his love. Woland discusses his Pilate novel, which Behemoth then presents to the master; Woland utters that "manuscripts don't burn." The couple choose to live a life of impoverished happiness in their old apartment. The other characters too are returned to relative normality (except for Natasha who wishes to remain a witch).

In the lovers' humble apartment, Margarita reads through the master's manuscript, ushering a return to the Pilate story. In this section, Pilate orchestrates the murder of Judas, who betrayed Yeshua to the authorities and thus brought about his death. Judas is lured outside of the city, where, in fact, it is Pilate that deals the fatal blow. Pilate then meets with Yeshua's disciple, Matthew Levi. Levi wants to kill Judas himself, but is angered to find out that Pilate has already done the deed. On leaving the palace, Levi asks for some parchment so that he can continue writing down the story and teachings of Yeshua.

It's now Saturday in Moscow. Investigators try desperately to get the bottom of the strange occurrences in the city, explaining most of Woland's activities away as the work of a gang of "hypnotists"; they blame the talking cat Behemoth, with whom they have a gunfight, on "ventriloquism." When Woland and his entourage leave the Sadovaya apartment, Behemoth sets it on fire. Later in the day, he also razes Griboedev's to the ground.

As the two storylines merge, Levi visits Woland to tell him that Yeshua requests that the master be granted "peace." On Woland's instructions, Azazello tricks the couple into drinking poison, which paradoxically kills their earthly bodies while also granting them eternal afterlife together. The master and Margarita fly off with Azazello and meet with Woland, who stands overlooking all of Moscow. They then soar away from the city on **horseback** with Woland and the rest of his entourage, who are now revealed in their true forms—Behemoth, for example, is actually a "slim youth" who is "the best jester the world has ever seen."

As they fly noiselessly away from earthly reality, the group soon comes up Pontius Pilate, who has been sitting staring at the moon with his dog, Banga, for two thousand years. Pilate is wracked with guilt for not saving Yeshua. Woland instructs the master to set Pilate, the hero of his novel, free. The master grants Pilate his freedom, telling him that Yeshua is waiting for him. Pilate then travels up a path of **moonlight** with Banga to be with Yeshua. With his final act completed, the master is then given his "peace" (though not "enlightenment") and lives eternally with Margarita in a small, ethereal cottage. The main part of the novel concludes with the same lines that end the master's novel: "the fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate."

In the novel's epilogue, the narrator goes into more detail about the haphazard investigations into the events surrounding Woland's visit. No trace of the strange professor or his entourage remains, and, unfortunately, a number of cats are killed due to people suspecting them of being affiliated with the gang. The narrator catalogues what happens subsequently to the minor characters (e.g. Styopa and Varenukha, all of whom go back to some kind of normality but remain haunted by Woland's actions. Ivan becomes a professor of history and, though he too subscribes to the hypnotism theory as an explanation for his experiences, is always deeply anxious and agitated during the spring full moon. On those nights his wife calms him down with a sedative injection; Ivan then always dreams about Pilate walking with Yeshua, Pilate pleading with Yeshua to tell him that the execution never happened. Still in the dream, Ivan is then visited by the master and Margarita, who console him. As moonlight floods his face, Margarita tells Ivan that everything "will be as it should be." The epilogue, too, ends with the same lines as the previous chapter.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Woland – Woland is the novel's central character. He is Satan, choosing to adopt the form of Woland for his visit to Moscow. A paradoxical figure, Woland is both manipulative and honorable, ruthless and generous. His physical appearance is that of a "foreigner," often dressed in a black cloak, with different colored eyes reflecting to the complexity of his nature. He also often walks with a stick embellished with a figurine of a poodle's head, one of many signs linking Woland with the devil-figure found in Goethe's *Faust* (his Germanic-sounding name and the novel's epigraph being the other two prominent references). He differs greatly from the traditional idea of the devil, in that Woland does not seek to torture mankind for his enjoyment, but to expose and draw out the worst in people so that it is there for all to see. In this, his role is remarkably similar to the idea of the artist as someone who holds up a mirror to society. He is an advocate not for evil itself, but for the *acknowledgement* and *understanding* of evil's place in the world. He expresses this best to Matthew Levi towards the end of the novel, explaining that good can't exist without evil just as people and things can't exist without casting a shadow. He is thus a kind of philosophical figure, a true "foreigner" from beyond the moral spheres of mankind, whose rule is to highlight the hypocrisy

and folly of mankind's arrogant behaviors. Ultimately, he comes across as noble and fair, granting Margarita her reunion with the master and encouraging the master to set Pontius Pilate free. Though he is of unquestionably high spiritual authority—hence his loyal entourage—the end of the novel indicates that he also has to take orders from Yeshua Ha-Nozri. Woland can take on different forms, and it is strongly suggested that he is present during the Pilate narrative as a sparrow.

Margarita – Margarita is the heroine of the novel, a woman of around thirty years of age. Though she is married to someone else, her true love is the master, though she does not know if he is alive or dead. Margarita does not make an appearance in the book until halfway through, but her importance becomes obvious thereon in. The mistreatment of the master by critics and editors runs deep in Margarita, and, when she is turned into a witch by Azazello's cream, she opts to destroy the apartment of Latunsky, one of the master's harshest critics. She thus represents steely determination and faith. She is tasked with being the hostess at Satan's (Woland's) Ball and does so with courage and determination, believing that helping the devil might help bring the master back to her. Margarita learns that Woland's ball is always hosted by a "Margarita," and that she is related to French royalty, explaining why the ball's guests address her as their Queen. Through helping Woland, Margarita is allowed to rescue the master and to live with him in eternal peace (leaving their earthly bodies behind). Many scholars believe that the character of Margarita is based on Bulgakov's third wife, Elena Sergeevna Shilovskaya. In an astonishing case of art imitating life, *The Master and Margarita* was only eventually published due to Elena's determination—similar to the way Margarita steadfastly supports the master's Pontius Pilate novel.

The Master – The master is one of the two titular characters. He is a weary man who has given up on life. The reader learns most of his back story when the master clambers through Ivan's window at Stravinsky's clinic, where he is also a patient. In hushed tones, he explains the two most important elements in his life: the love he shares with Margarita (whom he refuses to name) and his failed novel. Margarita and he, explains the master, fell in love at first sight, despite both having spouses already. She then encourages him to write his novel about Pontius Pilate, supported by funds from the master's lottery win, which he throws his entire being into. Once it's finished, however, the psychic pain brought by the novel's rejection by editors and the malicious dismissal by critics causes the master to flee the apartment he shares with his lover. He walks for miles to a Dr. Stravinsky's recent clinic, deciding that he is mad, and commits himself to staying there for ever more. When Margarita, having served as hostess at Satan's ball, wishes for the master to return to her, he is surprised to find himself reunited with the love of his life. Further to his surprise, Woland has his novel—intact (the master had burned it in the fire). The master is granted eternal peace by Yeshua Ha-Nozri and frees Pontius Pilate from his tortured limbo, before living forever in a small cottage with Margarita (both of them having left their earthly bodies behind). The master represents authenticity in art and, in his persecution, the suffering of artists under Stalin's Soviet regime. Mihael Bulgakov himself provides the obvious archetype for the master's character.

Pontius Pilate – Pontius Pilate is the fifth procurator of Judea and the subject of the master's novel. His story represents the counterpoint narrative to the main action in Moscow, and centers on his decision to approve the execution of Yeshua Ha-Nozri in the city of Yershalaim. Pilate holds a high-pressured position of authority and can't be seen to show weakness. That said, Yeshua's unique character based on compassion and empathy intrigues him, ultimately increasing its hold over him more and more as time goes on. Sensing that he has made a mistake in allowing Yeshua to die, Pilate tries to atone by killing Judas of Kiriath, the man who set up Yeshua's arrest. But this doesn't bring him any true resolution, and Pilate spends two thousand years in a kind of limbo, looking up at the moon with his faithful dog, Banga, by his side. Pilate longs to be with Yeshua and for his decision approve the execution to be undone. Pilate is eventually set free, when the master is encouraged by Woland to complete his novel by granting Pilate his liberty. At this, the dazed Pilate follows his dog up a moonlit path and is reunited with Yeshua. Pilate, then, represents human authority as a counterpoint to Yeshua's godly authority—his millennial torture comes from the realization that the second is more meaningful than the first.

Yeshua Ha-Nozri – Yeshua's name is the Aramaic for Jesus of Nazareth. Yeshua is a vital character but actually does not appear much in the novel. Yeshua is brought before Pontius Pilate, accused of wanting to incite rebellion and bring down the temple of Yershalaim (having been set up by Judas of Kiriath). Yeshua insists that this was not his plan and that he has been misrepresented. He displays a kind of radical compassion, believing that all people are "good." This intrigues Pilate, but the procurator doesn't have the courage to save Yeshua from execution (though he does try to persuade Joseph Kaifa, leader of the Jews, to pardon him). Yeshua crops up again "off-stage" towards the end of the book, when he sends Matthew Levi with a message for Woland: Yeshua has read the master's novel and orders Woland to grant him peace. This demonstrates that in the spiritual order embedded in the book, Yeshua represents the highest authority.

Matthew Levi – Levi is Yeshua Ha-Nozri's only disciple during the Yershalaim narrative. Levi tries to shorten Yeshua's suffering by stabbing him but can't get close enough to the execution; once Yeshua does die, Levi cuts down his body and hides with it in a cave. He is depicted as a somewhat disheveled, crazed individual who makes Yeshua feel uncomfortable.

Furthermore, Yeshua worries that Levi's writings, which he intends to chronicle Yeshua's life and teachings, are inaccurate. Despite these concerns, Levi is rewarded for his devotion to Yeshua by later becoming his messenger in the realm of the afterlife.

Ivan "Homeless" Nikolaevich Ponyrev – Ivan is a young, misguided poet. The novel both starts and ends with him. In the novel's opening, Ivan discusses a recent poem of his with Berlioz, who is telling him that the poem is no good as it makes Jesus seem to real. The pair then encounter Woland, who mystifies Ivan by insisting that Jesus is real, making Ivan confused and frustrated (particularly as his intellect is no match for either Berlioz's or Woland's). When Berlioz is killed by a tram—true to Woland's prediction—Ivan gives chase to Woland, Koroviev, and Behemoth. When he arrives in sodden clothing at Griboedov's and tries to explain what happened, he is thought to be insane and is committed to Dr. Stravinsky's psychiatric clinic. Here he meets the master, who tells him more about Pontius Pilate (continuing where Woland left off) and confirms that Ivan is not mad at all. Ivan, however, becomes increasingly used to his placid surroundings and decides not to try and escape. Ivan renounces his poetry at the master's request and, though he recovers from his mental distress—a recovery partly based on the fallacy that Woland's antics were the work of a gang of hypnotists—he always feels anxious when the spring full moon comes around. Each time it does, his night ends with the same dream: Pontius Pilate and Yeshua Ha-Nozri walking towards the moon engaged in conversation. The dream always concludes with a visit from the master and Margarita, who comfort him.

Mikhael Alexandrovich Berlioz – Berlioz is the chairman of Massolit, the writers' union and the editor of a literary journal. He is a middle-aged man and prides himself on his atheism, rationality, and learnedness. Berlioz appears in the novel's opening scene, in which he chastises the poet Ivan Homeless for making Jesus appear too much like a real person in a recent poem. As he explains why Jesus never existed, Berlioz is interrupted by a strange foreigner, who claims to be a professor (it's actually Woland). The foreigner insists that Jesus was real and that, furthermore, he was there when Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus to crucifixion, leading Berlioz to think the visitor is a madman. Berlioz thus represents Soviet officialdom, faithfully adhering to protocol and not for a moment entertaining the thought that anything might lie outside of the realm of his understanding. Woland predicts Berlioz's imminent death; minutes later, the chairman is decapitated by a tram. Later in the novel, Woland uses Berlioz's severed head as a ceremonial cup, drinking blood from it during the great ball.

Styopa Likhodeev – On the second day of the novel, Styopa, the director of the Variety theater, wakes up in the apartment he shares with Berlioz nursing a terrible hangover. He is flabbergasted to see Woland sitting in his room (though Woland's identity is not revealed till later); Woland informs Styopa that he has agreed to let him perform at the Variety. Styopa is then shown a contract that seems to have his own signature on it, seemingly proving the stranger's story to be true. Woland also tells Styopa that he will be taking over the apartment and that there is no longer any room for him there; in an instant, Styopa is transported to Yalta, thousands of miles away. Styopa tries to telegram his workplace but the staff are baffled: there is no way he could have travelled so far in such a short time.

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy – Nikanor is the chairman of the tenants' association asked with overseeing apartment no. 50, Berlioz's property that is taken over by Woland and his entourage. Nikanor tries to behave in an officious manner and be an upstanding citizen but is quickly tempted by the promise of free tickets to the Variety and a bribe. Unfortunately for him, shortly after accepting the bribe, which turns out to be illegal foreign currency, Nikanor is reported to the authorities (by Koroviev) and swiftly arrested.

Koroviev – Koroviev is Woland's right-hand man. He usually wears a pince-nez, a jockey's cap and chequered clothes. Koroviev is adept at manipulating the Muscovites into showing the worst of themselves, for example, by convincing Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy to accept a bribe on Woland's behalf. He has a piercing, nasal voice and an erratic temperament, but unlike the rest of Woland's entourage never directly commits acts of violence. Instead, he delights in orchestrating scenarios that create chaos and havoc.

Behemoth – Behemoth is huge black cat who can do everything that a human can do, including talking and walking on his hind legs. He is the most devilish of Woland's crew and delights in causing havoc. He also has a penchant for setting things on fire, destroying the Sadovaya street apartment block and Griboedev's towards the end of the novel. His true form is revealed at the end as "a slim youth … the best jester the world has ever seen."

Azazello – Azazello is a key member of Woland's entourage. He is described as a short, fat, and broad-shouldered man whose mouth shows a single fang. His hair is flaming red and he often wears a bowler hat. He is an extremely good shot, as he proves by shooting a playing card beneath a pillow with the gun behind his back. While demonstrating a relish for violence, he is also entrusted by Woland to fetch Margarita and convince her to join them for the ball. In the Bible, "Azazel" is a fallen angel annoyed by God's creation of mankind. His true form is revealed at the end to be "the demon of the waterless desert, the killer-demon."

Hella – Hella is a beautiful redheaded succubus and part of Woland's entourage. She is a vampire and almost always appears naked. Administering care is part of her role in the group: she rubs Woland's injured knee with ointment and helps Margarita prepare for Satan's Ball. Interestingly, she does not

appear in the final scene as Woland and his entourage, together with the master and Margarita, fly away from Moscow on **horseback**.

Natasha – Natasha is Margarita's devoted housemaid. When Margarita turns into a witch and leaves her old life behind, Natasha uses Azazello's cream to become a witch herself. She then rides a hog—actually the neighbor Nikolai Ivanovich—and reconvenes with Margarita. At the end of the novel, she begs to be allowed to remain as a witch, a request which is granted.

Nikolai Ivanovich – Nikolai is Margarita's officious neighbor (where she lives with her husband, not the master). When Natasha becomes a witch by using Azazello's cream (as Margarita has already done), Nikolai is astonished by her youthful beauty and tries to come on to her, calling her "Venus" despite having a wife already. She mischievously rubs him with the cream, turning him into a hog which she rides instead of a broomstick. At his request, he is turned back into his normal form, but later regrets not trying to stay with Natasha.

Abaddon – Abaddon shows up late in the novel and is one of Woland's demons. He represents destruction incarnate and is described by Woland as having a "rare impartiality"; that is, his destruction is not tempered by ideas of good and evil. Abaddon is described in the Bible as an "angel of the abyss" and appears in the books of Job and Revelation.

Grigory Danilovich Rimsky – Rimsky is the financial director of the Variety theater. He tries to find out where Styopa has gone but nearly meets a terrible end when Hella and Varenukha, now a vampire, try to attack him in his office. He is saved by the crowing of a cockerel, signaling the dawn and the necessary escape of the undead Hella and Varenukha. Rimsky subsequently flees Moscow for Leningrad, seemingly having aged by decades.

Judas of Kiriath – Judas is a young man who works in a money-changing shop. He meets Yeshua and under false pretenses tricks him into criticizing the state authorities (who are lying in wait to arrest him). Judas is paid by Joseph Kaifa for his service but does not live to enjoy the money; he is lured by the attractive Niza to an olive grove outside of the city, where the hooded Pontius Pilate murders him.

Joseph Kaifa – Joseph Kaifa is the high priest of the Jews. He is insistent that Yeshua must be executed, instead choosing to pardon Bar-Rabbin (it is customary to pardon one prisoner on the eve of Passover). It later becomes clear that Kaifa, or his associates, paid money Judas in exchange for information leading to Yeshua's arrest.

Banga – Banga is Pontius Pilate's faithful dog, one of the only sources of joy in the procurator's life. When Pilate waits for two thousand years to be set free from the torture he feels for having approved Yeshua's execution, Banga sits patiently by his side. When Pilate is set free by the master, Banga bounds down the moonlit path, leading the way for Pilate to be reunited with Yeshua.

Baron Meigel – Baron Meigel is an employee of the "Spectacles Commission" who offers Woland assistance in Moscow. Woland suspects him of espionage, however, and lures him to the Satan's Ball. Here, Baron Meigel is shot by Koroviev. Woland and Margarita then ceremonially drink the baron's blood from a cup made of Berlioz's severed head.

Frieda – Frieda is a guest at Satan's Ball. Her soul is damned because she suffocated her baby boy with her handkerchief. The child, however, was probably the result of a rape by the owner of a café that Frieda worked at. She is eternally haunted by what happened. Margarita, when offered a wish by Woland in return for hosting the ball, selflessly decides to free Frieda from her pain.

Bar-Rabban – Bar-Rabban is the criminal due to be executed alongside Yeshua Ha-Nozri and two others. Because it is Passover, it is customary for the Jewish leadership to set one man free. Though Pontius Pilate tries to get Joseph Kaifa, the Jewish leader, to pardon Yeshua, he is insistent on choosing Bar-Rabban instead. The irony is that Bar-Rabban is certainly guilty of the crime which Yeshua is accused of—inciting rebellion—and, moreover, has killed a guard in trying to escape.

Alexander Riukhin – Riukhin is a poet who helps transport Ivan Homeless from the restaurant at Griboedov's to Stravinsky's clinic. Ivan, distressed from his experience with Woland and Patriarch's Pond, tells Riukhin that he thinks he is a terrible writer. These words hit home with Riukhin on his way back from the clinic.

Maximillian Andreevich Poplavsky – Poplavsky is Berlioz's uncle, who comes to Moscow from Kiev after receiving a strange telegram from his nephew informing his uncle that his funeral will soon be taking place. Poplavsky travels to Moscow more to try and acquire Berlioz's apartment than to pay his respects, but Woland's gang quickly intimidates him to turn back to Kiev.

Arkady Apollonovich – Arkady is the smug and rotund chairman of the Moscow Theaters' "Acoustics Commission." He appears during Woland's Variety performance, demanding from his seat that the magicians explain what they are doing. Koroviev informs the entire theater that Arkady is having an affair—which is awkward for his wife and niece sitting in the box with him.

Aloisy Mogarych – Aloisy is the man who took over the master's old apartment when the master was admitted to Dr. Stavinsky's clinic. Woland makes him appear before them; Koroviev deletes Aloisy's name from the apartment register, thus freeing the master and Margarita to live there again. Interestingly, Aloisy represents something of a loose end in the novel. In an earlier draft, Bulgakov had the master explain to Ivan. Homeless that Aloisy had reported him to the authorities for possession of illegal literature. This would have been an act

motivated by getting the master's apartment, justifying the way in which Woland subsequently turfs him out again.

Andrei Fokich Sokov – Andrei is the barman and buffet manager of the Variety theater. After Woland's "black magic séance," the theater customers use money from the show at the bar and buffet. When this money later turns into cut-up paper, Andrei goes to see Woland, who nonchalantly tells Andrei that he will soon die of liver cancer. Andrei goes to see Professor Kuzmin; a few months later, Woland's prediction comes true.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Archibald Archibaldovich – Archibald is the manager of the restaurant at Griboedev's. At the end of novel, when Koroviev and Behemoth visit the restaurant, Archibald tries to have them captured by the authorities. This fails, and they burn Griboedev's to the ground.

Ivan Savalyevich Varenukha – Varenukha is the administrator of the Variety theater. When he tries to find out what's happened to Styopa, he is ambushed and beaten by Behemoth and Koroviev. Hella then kisses Varenukha, turning him into a vampire.

Dr. Stravinsky – Stravinsky runs the psychiatric clinic at which both Ivan Homeless and the master are patients.

Mark Ratslayer – Ratslayer is the cruel and disfigured centurion (soldier) most favored by Pontius Pilate. He is known for his brutality and unflinching lack of emotion.

Aphranius – Aphranius is the shadowy figure that serves as Pontius Pilate's head of secret police. Practically nothing happens in Yershalaim without him knowing about it. He helps orchestrate the scenario in which Pilate can murder Judas, revenge for Judas turning in Yeshua to the authorities.

Niza – Niza is the woman who, on Aphranius's instruction, lures Judas outside of Yershalaim so that he can be murdered.

Dysmas – Dysmas is one of the other men executed at the same time as Yeshua Ha-Nozri.

Gestas – Gestas is one of the other men executed at the same time as Yeshua Ha-Nozri.

Zheldybin – Zheldybin is Berlioz's assistant at Massolit, the writers' union. When Berlioz dies, Zheldybin harbors the ambition that he can take over the top job.

Grunya – Grunya is the housemaid of Styopa Likhodeev. However, she never actually appears in the novel, having been made to disappear by Woland.

Anna Richardovna – Anna is Prokhor Petrovich's secretary, understandably distraught when her boss is turned into a walking, talking suit.

Prokhor Petrovich – Prokhor is the chairman of the "Commission on Spectacles and Entertainment of the Lighter Type." He is, in a way, most notable for his absence: Behemoth turns him into an empty—but still talking and gesturing—suit.

Georges Bengalsky – Bengalsky is the master of ceremonies at the Variety theater. He is temporarily decapitated by Behemoth as part of the black magic séance show. Bengalsky has a breakdown from the distress and ends up in Dr. Stravinsky's clinic.

Annushka – Annushka is the old woman who inadvertently causes Berlioz's death by spilling sunflower oil near the tram line. She lives below apartment no. 50 and, late in the book, tries to steal the **jeweled horseshoe** that Woland gifts to Margarita.

Latunsky – Latunsky heads up the editorial board that rejects the master's Pontius Pilate novel (in the master's back story). Latunsky also published an article damning the master's work. Margarita takes revenge on Latunsky when, turned into a witch, she flies to his apartment and wrecks it.

Vassily Stepanovich Lastochkin – Vassily is the Variety Theater's book-keeper, surprised to find himself in charge of the theater when everyone in positions above him goes missing.

Professor Kuzmin – Professor Kuzmin is the doctor who treats Andrei Fokich Sokov when he is told by Woland that he will soon die of liver cancer. After Andrei's visit, Woland and his gang play tricks on Professor Kuzmin.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

COURAGE AND COWARDICE

Mikhael Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* makes a powerful argument in favor of courage over cowardice, describing the latter as "the worst sin of all." All three of the novel's storylines—the visit of Woland (Satan) and his entourage to Moscow, the love between the master and Margarita, and Pontius Pilate's condemnation of Yeshua (Jesus) to execution in Yershalaim (Jerusalem) two thousand years prior—combine to show the power of courage and the terrible consequences of cowardice.

If courage can be defined as a willingness to take a stand against something in aid of a greater good, most of the Moscow inhabitants of the novel fall well short. The antics of Woland and his gang draw out the populace's self-interest, greed, and dishonesty, exposing a collective cowardice that strengthens the status quo and all its faults—and in Soviet society, there were many. Whether Woland comes to Moscow with evil

intentions or not, the chaos he creates certainly highlights the most "sinful" side of society's character.

Bulgakov exposes this moral cowardice in a number of ways. It plagues the distribution of housing, as shown by Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, chairman of the tenants' association on Sadovaya street, who accepts a bribe from Woland's assistant, Koroviev, to let them stay in the apartment. The state-approved writers are also cowards, more interested in fine food and holidays than in saying anything daring or genuine with their art. And there's the obsessive bureaucracy that pervades Moscow where "dutiful" citizens are often trying to report one another to the shadowy secret police. This exposure of cowardice reaches a climax with Woland and his gang's performance at the Variety theater, in which they make money rain down from the ceiling, causing the audience to fight with each other to snatch as much as they can. Moscow society, then, is utterly compromised by self-interested moral cowardice and the refusal to put one's own comfort or security aside for anyone else.

Bulgakov fleshes out his comparison of courage and cowardice in the Pontius Pilate sections of the novel. Pilate, who must decide whether or not to approve Yeshua Ha-Nozri's crucifixion, is at first guilty of a similar cowardice found in the Moscow narrative. Though deep down he wants to free Yeshua, intrigued by the latter's radical compassion, he confirms Yeshua's death because he is afraid of the consequences of doing otherwise. This is both an attempt to preserves his own status as Hegemon—self-interest—and a general fear of upsetting the hierarchy (Yershalaim is an environment held together by a delicate balance of power). Pilate regrets his decision and is plagued with guilt for two millennia, frequently dreaming of walking with Yeshua; in these dreams, the two men agree that the execution never happened and that "cowardice is the worst sin of all." Yeshua, for his part, embodies true selfless courage, refusing to drink water from the executioner's sponge and insisting it is given to one of his fellow dying men. Bulgakov, then, reinforces the idea that courage is about individual sacrifice for a greater good.

Bulgakov develops this conception of courage in the character of Margarita. She has a deeply held desire to help others which drives her on to find the master, though she doesn't even know if he is alive. This courageous determination makes her willing to put herself at real risk by agreeing to host Satan's Ball with Woland. Though, as mentioned earlier, Woland's can't be simplified as being "pure evil," Margarita doesn't know whether or not a pact with the devil might bring terrible consequences. Exemplifying her courageous desire to help others, she chooses to use a wish granted to her by Woland to free Frieda, a tortured soul at the ball, rather than fulfil her own longing to be reunited with the master. This selflessness, though slightly irksome to Woland, is rewarded by a second wish, which does bring the master back. Margarita's courage gives vitality to the master, who in turn is able to free Pilate from his millennial purgatory. Courage in the novel, then, has a knock-on effect, positively benefitting all those who act selflessly. The Moscow inhabitants, for their part, go back to their old ways soon enough. Courage leads to redemption, salvation, love and hope; cowardice goes nowhere.

ART AND AUTHENTICITY

The Master and Margarita sets up a contrast between art that is authentic and that which is phoney. Just as the novel begins by depicting a Moscow completely lacking in courage, the novel also depicts artists belonging to the group Massolit as almost entirely inauthentic. This is evident in the simple fact that the writers seem to spend more time gorging themselves on food at Massolit headquarters than they do actually writing. But the implications of the writer's behavior, and even the simple fact that Massolit headquarters has such fine food to offer writers, implies an even deeper inauthenticity. In Soviet society, the only way for any writers' association to exist, much less to be granted the sort of resources that Massolit has, is to have the favor of the government—and the only way to gain such favor is to ensure that every writer in the group writes thing that always meet the ideological approval of the government. Put another way, the writers of Massolit are not producing literature; they are producing work that might superficially seem like literature but is in fact no more than propaganda. This contrasts with art created by the master, underscoring the novel's position that genuine, meaningful art must be authentic—that is, a product of its creator's intellectual independence, emotional vulnerability, and personal sacrifice.

This situation is implied in the conversation between Berlioz, the head of Massolit, and the poet Ivan Homeless at the beginning of the novel, in which Berlioz chastises Ivan for recently writing a poem that made Jesus seem as if he were a living person. Berlioz's criticism is in part ideological, as Soviet doctrine at the time was anti-religious and so writing about Jesus as a real person would be seen as problematic. But this ideological criticism results in Berlioz chastising Ivan for succeeding in one of the main aims of writing: that is, bringing something "to life." The novel thereby implies that Berlioz's criticism is ludicrous, and that following Berlioz's advice could only ever produce bad or inauthentic art.

The novel, of course, goes on to introduce Woland (though not yet by name at that point), who insists that Jesus was in fact a real person, and who then predicts that Berlioz will soon be decapitated. And soon after, Berlioz *is* decapitated after slipping on some oil and falling under a tram. Put another way: Berlioz, who advises Ivan against creating a living character, himself soon after ceases to be a living character. The novel's gleeful judgment of Berlioz, and of the sort of artists who are a part of Massolit, is clear.

In contrast to the Massolit writers, the novel holds up the master as representing authenticity in art, both in the artist's struggle to produce the work *and* in the importance of the work itself. When the master tells the story of the writing of his novel, it is a tale of sacrifice. The master is thus marked out as different from the Massolit writers, with their cushy food and "writing retreats" that seem like little more than vacations. In fact, the master gives so much of himself to his novel that it almost kills him. When misguided critics, led by Latunsky, accuse the master of "Pilatism" and ruin the master's reputation, the shock is too much for him to bear. The master removes himself from the Massolit-led literary society and voluntarily enters Dr. Stravinsky's psychiatric clinic. In this way the novel shows that the master's idea of art, then, is so different from the dominant idea of art in Soviet society that it makes him technically "mad."

However, while Soviet society may have shunned the master's art, the novel itself makes clear that it is *his* art which is true and authentic. First, the novel does this through Margarita's devotion to him (and his book). No other artist in the novel produces work that so touches any other character. The novel also shows the power of the master's work through the fact that Woland and his gang are both aware of and respectful of it. In fact, Woland states that "manuscripts don't burn." Woland is saying here that, though the master thought he was done with his artistic life (which culminated in him throwing his work into the fire), the authenticity of his work preserves it—it is timeless and will outlast the Soviet society that currently can't appreciate it. In fact, the novel seems to imply that the fact that the master's work *isn't* appreciated in Soviet society is a kind of mark in its favor, as that society—with its government-sanctioned Massolit—neither wants nor can comprehend true art.

That Bulgakov's own work was censored in the Soviet Union further suggests that his sympathies lie with the master. In fact, Bulgakov finds a way in *The Master and Margarita* to link the novel he is writing with the novel that the master is writing. The master's novel is about Pontius Pilate. The Pilate story also crops up intermittently but sequentially throughout *The Master and Margarita*, sometimes as part of the master's text but also as told by Woland or even dreamed by Ivan Homeless. The master states at one point in *The Master and Margarita* that he always knew which lines would end his novel: "the cruel fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate." Bulgakov then ends *The Master and Margarita* with the same line. In doing so, Bulgakov gives the master the final word, and suggests that perhaps the entire book—all of *The Master and Margarita*—belongs to the master.

The possibility of this being an analogy for Bulgakov's own censored position within the Soviet Union can't be ignored; true art, the novel seems to say, will always finds its way to the outside world. In addition, within the world of the novel, when the master completes his novel, it results in Pontius Pilate finally being freed from his millennia of torment and gaining peace. The novel, then, suggest both that true art can't be stymied, and that through the life it grants its characters that it can have an actual impact on the world. The novel both asserts the enduring strength of true art, and its enormous power.

THE AMBIGUITY OF GOOD AND EVIL

The Master and Margarita is a highly philosophical book that explores the meaning of "good" and "evil," and how these concepts relate to life as it is actually lived. Moreover, the book makes a very specific point that good and evil do not exist independently from one another, but that each in fact requires the other. Good and evil exist in a continuum, informing and coloring each other, each bringing the other into existence. Morality, the novel seems to say, is far more complex than a simple divide between good and evil. Bulgakov even opens the novel with a quote from Goethe's *Faust*, which is suggestive of Woland's complex role and the novel's overall argument about morality: "...who are you, then? I am part of that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good."

The Master and Margarita subverts the traditional notion of the devil as *simply* the embodiment of evil. Woland is a complicated figure, and while he evidently delights in causing havoc in Moscow, he doesn't seem to engage in violent or cruel behavior for its own sake. Instead, his targets tend to be those who are most prone to "sinful" or "evil" behavior in the first place. That said, it is explicitly stated that Woland *is* Satan, and accordingly the reader must balance the traditional idea of the devil as evil with Woland's actions in the novel. While Woland and his gang show evident glee and ingenuity in their reign of terror of Moscow, their targets are quite specific: those who are materialistic, greedy, and/or charlatanistic. In this sense, Woland's purpose in Moscow bizarrely aligns with the one of the novel's other key arguments: the vital role authentic art plays in showing society to itself. Like an artist might do, Woland and his gang create spectacle in order to highlight the compromised morals of the Moscow populace.

While they do this in many different ways, it is foregrounded by the "black magic séance" show that they put on at the Variety theater. In this, Koroviev, one of Woland's principal assistants, makes it rain money, drawing the Muscovites' greed into full view. He then conjures a fashion boutique on stage, causing a stampede of women to come up and take as much as possible. But the money, once taken out of the theater, becomes foreign currency or simply bits of paper (the first being illegal, the second being useless). The expensive clothes and shoes similarly disappear once the women are out on the street, leaving them naked and causing immense chaos. The victims fall foul of these antics because they too easily give into their worst instincts, and greed and pride, two of the "seven deadly sins,"

are shown to be alive and well in Moscow. While there is undoubtedly a hostile streak in the actions Woland's and his gang here, the result is the exposure of the people's most "sinful" attributes. Ultimately, the citizens of Moscow learn little from the experience, explaining away what's happened as being the work of a gang of "hypnotists" and "ventriloquists." But Bulgakov clearly wants the reader to view these explanations as foolish, and to take on board the message that everyday life is full of "little evils" that it takes strength to avoid.

Rather than the simple aim of spreading in evil through the world, Woland's key principle seems to be demonstrating that evil does—and always will—exist. Not only that, but that evil is inherently necessary, a part of the complexity of morality and life itself. He thus takes on a kind of ceremonial role—ambassadorial, even—both in the antics described above and in the novel's centerpiece: Satan's Ball. The attendees of this incredible, phantasmagoric party all have something in common (Margarita aside): they all committed acts of evil in their life time. The purpose of the ball is best implied by Woland himself, in a later conversation with Yeshua's disciple, Matthew Levi: "Kindly consider the question: what would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look life if shadows disappeared from it? Shadows are cast by objects and people … Do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light?" The ball can thus be explained as a ceremonial tribute to evil, an annual honouring of its critical importance in the world. Through Woland's words, Bulgakov suggests that good and evil are co-dependent, and rather than being separate, are part of a spectrum that ultimately provides life with its richness, fullness, and meaning. Without evil, good would be meaningless; to deny it would be to deny life's complexity and therefore life itself.

LOVE AND HOPE

Love is unambiguously at the heart of *The Master and Margarita*. The titular characters of the novel, the master and Margarita, know that they love each other from the moment that they meet (despite both being married already) and remain devoted to one another even when their paths diverge far apart. Love, then, is shown not just to be a feeling between two people, but a force that governs their lives—a kind of fate and destiny. Furthermore, love constitutes a kind of hope—this hope keeps the master and Margarita alive, both deciding not to commit suicide because of their commitment to one another. In the novel, love and hope, like lovers, go hand in hand.

At the start of Book Two, the narrator addresses the reader directly to paint a picture of the kind of love that the master and Margarita share. This definition then informs the rest of the novel, creating a sense that the strength of their love will inevitably reunite them. The narrator describes this love as "true, faithful, eternal," explicitly levelling criticism at the "vile tongues" of "liars" who pretend that this kind of love doesn't exists. The narrator then implores the reader to "follow" them and be shown "such a love." The entire book, then, becomes a consideration of this type of love. Bulgakov wants his readers to believe in this love's existence, and to witness how it conquers both characters' suffering. By advocating for this love's existence, the book asks the reader to examine their own relationship to love: are their loves "true," "faithful," and "eternal;" and if not, why not? Or is this the kind of love that exists only rarely, not for everyone to experience?

The answer seems to be about faith and hope: everyone, Bulgakov's book argues, should believe in this kind of love. Both the master and Margarita continue to love one another even when they don't know if the other is still living. This belief gives purpose and meaning to their lives—in fact, it literally keeps them alive. There is, however, an important distinction between the master's and Margarita's attitude to their love. Whereas Margarita never gives up hope that she will find her lover, the master—fearing his novel's rejection has made him insane—deliberately avoids contacting her. This is because he feels that the best expression of his love is to set her free. Still, both characters, in their separation from one another, strive to honor the love between them as best they can.

The force of this love ultimately takes over and leads them back to one another. This is mostly enacted by Margarita's determination to do whatever it takes to find the master, but his actions too represent a quiet patience and grace that also constitute a kind of hope. The other marriages and relationships portrayed in the book provide the counterexample: most of the minor characters (generally the victims of Woland's gang) have spouses, but none of them show an ounce of respect or care for their partners. Perhaps, then, the overall argument about love is similar to the argument about art: make it true and treat it with respect; acknowledge its complexities and mysteries. As in art, the novel demands this sort of authenticity in love.

Looking at this theme more widely, the message of hope and love in the novel can be read as Bulgakov's message to his readers in defiance of the oppression the Soviet Union. He changed the title of the book a number of times and, knowing that he wouldn't live to see the its publication, chose to emphasize not Woland's visit to Moscow (as the earlier titles did) but to instead place the master and Margarita's love directly at the book's heart. This particular type of love—"real love," continuing the idea of authenticity—is best summed up by Woland towards the end of the book (again complicating the idea of him as evil incarnate). He states that "he who loves must share the lot of the one he loves." The book, then, is arguing for a selfless kind of love in which people give courage to one another. Love in *The Master and Margarita* can easily be overlooked by a reader dazzled by the wild antics of Woland and his gang, but Bulgakov clearly wants the relationship

between the master and Margarita to be a paramount consideration of his readers. In doing so, the author asks people to examine their ideas of love, and advocates for authenticity and selflessness.

THE DANGER AND ABSURDITY OF SOVIET SOCIETY

The Soviet Union (shorthand for Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was the one of the dominant political entities of the 20th century and represents the largest-scale attempt to create a Communist society in the history of humankind. It grew out of the overthrow of Russia's monarchy and was constructed around the core principle of giving its people equal social and economic rights. The imposition of the system, however, reached a climax of tyranny under the Union's second leader, Joseph Stalin, who oversaw increasing state paranoia, censorship, mass imprisonment, and executions. It was within this suffocating atmosphere that Bulgakov wrote *The Master and Margarita*, taking satirical aim from within at the Soviet society which Bulgakov was not allowed—by state order—to escape. The targets are many, ranging from currency to accommodation, censorship to state-imposed atheism. The satire seeks to expose the hypocrisies of Soviet life but was severely limited in how explicit it could be because of the risk to the author of censorship, imprisonment or even death. Bulgakov's satire, then, has to function doubly hard, by using a dark under-the-radar humor to draw the reader's attention to the shortcomings of the Soviet project and the way in which it, at times, brought out the worst in its people. At the same time, Bulgakov's use of the Pontius Pilate narrative, set two thousand years prior and in another region of the world, allows him to develop an atmosphere of suspicion, intrigue, and paranoia that colors the more humorous Moscow narrative without creating too much of an explicit link between the two.

The Soviet Union was an attempt to impose, from the top down, a particular mode of society, organized around the principles of Communism: a centralized economy, collective labor effort, a "fair" distribution of resources, and a disincentivization of individualism. Bulgakov subtly but fiercely demonstrates throughout the novel that the particular way the Soviet Union imposed these conditions had terrible consequences which were practically the opposite of their supposed aims (aims which, in themselves, are not inherently "wrong" or "evil").

Woland's antics in Moscow are specifically targeted to highlight these consequences in Soviet society: Berlioz's attempt to report him to authorities indicates the paranoid fear of foreigners, more widely suggesting the Soviet Union's isolation on the international stage. The bribery of Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, a man tasked with approving who gets to live in Berlioz's newly vacant Sadovaya street apartment, represents the underground corruption that festered as a result of Soviet housing policy and the subsequent housing shortage. In a telling exchange between Koroviev and Nikanor, Bulgakov satirizes the Soviet Union's oppressive bureaucracy: "What are official and unofficial persons? It all depends on your point of view on the subject. It's all fluctuating and relative, Nikanor Ivanovich. Today I'm an unofficial person, and tomorrow, lo and behold, I'm an official one! And it also happens the other way round—oh, how it does!" The transformation of the bureaucrat Prokhor Petrovich into an empty suit serves a similar function. In the Pilate narrative, the slippage between "official" and "unofficial" is best demonstrated by the lengthy conversation between Pilate and the head of his secret service in Yeshalaim, Aphranius. In this, the "official" content of their discussion is Pilate's order that Judas of Kiriath, the man who turned Yeshua Ha-Nozri into the authorities, must be protected from threats against his life. However, the entire conversation is euphemistic: Pilate and Aphranius are actively *arranging* the terms of Judas's murder (at Pilate's own hands). The "unofficial" content of the speech, then, is the exact opposite of what it seems to be, a fact that echoes the Moscow sections' frequent suggestion of bureaucratic dishonesty.

Later in the book, Bulgakov further satirizes the problematic issue of housing with the example of Berlioz's uncle, Maximillian Andreevich Poplavsky, who travels from Kiev to Moscow not to pay his respects to his deceased nephew, but to try to acquire his apartment. On the one hand, Poplavsky's actions are the direct result of the housing shortage; on the other, his character reinforces the idea that Soviet policy merely sublimated people's greed and made people manipulative. Koroviev satirizes Poplavsky's self-serving intentions by pretending to be distraught at Berlioz's death, mimicking the reaction that might reasonably have been better suited to an uncle grieving his nephew.

But the above instances describe only the satire that, to put it bluntly, Bulgakov felt he could get away with. The darker side of the Soviet Union—its willingness to "disappear" those citizens not obeying its ideology—Bulgakov could only imply, because to do more than that would have been dangerous. Appropriately enough, the shadowy state authorities don't have much of a presence in the novel. In fact, the most obvious gesture towards them is in the Pilate narrative with the extra-judicial (though arguably justified) killing of Judas. That isn't to say they're not there in Moscow, though. Bulgakov keeps them just out of view, masterfully representing the secrecy with which they actually operated at the time. On numerous occasions in the novel, people vanish. Bulgakov portrays these moments with a light touch, but the implication is clear: failure to the toe the line one day can mean ceasing to exist the next—transforming from "official" person to "unofficial." For example, previous inhabitants of the apartment which Woland chooses as his base are described as having disappeared

without any trace. That's because any *official* trace has been erased. In one particular episode, Styopa Likhodeev is suddenly transported by Koroviev from Moscow to Yalta, thousands of miles away. Styopa's disappearance is comically impossible—there's no way he could travel that distance in such a short time (without a little supernatural help). The humor of this episode stands in stark contrast with the reality of disappearances under Soviet society.

Bulgakov's novel, then, constantly reminds the reader of the perils of Soviet oppression—an oppression that he himself faced, and which he knew was almost certainly going to make publication of *The Master and Margarita* impossible (and in fact though the novel was completed by 1940, it was not published until 1967, and even then it was published in Paris, outside the USSR). Loyal first and foremost to his art, Bulgakov takes satirical aim at the Soviet Union from within.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

WOLAND'S BLACK POODLE WALKING STICK

Woland's walking stick is embellished with the ornate figure of a black poodle. This is one of many gestures by Bulgakov to Goethe's *Faust*, in which the devil appears to the titular character as a black poodle and, like *The Master and Margarita*, Goethe's work is centered on a human making a pact with the devil. Because Bulgakov quotes *Faust* in the epigraph, the reader expects the novel to relate to Goethe's work, and the walking stick represents the first allusion in the main text.

Though the walking stick can be seen as a symbol of Woland's identity as the devil, Bulgakov is careful not to reveal that specific identity until the right moment—Woland is not shown to be Satan until chapter 13. Yet when Woland first appears, interrupting a discussion between Ivan Homeless and Berlioz, the walking stick is one of the first things to arouse Berlioz's—and by extension, the reader's—suspicions. Because the walking stick is an unusual accessory for someone to be carrying in the Soviet Union, it marks Woland out instantly as an external visitor; as even the reader doesn't know who Woland is at this point, the walking stick symbolizes both the possibility of his Satanic identity and the depth of his character's mystery.

Subtly, the stick also represents Woland's eternal nature, in drawing a link between Goethe's story centuries before and Bulgakov's in the 20th. Finally, the walking stick hints at the fall of Satan from heaven, in which, so the story goes, he is said to have sustained the injury. Accordingly, the walking stick also stands in for Woland's physical (and moral) asymmetry, marking him out as fundamentally "foreign" not just to the people he walks among on earth but also to the heavenly sphere from which he originates.

THE MOON/MOONLIGHT

Moonlight is a complex symbol that takes on different meanings throughout the novel. It often depicts moments of transition. For example, the last thing Berlioz perceives when he is run over by a tram is the fragmentation of the moonlight. But moonlight, in the Yershalaim narrative about Pontius Pilate, also comes to represent a restlessness of the spirit. Pilate tries to retreat into the moonlight in order to sleep, but has a terrible insomnia brought on by his guilt regarding the execution of Yeshua Ha-Nozri. That's why, when the master, Margarita, and Woland's entourage meet with Pilate in the novel's final psychedelic dreamscape, he is depicted in a kind of moonlit limbo, unable to find any peace because of his grave decision. Once the master frees Pilate, however, moonlight comes to symbolize peace: Pilate is freed to join Yeshua, led up a moonlit path by his faithful dog, Banga. Reinforcing this idea of moonlight as peace, the master and Margarita are also depicted as walking to their "moonlit" cottage, where they will live out their eternal union.

BRIEFCASES

Many of the minor characters in the Moscow narrative, who usually represent cowardice or selfishness, are depicted with briefcases. This is Bulgakov's nod to the overbearing bureaucracy of the Soviet Union and the fine line between being an "official" and a "non-official" person. Soviet citizens often carried briefcases which held their identity papers, should they have a run-in with the authorities. But the briefcase also shows the weakness of unquestioning "duty" and loyalty to state ideology, with those citizens holding the briefcases literally unable to let go of the limitations of the society they live in. Nikolai Ivanovich provides a good example of this symbolism: when is transformed into a hog and ridden by Natasha in lieu of a broomstick, he can't bring himself to let go of his briefcase, clutching it as if it is the most important item in the world.

HORSES

Equestrian imagery crops up intermittently throughout the book and, like **moonlight**, horses do not represent one thing at all times. Margarita is given a golden horseshoe by Woland in reward for her services at Satan's Ball, his way of saying that she need not fear the devil or evil anymore. Towards the end of the book, when the master and Margarita ride away on horseback from their earthly lives. In

both these instances, horse imagery is linked to an idea of freedom, firstly from "evil" and secondly from earthly suffering. While heroes are often depicted on horseback—especially in commemorative statues—the horses in the final scene seem to be more a representative of Woland's power, rather than signaling a triumph that is particularly the master's own. Horseback is just presented as the way that Woland and his entourage—in short, demons—transition between the earthly world and the more ethereal, abstract plains of eternity. In that case, they represent a kind of freedom for Woland and his ambassadors of "evil," too.

In both the final scene and with the aforementioned horseshoe, Bulgakov grounds his symbolism in a finely-wrought network of allusion. A "lucky" horseshoe bringing protection to its owner perhaps originates with the story of St. Dunstan who, so the story goes, had to re-shoe the Devil's horse—helping the devil, just as Margarita has to do. The horseshoe, then, takes on an identity as a talismanic object or memento, a physical representation of the spiritual pact between mortal and Satan. With regard to the allusion built into the book's final scenes, these reference the horsemen of the apocalypse who appear in the biblical Book of Revelation, signaling that the story is drawing to a close.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Random House edition of *The Master and Margarita* published in 1965.

Chapter 1 Quotes

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. 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.

Related Characters: Woland

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

This quote represents the first time the reader encounters Woland. His physical appearance matches his complicated character and is a form that he has specifically chosen for his visit to Moscow. Rather than have the aesthetic of a Moscow citizen, Woland opts intentionally for the look of a foreigner, emphasizing that he is a visitor from another world and playing on the atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion in the Soviet Union. His walking stick is a reference to Goethe's *Faust*. In that book, Faust is visited by the devil, who first appears in the form of a black poodle. The reference indicates that a similar transaction will take place in this book as does in Goethe's: a mortal making a pact with the devil. Woland's eyes encapsulate his contradictory nature—while he is an embodiment of evil, in this book at least he refrains from targeting people with reason (e.g. their cowardice or greed).

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.'

Related Characters: Mikhael Alexandrovich Berlioz, Woland (speaker), Ivan "Homeless" Nikolaevich Ponyrev

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Bulgakov is careful to delay revealing certain characters' identities, waiting for the right moment to do so. In both this quote and the previous, the reader is not privy to Woland's name. Here, the reader views Woland's identity through the prism of Berlioz's suspicion. Berlioz does not trust this strange "foreigner" and projects the official line of the Soviet Union when it comes to religion—state-sponsored atheism. His rewriting of history—by falsely claiming that religion has long ago died away in the country—mirrors the tendency of authoritarian regimes to shape historical

account to support their ideological narrative. Woland, a much more learned and world-weary figure than Berlioz by virtue of his eternal existence, delights in Berlioz's naïve atheism. This atheism is also a reflection Berlioz's role as Massolit chairman (Massolit is the writers' association). He is thus a mouthpiece for official propaganda.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ 'And now tell me, why is it that you use me words "good people" all

the time? Do you call everyone that, or what?'

'Everyone,' the prisoner replied. There are no evil people in the world.'

'The first I hear of it,' Pilate said, grinning. 'But perhaps I know too little of life! ...

Related Characters: Yeshua Ha-Nozri, Pontius Pilate (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Yeshua is presented to Pontius Pilate, who must decide whether to confirm Yeshua's execution. The reader actually sees very little of Yeshua throughout the book—soon he is dead, and in the final chapters is only a distant presence—and so this exchange offers an invaluable insight into Yeshua's worldview and philosophy. Yeshua's point that there are no evil people in the world is not a denial of evil—just a refusal to define people by the evil that they do. Every evil act, he seems to be saying, can be explained; violence begets violence in a cyclical trap, but does not fundamentally define human nature. Though Pilate appears to arrogantly dismiss Yeshua's belief that all people are good, the rest of the book proves how the simple power of Yeshua's message works its way into Pilate's very being.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Any visitor finding himself in Griboedov's, unless of course he was a total dim-wit, would realize at once what a good life those lucky fellows, the Massolit members, were having, and black envy would immediately start gnawing at him. And he would immediately address bitter reproaches to heaven for not having endowed him at birth with literary talent, lacking which there was naturally no dreaming of owning a Massolit membership card, brown, smelling of costly leather, with a wide gold border – a card known to all Moscow.

Related Characters: The Master, Ivan "Homeless" Nikolaevich Ponyrev, Mikhael Alexandrovich Berlioz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from a heavily satirical chapter that describes Massolit, which is a Moscow writers' union that seems to spend more time on fine dining than on actual writing. The writers at Mossolit enjoy a "good life" because they refrain from being critical of the state and can therefore enjoy the resources that come with aiding the official line. Bulgakov is trying to draw a distinction between talent and status, between authenticity and charlatanism. He paints Massolit as a pointless institution pretending to be in service of art but actually serving the authorities. The counter-example in the book is provided by the master.

Chapter 7 Quotes

And then the bedroom started spinning around Styopa, he hit his head

against the doorpost, and, losing consciousness, thought: 'I'm dying...'

But he did not die. Opening his eyes slightly, he saw himself sitting on something made of stone. Around him something was making noise. When he opened his eyes properly, he realized that the noise was being made by the sea and, what's more, that the waves were rocking just at his feet, that he was, in short, sitting at the very end of a jetty, that over him was a brilliant blue sky and behind him a white city on the mountains.

Not knowing how to behave in such a case, Styopa got up on his trembling legs and walked along the jetty towards the shore.

Some man was standing on the jetty, smoking and spitting into the sea. He looked at Styopa with wild eyes and stopped spitting.

Then Styopa pulled the following stunt: he knelt down before the unknown smoker and said:

'I implore you, tell me what city is this?'

'Really!' said the heartless smoker.

'I'm not drunk,' Styopa replied hoarsely, 'something's happened to

me... I'm ill... Where am I? What city is this?'

'Well, it's Yalta...'

Styopa quietly gasped and sank down on his side, his head striking the

warm stone of the jetty. Consciousness left him.

Related Characters: Styopa Likhodeev (speaker), Woland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84-85

Explanation and Analysis

Styopa Likhodeev is the director of the Variety theater and lives in the same place as Berlioz (who by this point has been decapitated by a tram). In this chapter, he wakes to find Woland sitting in his room, or informs Styopa that he agreed the previous day to host Woland's show and give up his apartment for the strange foreigner. This comes at the end of the chapter and is a clear demonstration of Woland and his gang's supernatural capabilities. Done with toying with Styopa, they transport him instantly to Yalta—which is thousands of miles away from Moscow. Because it's impossible for him to have travelled so far in so short a time, his colleagues at the theater think they are being pranked when Styopa tries to contact them. The passage also has a darkly comic purpose: by making Styopa disappear, Bulgakov gestures towards the way dissenters in the Soviet Union could be made to disappear too, here one day and gone the next.

Chapter 9 Quotes

At the deceased's desk sat an unknown, skinny, long citizen in a little checkered jacket, a jockey's cap, and a pince-nez... well, in short, that same one.

'And who might you be, citizen?' Nikanor Ivanovich asked fearfully.

'Hah! Nikanor Ivanovich!' the unexpected citizen yelled in a rattling tenor and, jumping up, greeted the chairman with a forced and sudden handshake. This greeting by no means gladdened Nikanor Ivanovich.

'Excuse me,' he said suspiciously, 'but who might you be? Are you an official person?'

'Eh, Nikanor Ivanovich!' the unknown man exclaimed soulfully. 'What are official and unofficial persons? It all depends on your point of view on the subject. It's all fluctuating and relative, Nikanor Ivanovich. Today I'm an unofficial person, and tomorrow, lo and behold, I'm an official one! And it also happens the other way round – oh, how it does!'

Related Characters: Koroviev, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy (speaker), Mikhael Alexandrovich Berlioz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Nikanor is the chairman of the tenants' association that looks after Berlioz and Styopa's apartment block. He is thus in a position of considerable power, being able to decide who will live in Berlioz's vacant rooms (a power granted to him by the state in support of the ban on private ownership of property). Nikanor shows a slavish loyalty to duty and officialdom, asking Koroviev to prove his identity by proving his officiality. Koroviev's flippant dismissal of Nikanor's concerns both paints the whole question of being an "official" person as absurd and highlights the fragility of "official" status in a society where people can be "disappeared" for saying the wrong thing.

Chapter 10 Quotes

Here the two robbers vanished, and in their place there appeared in the front hall a completely naked girl – red-haired, her eyes burning with a phosphorescent gleam.

Varenukha understood that this was the most terrible of all things that had ever happened to him and, moaning, recoiled against the wall. But the girl came right up to the administrator and placed the palms of her hands on his shoulders. Varenukha's hair stood on end, because even through the cold, water-soaked cloth of his Tolstoy blouse he could feel that those palms were still colder, that their cold was the cold of ice.

'Let me give you a kiss,' the girl said tenderly, and there were shining eyes right in front of his eyes. Then Varenukha fainted and never felt the kiss.

Related Characters: Hella (speaker), Ivan Savalyevich Varenukha

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

The naked girl is Hella, a beautiful redheaded succubus who, in this form at least, is a vampire. She is the only female member of Woland's entourage and appears here at the end of chapter 10 to turn Varenukha into a vampire too (he has just been beaten up by Koroviev and Behemoth). Hella's presence in Woland's entourage represents Bulgakov's attempt to widen out their supernatural "evil" element beyond the biblical, mixing in other ideas and characters from folkloric conceptions of evil. As with the traditional vampire myth, a vampire bite results in the victim being turned into a vampire too. Varenukha's transformation becomes clear in chapter 14, when he in turn preys on Rimsky, the Variety theater's financial director.

Chapter 12 Quotes

'And so, now comes the famous foreign artist. Monsieur Woland, with a séance of black magic. Well, both you and I know,' here Bengalsky smiled a wise smile, 'that there's no such thing in the world, and that it's all just superstition, and Maestro Woland is simply a perfect master of the technique of conjuring, as we shall see from the most interesting part, that is, the exposure of this technique, and since we're all of us to a man both for technique and for its exposure, let's bring on Mr Woland!'

Related Characters: Georges Bengalsky (speaker), Woland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

Georges Bengalsky is the hapless master of ceremonies tasked with introducing and overseeing Woland's "black magic séance" at the Variety theater in this chapter. He typifies the relationship between the Moscow populace and the supernatural, naively explaining away anything that he does not understand (or in this case anticipating an explanation from Woland). The real exposure is not in Woland revealing his "techniques," but in the way the performance draws out the worst in audience members' characters, showing them to be greedy and selfish. As with the encounter with Berlioz in chapters 1 and 3, Woland delights in demonstrating his powers to those who don't believe in them.

In a few seconds, the rain of money, ever thickening, reached the seats, and the spectators began snatching at it.

Hundreds of arms were raised, the spectators held the bills up to the lighted stage and saw the most true and honest-to-God watermarks. The smell also left no doubts: it was the incomparably delightful smell of freshly printed money. The whole theatre was seized first with merriment and then with amazement. The word 'money, money!' hummed everywhere, there were gasps of 'ah, ah!' and merry laughter. One or two were already crawling in the aisles, feeling under the chairs. Many stood on the seats, trying to catch the flighty, capricious notes.

Related Characters: Woland, Koroviev

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124-125

Explanation and Analysis

This moment represents the climax of Woland's black magic séance at the Variety theater. Koroviev makes money rain from the ceiling, tempting the audience members into displaying their greed, selfishness, and lust for material things by clambering over one another to snatch at the bank notes. The audience is stirred into a frenzied trance, drawing out their worst desires and highlighting their lack of community. This satirizes the Soviet Union's attempt to

control money in society and shows that the implementation of Communist policy—the particular way that it was done—did not eradicate greed but sublimated it. Part of Woland's role in the story is to bear witness to the worst in Moscow society, taking its moral temperature. Here, he delights in seeing the distance between the professed aims of the Soviet project and its actual results.

Chapter 13 Quotes

He suddenly wiped an unexpected tear with his right sleeve and continued: 'Love leaped out in front of us like a murderer in an alley leaping out of nowhere, and struck us both at once. As lightning strikes, as a Finnish knife strikes! She, by the way, insisted afterwards that it wasn't so, that we had, of course, loved each other for a long, long time, without knowing each other, never having seen each other, and that she was living with a different man ... as I was, too, then ... with that, what's her ...'

Related Characters: The Master (speaker), Ivan "Homeless" Nikolaevich Ponyrev, Margarita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140-141

Explanation and Analysis

In chapter 13, Ivan—and the reader—meets the master for the first time. He gives a lengthy explanation about how he came to find himself in Dr. Stravinsky's psychiatric clinic, which involves the writing of his novel, falling in love with Margarita (whom he deliberately doesn't name), and the psychological pain of having his novel rejected by Moscow literary society. This quote here, which paints a picture of his first encounter with Margarita, demonstrates the power of his writerly gift, describing a "love at first sight" scenario which avoids any lapse into cliché or sentimentality. Love is characterized as a kind of danger, expressing that true, authentic love is a question of life and death (also matched by both the master and Margarita's individual considerations of suicide). The love between the master and Margarita is painted as rare and special.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Yeshua tore himself away from the sponge, and trying to make his voice sound gentle and persuasive, but not succeeding, he begged the executioner hoarsely:

'Give him a drink.'

It was growing ever darker. The storm cloud had already poured across half the sky, aiming towards Yershalaim, boiling white clouds raced ahead of the storm cloud suffused with black moisture and fire. There was a flash and a thunderclap right over the hill. The executioner removed the sponge from the spear.

'Praise the magnanimous hegemon!' he whispered solemnly, and gently pricked Yeshua in the heart. He twitched and whispered:

'Hegemon...'

Related Characters: Yeshua Ha-Nozri (speaker), Pontius Pilate

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

The novel returns to the Yershalaim narrative, with Bulgakov painting a vivid picture of the death of Yeshua by crucifixion. The main purpose of this moment is to demonstrate Yeshua's courageousness. His immense and universal love for people and his exemplary selflessness cause him to refuse the drink of water, even though he is undoubtedly thirsty. His rejection of the sponge is also his way of denying the hierarchy of the society that has put him to death, lending him an air of dignity and grace. His last word in this account is an interesting one: "Hegemon." (rather than biblical cry of "why hast thou forsaken me?"). "Hegemon" is Pontius Pilate's official title, and Yeshua's utterance of the word perhaps symbolizes the way in which their fates are now intertwined; alternatively, it could the delusory expression of a dying man, repeating back the last word that he hears before drawing his last breath.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ At a huge writing desk with a massive inkstand an empty suit sat and with a dry pen, not dipped in ink, traced on a piece of paper. The suit was wearing a necktie, a fountain pen stuck from its pocket, but above the collar there was neither neck nor head, just as there were no hands sticking out of the sleeves. The suit was immersed in work and completely ignored the turmoil that reigned around it. Hearing someone come in, the suit leaned back and from above the collar came the voice, quite familiar to the bookkeeper, of Prokhor Petrovich:

'What is this? Isn't it written on the door that I'm not receiving?'

The beautiful secretary shrieked and, wringing her hands, cried out: 'You see? You see?! He's not there! He's not! Bring him back, bring

him back!'

Here someone peeked in the door of the office, gasped, and flew out. The bookkeeper felt his legs trembling and sat on the edge of a chair,

but did not forget to pick up his briefcase. Anna Richardovna hopped around the bookkeeper, worrying his jacket, and exclaiming:

'I always, always stopped him when he swore by the devil! So now the devil's got him!'

Related Characters: Anna Richardovna, Prokhor Petrovich (speaker), Woland, Behemoth, Vassily Stepanovich Lastochkin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This is a very funny moment that takes aim at the Soviet Union's overbearing and cumbersome bureaucracy. Vassily, the Variety's book-keeper, visits one of the state authorities to give a report on the previous night's events at the theater. Here, he is confronted by the distressed receptionist, Anna Richardovna, who shows him that Prokhor Petrovich has essentially disappeared, at least in physical form. Instead, he is now just an empty—but walking, talking—suit, going about all of Prokhor's usual official duties despite not having a body. It is therefore a comment on the hollowness of the bureaucratic environment, in which duty and status take precedence over humanity and empathy. Anna's account of what happened shows that Prokhor's transformation came just at the moment he invoked the devil, despite living under state-sponsored atheism—a recurring set-up throughout the novel. Bulgakov thus flips the old adage on its head that people should not "take the Lord's name in vain," applying it mischievously to Satan instead.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Follow me, reader! Who told you that there is no true, faithful, eternal love in this world! May the liar's vile tongue be cut out!

Follow me, my reader, and me alone, and I will show you such a love!

No! The master was mistaken when with bitterness he told Ivanushka in the hospital, at that hour when the night was falling past midnight, that she had forgotten him. That could not be. She had, of course, not forgotten him.

First of all let us reveal the secret which the master did not wish to reveal to Ivanushka. His beloved's name was Margarita Nikolaevna.

Related Characters: Ivan "Homeless" Nikolaevich Ponyrev, The Master, Margarita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

This is the opening of Book Two and represents one of few instances in which the narrator addresses the reader directly and familiarly. Essentially, this sets up the premise of the second book: to prove the existence of "true, faithful, eternal love." This love is embodied by the master and Margarita, and its existence is an affirmation of hopefulness and courage within an oppressive and trying environment. It also speaks to the power of stories and thereby to the power of true, authentic art—as opposed to the work produced by the propogandists of Massolit. The quote also demonstrates Bulgakov's careful technique in choosing when to reveal characters' identities. Delaying Margarita's name, for example, allowed the reader to consider her as a more universal figure; the start of the second book signals that this universal figure is about to have flesh put on the bones and made more specific.

Chapter 21 Quotes

Naked and invisible, the lady flier tried to control and talk sense into herself; her hands trembled with impatience. Taking careful aim, Margarita struck at the keys of the grand piano, and a first plaintive wail passed all through the apartment. Becker's drawing-room instrument, not guilty of anything, cried out frenziedly. Its keys caved in, ivory veneer flew in all directions. The instrument howled, wailed, rasped and jangled. With the noise of a pistol shot, the polished upper soundboard split under a hammer blow. Breathing hard, Margarita tore and mangled the strings with the hammer. Finally getting tired, she left off and flopped into an armchair to catch her breath.

Related Characters: The Master, Latunsky, Margarita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 237-238

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 21, Margarita becomes a witch, having accepted Azazello's proposition to assist Woland. Though she is not yet sure of what her duties will be, the transformation into a supernatural being shows that she is in the presence of a great power. Her flight away from her old home represents her escape from the life that she has come to resent (because of her longing for the master). In this specific moment, she has flown into the critic Latunsksy's Massolit-provided apartment. As Latunksy was one of the master's key critics, Margarita, who feels a deep sense of protection and loyalty towards the master and his work, takes the opportunity to destroy the interior of his apartment. The destruction of the piano specifically signals the symbolic destruction of state-sponsored culture. The piano is an expensive, almost luxurious instrument, sitting there unplayed as an emblem of Latunksy's undeserved wealth.

Chapter 22 Quotes

'No,' replied Margarita, 'most of all I'm struck that there's room for all this.' She made a gesture with her hand, emphasizing the enormousness of the hall.

Koroviev grinned sweetly, which made the shadows stir in the folds of his nose.

'The most uncomplicated thing of all!' he replied. 'For someone well acquainted with the fifth dimension, it costs nothing to expand space to the desired proportions. I'll say more, respected lady - to devil knows what proportions!

Related Characters: Margarita (speaker), Koroviev

Related Themes:

Page Number: 250

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Azazello and Margarita arrive at the Sadovaya street apartment, where Woland his entourage temporarily reside. Here, Bulgakov satires the Soviet housing shortage and the resulting lack of space that came with enforced flat-sharing. More widely, the quote demonstrates Woland's immense power by referring to his dominion over different dimensions. The fourth dimension, time, is perfectly controllable by Woland (as shown in the following chapter). The mysterious fifth dimension refers to Woland's ablity to manipulate space, defying physics to host a vast extravaganza (again in the next chapter) in relatively modest Moscow apartment. Margarita is impressed, but noticeably unafraid.

Chapter 23 Quotes

'Mikhail Alexandrovich,' Woland addressed the head in a low voice, and then the slain man's eyelids rose, and on the dead face Margarita saw, with a shudder, living eyes filled with thought and suffering.

'Everything came to pass, did it not?' Woland went on, looking into the head's eyes. 'The head was cut off by a woman, the meeting did not take place, and I am living in your apartment. That is a fact. And fact is the most stubborn thing in the world. But we are now interested in what follows, and not in this already accomplished fact. You have always been an ardent preacher of the theory that, on the cutting off of his head, life ceases in a man, he turns to ashes and goes into non-being. I have the pleasure of informing you, in the presence of my guests, though they serve as proof of quite a different theory, that your theory is both solid and clever.

However, one theory is as good as another. There is also one which holds that it will be given to each according to his faith. Let it come true! You go into non-being, and from the cup into which you are to be transformed, I will joyfully drink to being!'

Woland raised his sword. Straight away the flesh of the head turned dark and shrivelled, then fell off in pieces, the eyes disappeared, and soon Margarita saw on the platter a yellowish skull with emerald eyes, pearl teeth and a golden foot. The lid opened on a hinge.

Related Characters: Woland (speaker), Margarita, Mikhael Alexandrovich Berlioz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is quoted from Satan's Ball, which Woland hosts annually during the spring full moon. The ball is attended by evil-doers (some actual historical figures) who arrive through a fire, perhaps symbolizing that they've come from Hell. Here, Woland addresses the head of Berlioz, who was decapitated by a tram in chapter 3. Berlioz's head had subsequently gone missing, a mystery that is now explained by its appearance at the ball. The ball represents a ceremonial tribute to evil's place in the world, and drinking blood from Berlioz's head, transformed into a cup, is its sacrificial peak. Berlioz seems to have been particularly targeted precisely because he was so sure that none of this—the devil, the supernatural, etc.—existed. His decapitation thus symbolizes a severance of rationality, cutting off the site of human intelligence—the head/brain—at its source.

Chapter 24 Quotes

'But tell me, why does Margarita call you a master?' asked Woland. The man smiled and said:

'That is an excusable weakness. She has too high an opinion of a novel

I wrote.'

'What is this novel about?'

'It is a novel about Pontius Pilate.' Here again the tongues of the candles swayed and leaped, the dishes on the table clattered, Woland burst into thunderous laughter, but neither frightened nor surprised anyone. Behemoth applauded for some reason.

'About what? About what? About whom?' said Woland, ceasing to laugh.

'And that - now? It's stupendous! Couldn't you have found some other subject? Let me see it.' Woland held out his hand, palm up.

'Unfortunately, I cannot do that,' replied the master, 'because I burned it in the stove.'

'Forgive me, but I don't believe you,' Woland replied, 'that cannot be: manuscripts don't burn.' He turned to Behemoth and said, 'Come on. Behemoth, let's have the novel.'

The cat instantly jumped off the chair, and everyone saw that he had been sitting on a thick stack of manuscripts. With a bow, the cat gave the top copy to Woland. Margarita trembled and cried out, again shaken to the point of tears:

'It's here, the manuscript! It's here!' She dashed to Woland and added in admiration:

'All-powerful! All-powerful!'

Related Characters: Margarita, The Master, Woland (speaker), Pontius Pilate, Behemoth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 286-287

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes just after Margarita has been reunited with the master as reward for her role in Satan's Ball. The quote is principally a comment on literature and art more generally. It neatly encapsulates the novel's argument that authentic art does not die, representing a kind of vital immortality granted to work that truly teaches humanity about itself. The phrase "manuscripts don't burn" became a much-used quotation in Russian society (when the novel was eventually published), thus neatly illustrating the point that good art will always find a way to the public, winning out against powers that try to prevent its existence. The way the novel is revealed is suitably theatrical—Behemoth

was sitting on it throughout the conversation.

Chapter 26 Quotes

He walked in the company of Banga, and beside him walked the wandering philosopher. They were arguing about something very complex and important, and neither of them could refute the other. They did not agree with each other in anything, and that made their argument especially interesting and endless. It went without saying that today's execution proved to be a sheer misunderstanding: here this philosopher, who had thought up such an incredibly absurd thing as that all men are good, was walking beside him, therefore he was alive. And, of course, it would be terrible even to think that one could execute such a man. There had been no execution! No execution! That was the loveliness of this journey up the stairway of the moon.

There was as much free time as they needed, and the storm would come only towards evening, and cowardice was undoubtedly one of the most terrible vices. Thus spoke Yeshua Ha-Nozri. No, philosopher, I disagree with you: it is the most terrible vice!

Related Characters: Banga, Pontius Pilate, Yeshua Ha-Nozri

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

This quote explains a recurring dream of Pontius Pilate's after his decision to approve Yeshua Ha-Nozri's execution. It shows that his mind is wracked by guilt, and that he knows deep down that he gave into cowardice. It also demonstrates how deeply affected Pilate has been by his brief encounter with Yeshua; he knows that he is deeply wrapped up in events of great magnitude, with huge repercussions for humanity at large. He senses the truth of Yeshua's message and longs to learn more about it. The dream represents Pilate's longing to absolve himself from his decision, with Yeshua confirming that the execution didn't happen—though, of course, it did. Cowardice is portrayed as the worst sin of all because in a way it informs all wrongdoing—cowardice is the reluctance to take a stand in aid of a greater good, which is exactly what Pilate has done.

Chapter 29 Quotes

'If you've come to see me, why didn't you wish me a good evening, former tax collector?' Woland said sternly.

'Because I don't wish you a good anything,' the newcomer replied insolently.

'But you'll have to reconcile yourself to that,' Woland objected, and a grin twisted his mouth. 'You no sooner appear on the roof than you produce an absurdity, and I'll tell you what it is — it's your intonation. You uttered your words as if you don't acknowledge shadows, or evil either. Kindly consider the question: what would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it? Shadows are cast by objects and people. Here is the shadow of my sword. Trees and living beings also have shadows. Do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light? You're a fool.'

Related Characters: Matthew Levi, Woland (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 360

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes when Matthew Levi is dispatched to Woland with a message from Yeshua Ha-Nozri, stating that Woland should grant the master and Margarita eternal peace. Interestingly, it reveals that Woland and Yeshua are not arch enemies—as representatives of the poles of good and evil—but that they are part of an overall hierarchy in which Woland must obey the wishes of Yeshua. Woland's criticism of Matthew Levi is an abstraction of this relationship, demonstrating that "good" is meaningless without "evil," and that morality is as complex as life itself. Levi, in his complete devotion to Yeshua, can't see that, and would rather live in a world that is solely good.

Chapter 32 Quotes

Here Woland turned to the master and said:

'Well, now you can finish your novel with one phrase!'

The master seemed to have been expecting this, as he stood motionless and looked at the seated procurator. He cupped his hands to his mouth and cried out so that the echo leaped over the unpeopled and unforested mountains:

'You're free! You're free! He is waiting for you!'

The mountains turned the master's voice to thunder, and by this same thunder they were destroyed. The accursed rocky walls collapsed. Only the platform with the stone armchair remained. Over the black abyss into which the walls had gone, a boundless city lit up, dominated by gleaming idols above a garden grown luxuriously over many thousands of moons. The path of moonlight so long awaited by the procurator stretched right to this garden, and the first to rush down it was the sharp-eared dog. The man in the white cloak with blood-red lining rose from the armchair and shouted something in a hoarse, cracked voice. It was impossible to tell whether he was weeping or laughing, or what he shouted. It could only be seen that, following his faithful guardian, he, too, rushed headlong down the path of moonlight.

Related Characters: The Master, Woland (speaker), Banga, Pontius Pilate

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as the master and Margarita accompany Woland and his entourage on a journey away from the earth, heading towards their eternal peace. They encounter Pontius Pilate because it is the master's responsibility to set him free, and thus complete his novel. It is a psychedelic expression of the master's authenticity in his art, arguing that he holds true power and that his work is of great value and importance. Pilate has evidently been trapped in a limbo based on his longing to reverse his decision to approve Yeshua's execution. The moonlight, which has symbolized his restless insomnia, comes to represent peace once the master has done his duty. Banga, Pilate's ever-faithful dog, is a creature of loyalty, echoing Levi's loyalty to Yeshua, the master's commitment to his art, and the love between the master and Margarita.

'Listen to the stillness,' Margarita said to the master, and the sand rustled under her bare feet, 'listen and enjoy what you were not given in life — peace. Look, there ahead is your eternal home, which you have been given as a reward. I can already see the Venetian window and the twisting vine, it climbs right up to the roof. Here is your home, your eternal home. I know that in the evenings you will be visited by those you love, those who interest you and who will never trouble you. They will play for you, they will sing for you, you will see what light is in the room when the candles are burning. You will fall asleep, having put on your greasy and eternal nightcap, you will fall asleep with a smile on your lips. Sleep will strengthen you, you will reason wisely. And you will no longer be able to drive me away. I will watch over your sleep.'

Thus spoke Margarita, walking with the master to their eternal home, and it seemed to the master that Margarita's words flowed in the same way as the stream they had left behind flowed and whispered, and the master's memory, the master's anxious, needled memory began to fade. Someone was setting the master free, as he himself had just set free the hero he had created. This hero had gone into the abyss, gone irrevocably, the son of the astrologer-king, forgiven on the eve of Sunday, the cruel fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate.

Related Characters: Margarita (speaker), Pontius Pilate, The Master

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 384

Explanation and Analysis

This quote shows the reader the fate of the master and Margarita and marks the end of their narrative. It is a depiction of the strength of their love together, which earns the master his peace and allows the lovers to live the only life they've ever wanted: humble union. Just as the master set free Pilate, he too feels himself being set free from what has caused him so much distress. Perhaps this freedom is granted to him by Bulgakov, or perhaps it is an evocation of the reader's role in bringing the story to life and thus validating the importance of art itself. The final lines here are the same as the master's to his own novel, thus illustrating that on one level the entire story belong to him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1. NEVER TALK WITH STRANGERS

Two literary men meet at Patriach's Ponds one spring evening in Moscow. They are the plump and pompous Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, editor of an important literary journal and chairman of Massolit (the Moscow writers' union), and the younger poet Ivan Nikolaevich Ponyrev, who writes under the pseudonym "Homeless."

Bulgakov's opening is meant to lure the reader into a false sense of security with its seemingly mundane scenario. That Berlioz and Ivan are writers immediately sets up the role of art in society as a key concern.

The two men buy refreshments from a kiosk. Berlioz is disturbed by the sight of an extremely tall, thin and apparently "see-through" citizen who appears to be levitating just above the ground. Berlioz tells Ivan about the sight, explaining it as "something like a hallucination" and exclaiming dismissively, "Pah, the devil!"

Berlioz's apparition creates a sense of foreboding and gently hints at what will happen to him later in the chapter. Here, as throughout the novel, citizens invoke the devil as an expression while adhering to the Soviet Union's official policy of atheism. Bulgakov thus suggests a disconnect between what people say and do that is developed more fully as the novel goes on.

Berlioz talks about Ivan's latest poem, an "anti-religious" consideration of Jesus. In Berlioz's opinion, the entire thing needs re-writing, as Ivan has unwittingly brought Jesus to life—when they both know, says Berlioz, that Jesus never existed. In a display of erudition, Berlioz compares the story of Jesus to a host of other religions, demonstrating, in his view, that Jesus was, and still is, just a variation on a fictional theme.

Berlioz embodies the old proverb that "a little learning can be a dangerous thing." He is an erudite man but naively believes he knows all of the answers to life. His criticism of Ivan is highly ironic and a sly dig by Bulgakov at bad writing; he ought to be praising Ivan for bringing a character to life. Given that he is the chairman of Massolit, his foolishness doesn't bode well for the other writers.

A foreign-looking man, wearing an expensive suit, a beret, and carrying **a stick "with a black knob shaped like a poodle's head**," sits down on the next bench down from Berlioz and Ivan. As Berlioz continues to chastise Ivan for making Jesus seem "that he really was born," the stranger interjects politely, explaining that it is a subject that he is very interested in.

The foreign-looking man is Woland, though his identity is not revealed to the reader until much later. There is a trope running through the novel about "foreignness," creating an atmosphere of paranoia befitting the Soviet setting. The poodle-headed walking stick is a reference to Goethe's Faust, a work which exerted a great influence on Bulgakov's and similarly involves a visitation from the devil.

As Berlioz and Ivan try to figure out where he is from, the stranger expresses his amazement that Berlioz thinks of Jesus as made-up. He asks if it follows that the two men also don't believe in God; replying that they are "atheists," the man cries out, "Oh, how lovely!" The man shakes Berlioz's hand, thanking him for providing "very important information."

Woland actively delights in Berlioz's certainty that neither Jesus nor God exist. Part of Woland's visit seems to be a kind of fact-finding mission, taking the temperature of Moscow's religious beliefs and attitudes to good and evil, life and death.

The stranger asks Berlioz for his opinion on the "five proofs of God's existence." Berlioz dismisses these; Ivan exclaims that Immanuel Kant deserves to be imprisoned for his proofs. The stranger laughs, explaining that he had breakfast with Kant only recently. As the man probes further about what the other two believe governs human life and the universe, Ivan states that "man governs himself." The stranger points out that mankind is, in the grand scheme of things, a very recent addition to the universe. He asks whether, were a man to slip and fall under a tram-car, could he really be said to be governing himself.

The "five proofs" refers to five logical arguments made by 13th Century Catholic scholar St. Thomas Aquinas. The reference to Kant concerns his "sixth proof," which, crudely put, is that mankind's morality and pursuit of happiness prove the existence of God and the afterlife. Even though Kant was writing three centuries before the setting of Bulgakov's novel, for an eternal being like Woland that would seem like no time at all. Woland is trying to intimate that there are forces beyond man's understanding—ironically, the two writers he converses with are not interested in the mysteries of life.

As they discuss the issue of mortality, the stranger seemingly predicts how Berlioz will die, telling him that his "head will be cut off … by a Russian woman." He also mentions something about "sunflower oil." Ivan and Berlioz think the stranger is mad as he goes on to imply that Berlioz's death will prevent Berlioz from attending an important meeting at Massolit that evening.

The casual manner with which Woland informs Berlioz of his impending death is meant to contrast with the self-inflated "importance" of Massolit. Woland's prediction of Berlioz's death also raises interesting questions about his role—he doesn't actively cause the death, but he does have foreknowledge of it.

Much to Ivan's shock, the stranger address him by his name. The man explains that he has read Ivan's poems. Berlioz and Ivan pull aside to discuss whether the stranger might be a spy. They consider asking him to show them his identity papers.

Ivan is surprised to meet someone who knows his poems—this is not the only time in the novel that this happens and suggests that, deep down, Ivan knows his poems are bad and inauthentic. Berlioz and Ivan's aside develops the atmosphere of paranoia and hints at the bureaucratic tyranny of the Soviet regime.

Having somehow comprehended what Berlioz and Ivan were saying, the stranger produces his passport, invitation to a consultation in Moscow, and his personal business card (on which his name appears to begin with "W"). He explains that he is a professor specializing in black magic and that he can speak many languages. He is in Moscow, he claims, to look over some tenth-century manuscripts. He then tells them matter-of-factly that Jesus did indeed exists and begins to tell them a story as "proof."

Woland again demonstrates his supernatural abilities to by answering the question of his identity before it has even been asked. There is a carnivalesque trickster side to his character—he enjoys deceiving people, but usually does so with a purpose. He is not in Moscow simply to commit evil deeds, but to create a spectacle (mirrored by the idea of black magic). Unfortunately for Ivan, he doesn't get a proper look at the business card and so can't remember Woland's name in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2. PONTIUS PILATE

The stranger's story is set at the Palace of Herod in Yershalaim, approximately two millennia ago. It is the eve of Passover. Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, has been suffering from a headache all day which seems to be linked to the pervasive smell of rose oil exuding from the garden.

This is the first section of the Pilate narrative, which takes place in a completely different time and setting. It is linked to the main narrative by virtue of who is telling the story—in this case Woland. Pilate's headache is a precursor of the moral dilemma that is to come.

A male prisoner, Yeshua Ha-Nozri, is brought before the procurator. He has been preliminarily sentenced to death for inciting "the people to destroy the temple of Yershalaim"—but the authority who had been meant to confirm the sentence had refused and sent Yeshua to Pilate for the final decision.

Bulgakov uses the Aramaic words for Jesus and Jerusalem to make them less familiar and thereby enliven the story (and lend a degree of historical accuracy). Yeshua has been found guilty of a crime, but the fact that the other authority has refused to confirm his sentence marks him out as somehow unique.

Yeshua, dressed in a white cloth and looking like he has been recently beaten, tries to deny the charge, addressing Pilate as "good man." Taking offence at Yeshua's apparent lack of respect for his authority, Pilate has his burly guard, Mark "Ratslayer," whip Yeshua. Pilate insists on being called "Hegemon."

There is a strict hierarchy at play in Yershalaim, mirroring the paranoid authoritarianism of Soviet Russia. In fact, Bulgakov can write more explicitly about authority in these sections because of the time/setting distance. Yeshua is in the habit of calling people "good" because he fundamentally believes that that's what they are.

Pilate interrogates Yeshua. The latter claims to be "alone in the world" and to have no "permanent home." He tells Pilate that he can speak Greek, which he uses to insist that he would never desire the destruction of the temple building. He says that "the people" have wrongly interpreted his words, mostly because Matthew Levi, a devotee who follows him around, often writes down what he says "incorrectly."

Yeshua speaks a message of peace and has a concern for all of mankind, which ironically is what makes him "alone in the world." His use of Greek demonstrates his intelligence to Pilate, and further creates a sense of intrigue around the mysterious man.

Pilate asks Yeshua to state accurately what he *did* say about the temple. Yeshua replies: "I said, Hegemon, that the temple of the old faith would fall and a new temple of truth would be built. I said it that way so as to make it more understandable." Pilate asks angrily what right Yeshua has to talk about "truth."

Yeshua's message is about hope and courage—the "old faith" will fall, in his prediction, because it is based on fear and cowardice. Pilate, as the arbiter of justice, feels he has a monopoly on truth—hence his offence. The notion of truth in the Pilate chapters chimes with the question of artistic truth presented in the Moscow narrative. Yeshua's words could also be read as Bulgakov's clandestine way of predicting the fall of the Soviet Union.

To Pilate's shock, Yeshua tells him that that he, Pilate, has an insufferable headache and would rather just be hanging out with his dog (Banga) than dealing with a prisoner. Yeshua advises Pilate to take a stroll and predicts a coming storm. He goes on, telling Pilate that it's clear to him that Pilate has "definitively lost faith in people" and that "one can't place all one's affection in a dog." Pilate's secretary can't believe what he is hearing.

Yeshua's ability to intuit the fact that Pilate has a headache subtly mirrors Woland's prediction of Berlioz's death in the chapter before. Subconsciously, Yeshua is acknowledging Pilate's moral dilemma of whether to trust his inexplicable instinct to free Yeshua or not. Pilate's dog, Banga, is a symbol of faith.

Pilate orders Yeshua's hands to be unbound. He suspects Yeshua of being a "physician," which the prisoner denies, now speaking in Latin. Pilate asks Yeshua if he knows "such men as" Dysmas, Gestas, or Bar-Rabban. Yeshua replies that he does not know these "good people." Explaining why he refers to everyone as "good," Yeshua states that "there are no evil people in the world."

Pilate tries to reason away Yeshua's remarkable insight as the product of medical learning (much like the Moscow investigation will later try to reason away Woland's actions). Yeshua's quote about "good people" has implications for the entire novel; crucially, it does not deny the existence of evil, but the idea that people are fixedly defined by "evil" acts.

Pilate suggests that Ratslayer is a counter-example to Yeshua's theory, but Yeshua says that Ratslayer's cruelty is down to his hard life; Yeshua believes he could change Ratslayer if he could speak privately with him.

Yeshua believes that people will see the truth in his ideas if he is allowed to speak with them. Though he doesn't get a chance to with Ratslayer, this is what is slowly starting to happen with Pilate.

Just then, a swallow lands nearby. Pilate asks his secretary if Yeshua is accused of anything else. Reading Yeshua's other charge, Pilate becomes disorientated, thinking "raced, short, incoherent and extraordinary" thoughts about being lost—and an "unendurable" immortality.

Numerous critics have suggested that the bird in this chapter is Woland himself, taking on a form that allows him to listen in on Pilate and Yeshua's conversation. This is backed up by the ending of chapter 18. Pilate's disorientation here represents a kind of rupture in time—subconsciously, he is aware that he is involved in a decision that has consequences that reach much further than they initially appear.

Gathering himself together, Pilate asks Yeshua if it is true that he has said anything bad about the emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Pilate questions Yeshua privately on whether he knows "Judas from Kiriath" and if Yeshua said what he was reported by Judas to have said. Yeshua readily admits what he told Judas: "All authority is violence over people, and a time will come when there will be no authority of the Caesars … Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice, where generally there will be no need for any authority." Instantly upon saying these words, Yeshua explains, he was arrested.

Pilate questions Yeshua privately in part because he wants to know more about the young philosopher's worldview (rather than just to confirm or disprove his guilt). Yeshua's eloquent comments about authority cut right to the heart of the Roman project—authority is based on fear of one's fellow man, and therefore all authority is cowardly. This subtly takes aim at Stalin's authority, too. Also, Yeshua's words indicate that Judas set him up—the authorities were ready to pounce.

Pilate angrily insists on Tiberius' ultimate authority, shouting that the "kingdom of truth" will never come. He tells Yeshua to pray to his God. Yeshua, surprisingly, asks "why not let me go?" Pilate's eyes follow the swallow now fluttering nearby. He confirms Yeshua's death sentence, ordering that Yeshua be kept separate from the other prisoners and, furthermore, that no prison guard is allowed to talk to him.

Pilate's fury stems from his latent suspicion that Yeshua is right—which would deny his entire existence as a Roman authority figure. Yeshua's request to be freed is deceptively simple and humble, making the possibility of letting him go seem uncomplicatedly easy. But by framing the question so succinctly, the answer belongs completely to Pontius Pilate.

With Yeshua gone, Pilate is visited by Joseph Kaifa, the high priest of the Jews. In honor of the great feast Passover, the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council) are to choose a prisoner to set free: either Bar-Rabban, who has preached in favor of rebellion and killed a guard, or Yeshua. Joseph Kaifa informs Pilate that they have chosen Bar-Rabban. Pilate seems reluctant about this idea, and asks a further two times, receiving the same answer. They quarrel over the decision, with Pilate implying that the High Priest's choice not to save Yeshua, "a peaceful philosopher with his peaceful preaching," will prevent the Jewish people from having peace. Joseph Kaifa thinks that, to the contrary, Pilate wants Yeshua freed in order to prevent their peace.

This conversation takes place in an atmosphere of suspicion and represents the delicate power balance between the Romans and the Jews in Yershalaim. Bar-Rabban is guilty of the crimes levelled at Jesus—and worse, having committed murder. This shows that Jesus' condemnation to death is based on a base fear of what he represents. Pilate's attempts to have Jesus pardoned by Joseph Kaifa are too little too late—Pilate has already chosen power over the "kingdom of truth."

Pilate apologizes to Joseph Kaifa for getting "carried away." With their entourage in tow, they head to the Yershalaim stadium, where a huge crowd has gathered.

The interest in Yeshua's fate, and in the execution more generally, shows the intensity and pressure of the situation and reinforce Pilate's earlier intuition that this is a day with huge consequences. It also speaks to the idea of spectacle, which Woland cunningly employs in the Moscow narrative.

At the stadium, Pilate climbs the stand and addresses the crowd. He names the four criminals who are set for execution: Dysmas, Gestas, Bar-Rabban, and Yeshua Ha-Nozri. He announces to the crowd that, in honor of the feast of Passover, one criminal will be set free: Bar-Rabban. Announcing this seems to cause Pilate pain. The people in the crowd "roar" and "shriek," dissatisfied with the Sanhedrin's choice. The three remaining prisoners are led to Bald Mountain, where they will be crucified, and Pilate returns to the palace.

Pilate's pain is a kind of psychic discomfort brought on by the tension between doing what he sees as his official duty and what deep down he believes—but is afraid to admit—to be the right choice: freeing Yeshua. Again, this can be mapped onto the Moscow narrative, where people are also torn between doing what is their official duty and what they believe is right.

CHAPTER 3. THE SEVENTH PROOF

The professor's story comes to an end as the main narrative returns to Moscow. Berlioz tells him that, though his story is interesting, it doesn't coincide with what's in the Gospels. The professor dismisses the Gospels. He leans in and whispers that he knows the story better as he was actually there. Ivan and Berlioz, perplexed, notice that the professor has one "totally insane" green eye and one "empty, black and dead."

Berlioz is right that the story differs from the gospels. One big difference is that Woland's account leaves out Pilate asking whether Yeshua considers himself the "king of the Jews." Woland's "dead" eye associates him with evil and the "void" of death.

Berlioz asks the professor where he intends to stay during his visit to Moscow. The professor, winking, says he'll be staying at Berlioz's. He asks Ivan if he believes in the devil. Ivan, distressed, cries out that there is no devil, and tells the professor to "stop playing the psycho!"

Accommodation in the Soviet Union was not easy to come by, with foreign visits requiring registration and appropriate documentation. The reader doesn't yet know that Woland is Satan himself, but the irony of Ivan denying the devil's existence to the devil himself is not lost.

Berlioz decides to sneak off and make a phone call to the "foreigner's bureau" to report the professor. The latter then implores him to believe in the devil, adding that Berlioz is about to witness "a seventh proof." As Berlioz hurries off, the professor calls to him to ask if Berlioz would like a telegram sent to his uncle in Kiev. Berlioz is confused, as he does have an uncle in Kiev but there's no way the professor would know.

Berlioz tries to be an upstanding citizen, considering it his duty to inform the authorities of the strange professor. The "seventh proof" is Berlioz's predetermined death, which will make it seem much less likely that the professor is merely a madman. The reader will meet Berlioz's uncle later in the story.

Walking off, Berlioz notices the same man that had seemed to be levitating earlier (Koroviev), dressed in checkered trousers and mustachioed. This man directs Berlioz to the turnstile and, taking off his jockey cap, asks Berlioz to spare some change.

Bulgakov carefully delays the revealing of Woland and his gang's identities—the man that Berlioz encounters is Koroviev. He wears a strange outfit, marking him out too as a "foreigner."

Berlioz steps through the turnstile to cross over the tram tracks but notices a tram racing towards him. He moves back to safety but, as he does so, slips and tumbles into the path of the tram. With the female driver unable to bring the tram to a stop, Berlioz looks at **the moon** for the last time and is decapitatedd.

Berlioz dies in exactly the manner that Woland had predicted, developing the sense of mystery surrounding Woland and adding credibility to everything else he has said (particularly his claim to have been present in Yershalaim). The particular method of death is important too, signaling a severing of the brain—mankind's site of rationality that Berlioz, until recently, held so dear.

CHAPTER 4. THE CHASE

Hearing the commotion, Ivan rushes to the turnstile and sees Berlioz's head bouncing on the pavement. He overhears two women discussing what happened, learning that a woman called "Annushka" accidentally spilled sunflower oil by the turnstile, making the floor slippery. Ivan realizes that this is precisely what the professor had talked about earlier.

The manner of Berlioz's death is intentionally paradoxical: it seems like a freak accident but, having been predicted by Woland, is also predetermined. The reader, like Ivan, has the problem of how to ascribe responsibility. Perhaps Berlioz brought it upon himself for his cowardly allegiance to official policy (and misguided views on art); or, equally possible, Woland is responsible; a third possibility is that it was an accident and that Woland's powers merely allowed him to know in advance. Ivan, in his distress, chooses the second theory.

Ivan tries desperately to figure out what happened, concluding that the professor can't have been insane and, furthermore, must have set up Berlioz's death. He goes back to the bench, and finds the strange man still sitting there, talking with a companion (Koroviev) wearing checkered trousers and a jockey cap.

Woland has now been joined by his assistant, Koroviev. It's worth reiterating that Bulgakov deliberately doesn't name these characters yet, adding to their air of mystery and foreignness.

Ivan asks the professor to confess his identity, but he pretends to not speak Russian. Koroviev tells Ivan not to bother "a foreign tourist." Ivan pleads with the second man to help him arrest the professor: "Hey, citizen, help me to detain the criminal! It's your duty!" Suspecting the second man of being an accomplice, Ivan tries to grab him but is astonished as the man, seeming to defy the laws of physics, keeps materializing in different places.

Ivan comically appeals to Koroviev's sense of civic duty, unaware of who he is talking to. Koroviev's movements mark out him and Woland as from a different world; this is the first of many occasions in which they seem to defy scientific possibility.

Ivan notices the two men suddenly far off in the distance. They appear to be joined by a big black cat, as "huge as a hog," walking on his hind legs. Ivan gives chase. As the three split up, Ivan is amazed to see the cat sneak onto a tram.

The cat is Behemoth. His anthropomorphized ability to walk and talk quickly ramps up the surrealism of the book, further destabilizing Ivan's mind.

Ivan keeps chasing the professor, "struck by the supernatural speed of the chase." After many twists and turns, Ivan loses the professor completely, but is overwhelmed by the feeling that he must be hiding in a particular apartment on the street. Bursting into the flat, and then the bathroom, Ivan accidentally walks in on a naked woman taking a bath.

It's clear that the chase is Woland's way of toying with Ivan—he, Koroviev, and Behemoth could escape much more easily if they wanted to. They are trying to break down Ivan's character, which at this point in the story, appears malicious.

Without knowing why, Ivan steals a religious candle from the apartment and heads to the Moscow river, convinced now that this is where he'll find the professor. Ivan dives into the water, entrusting his clothes to a stranger nearby.

As Ivan's psyche continues to unravel, his subconscious makes him pick up the candle. He dimly senses that Woland might be Satan, that he is in the presence of powers he doesn't understand. His dive into the water, then, comes to represent a hapless attempt at ablution and cleansing of the soul.


Exiting the river, Ivan is horrified to see that his clothes have disappeared. Someone else has left a torn shirt and some long underwear, which Ivan puts on, worried about how he will get through Moscow in such ridiculous attire. He decides to head to Griboedov's, the building that houses Massolit, thinking he'll find the professor there. As he tries to make his way unseen through the city, passers-by are shocked at his appearance.

Ivan's predictions about where Woland will be don't seem to be his own—there is no logic to his choices of a random apartment, the river and finally Griboedov's. More likely is that Woland's mischievous side is at work, orchestrating the absurd scenario of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5. THERE WERE DOINGS AT GRIBOEDOV'S

Griboedov's is the beautiful building that houses Massolit, the literary society headed up by Berlioz, and boasts a fancy restaurant. Photographs of Massolit members adorn the walls. Each room deals with a different part of the society, including literary retreats and housing for writers. The narrator describes a conversation he once overheard, in which two men discuss the superiority of the Griboedov restaurant over others in Moscow, based on its luxurious options, freshness of fish and cheap prices.

Massolit is the writers' union and thus represents the centerpiece of state-sponsored culture. The writers here are given ample resources, which contrasts with their restricted freedom. Bulgakov reserves special scorn for these writers, showing them to be too scared to write anything real, and more than happy to gluttonize themselves in return for writing what they're supposed to write. The master, when he enters later in the novel, provides the inverse example.



It's evening, and in one of the offices of the Massolit building twelve writers wait Berlioz to arrive. They complain about Berlioz being late and talk about the writers' retreats. Some of them lament that they aren't getting a fair deal, with other writers seemingly always getting the best properties.

The writers' chief concerns seem to be making the most of the Massolit resources and ensuring that each of them can exploit them fairly. This makes a satirical mockery of the communist ideals of fair distribution and a classless society.

Increasingly annoyed, the writers call around Moscow to try and find Berlioz—who is, in fact, lying dead on two tables at the morgue, his head on one and his body on the other. His Massolit assistant, Zheldybin, is in attendance there, having been taken by investigators to Berlioz's house in order to seal his papers.

Bulgakov's black humor is at play here in the use of two separate tables, representing the stark division between life and death. It's also worth noting how quickly the machinery of bureaucracy kicks in after Berlioz's death.

At midnight in the Griboedov restaurant, a jazz band strikes up, quickly making the whole place bustle with dancing diners. Suddenly, Archibald Archibaldovich, the restaurant manager, rushes in with news of Berlioz's death. Grief briefly takes hold of the diners, but quickly subsides. It would be a shame, they think, to let luxuries such as "chicken cutlets de volaille" go to waste. Zheldybin installs himself in Berlioz's office, considering how best to facilitate the public mourning of the deceased Massolit chairman.

The restaurant scene fleshes out the idea of the Massolit writers as indulgent and self-satisfied. Their quibbles over food, which quickly resume after the news of Berlioz, who is their chairman no less, exemplifies their greediness and also makes a mockery of the starvation prevalent in Russia at the time as a result of Soviet policy.

With the restaurant largely back to normal, the diners are shocked for the second time: Ivan appears on the verandah through "an opening in the trellis," dressed ridiculously in a torn shirt and underwear, and carrying a lit candle. He addresses the diners, who suspect him of having a case of "delirium tremens."

Ivan's appearance has the atmosphere of an apparition, as though he is a messenger from another world. By virtue of his contact with Woland, to a degree he too is a foreigner now.

Ivan rants frenziedly about the events surrounding the strange professor, making little sense to anyone in the restaurant. He tells them that the professor killed Berlioz, but on being asked the professor's name can only remember that it begins with a "W." As Ivan goes on describing, amongst other things, a walking, talking cat, someone suggests calling a doctor for him.

Ivan's rant is a kind of unheard prophecy and is too crazed and distressed to make any sense. Here, only the reader can corroborate Ivan's absurd story. Ivan, essentially, is trying to tell them that evil has come to town.

Ivan grows increasingly distressed, spilling candle wax on tables and letting out a "terrible war cry." The waiters tackle him and tie him up with napkins, while Archibald Archibaldovich chastises the doorman for letting someone in who was dressed "in his underpants." Archibald orders his staff to call the police. When they arrive, the screaming Ivan is carried against his will into a police truck and carted off to a psychiatric clinic.

There is a strong sense of irony in the fact that Ivan's unwitting audience, an assembly of writers, finds it impossible to empathize with the fantastical nature of his story—it is beyond the realms of their imagination. This suggests the wider point that their imaginations—so key to producing good art—are dulled to the point of uselessness.

CHAPTER 6. SCHIZOPHRENIA, AS WAS SAID

It's now half past one in the morning. The poet Riukhin, who helped carry Ivan into the police truck, stands in the examining room of the psychiatric clinic, explaining to the doctor what happened at the restaurant. When the doctor addresses Ivan, the latter replies, "greetings, saboteur!"

Absurdly, Ivan feels that he is trying to defend society from Woland and is providing a citizenly service by trying to inform everyone what has happened. That's why he calls the doctor "saboteur."

Ivan protests furiously that he isn't insane; despite the fantastical nature of what Ivan is saying, Riukhin doesn't see madness in his eyes. The doctor informs Ivan that this is not a "madhouse, but a clinic," and that he will not be kept there unnecessarily. Ivan, still indignant, takes a moment to denounce Riukhin's poetry and personality.

Riukhin doesn't see madness in Ivan's eyes because the young poet is telling the truth. As is often the case in the novel, when something that seems impossible to believe is encountered it is then characterized as irrational.

The doctor questions Ivan on his story. Barely stopping to catch his breath, Ivan explains all about the strange professor—how he knew about Berlioz's death before it happened, and that he had spoken personally with Pontius Pilate. Ivan, sensing that the others think his story is crazy, insists on making a phone call. He calls the police, telling them to pick him up from the "madhouse" and to bring "five motor cycles with machine guns." He turns to leave and bids the doctor goodbye.

These moments represent Ivan at his most distressed and contribute to the link between the Yershalaim and Moscow narratives. Just as at Griboedov's, events outside the realm of human understanding are reasoned away. This creates an overall sense that the inhabitants of Moscow are unmovably wedded to the status quo, unable to look beyond the confines of their understanding. Ivan's call to the police is a funny moment, given that no amount of reinforcement is likely to stop Woland and his gang.

When the others block his exit through the door, Ivan tries to jump through the window, which absorbs his impact without breaking. The orderlies hold Ivan down as the doctor administers an injection of a sedative. Ivan grows sleepy and is wheeled out of the room.

Ivan's attempt to escape is an act of both courage and cowardice. He is so afraid of what's happened, yet also wants to do something about it. Ivan's sedateness brings him temporary peace, perhaps suggesting the soporific state of the wider society.

Riukhin exits into the dawn. He reflects on his career to date and concludes that everything he's ever written is "bad": "I don't believe in anything I write!" Passing a statue of the poet Alexander Pushkin, Riukhin laments the life that he feels he's wasted. He returns to the Griboedev restaurant and drowns his sorrows with vodka.

Riukhin is not the only writer to realize the utter lack of value of his work. He doesn't believe in it because, having been shaken from his usual mental state by Ivan's "breakdown," he recognizes that what he writes has little motivation beyond maintaining his access to Massolit resources. The revered Russian poet, Pushkin, stands as his counterexample.

CHAPTER 7. A NAUGHTY APARTMENT

Styopa Likhodeev, Berlioz's flat mate and director of the Variety theater, wakes with a terrible hangover. The narrator tells the reader that there has been something strange over the last couple of years about this particular apartment, no. 50 in a building on Sadovaya Street—a number of its various lodgers have been disappearing. The housekeeper suspected "sorcery" to be the cause, before she, too, went missing. Soon after, Berlioz and Styopa moved in with their wives.

Bulgakov's description of the goings-on at apartment no. 50 cut close to the bone in terms of what he could get away with writing. The disappearances are clearly indicative of state-sponsored exile and murder under Stalin's regime but can't be explicitly stated as such. The idea that sorcery is to blame here actually hints at the clandestine operations of the secret police, who are an unseen, almost supernatural, presence in the novel.

Styopa, suffering under the weight of his headache, tries to call out for Berlioz to bring him aspirin. He opens eyes, shocked to discover a strange man in his room, dressed in a black and wearing a beret.

Like Pontius Pilate, Styopa has a headache. There is a gentle suggestion that this might be a side effect of being in the presence of Satan (Woland). That said, it might also just be a result of the indulgent behavior of a man enjoying his position as the head of the theater.

The stranger explains that he has been waiting for an hour for Styopa to wake up—apparently the two men had arranged to have a meeting. "Here I am!" says the stranger. Styopa remembers nothing of the sort. The stranger tells Styopa that the only cure for his hangover is to take "like with like"—to drink some more vodka. Styopa looks around the room, amazed to see that the stranger has prepared a tray with bread, caviar, mushrooms, and vodka.

The reader rarely sees Woland in transition between two places; instead, he is more likely to just appear. Styopa is understandably shocked to see an unknown man in his room. Though seemingly a fairly throwaway comment, perhaps Woland's suggestion that Styopa take "like with like" is a hint at the motivations of his overall project—to use deception, manipulation and dishonesty to highlight how these traits are already operational in society.

Memories of the night before start to return to Styopa as he eats the breakfast and drinks the vodka—but none of them chime with the stranger that he sees before him. Sensing Styopa's confusion, the stranger announces who he is: "Professor of black magic Woland."

Woland presentation of himself as a practitioner of black magic highlights his use of spectacle in fulfilling his mission. He plays on people's fears, but also enjoys the idea that they might explain strange events away as mere "magic" (i.e. tricks).

Woland proceeds to recount the previous day's events for Styopa. Apparently, Woland had visited Styopa and agreed a contract for seven performances at the Variety theatre. This meeting, says Woland, was arrange so that they could go through the details. Woland had arrived to find Styopa asleep and, rather than wake him there and then, sent out the housekeeper, Grunya, to fetch breakfast for Styopa.

Woland takes advantage of Styopa's fragile state of mind to re-write events that have already happened, mimicking the authoritarian tendency to do the same.

Styopa asks to look at the contract. When Woland produces the document, Styopa is amazed to see his signature on there, alongside that of the Variety findirector," Rimsky. Woland's signature is on there too, verifying his receipt of ten thousand roubles.

Styopa finds it hard to argue with the sight of his signature on a contract, gesturing to the importance of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

Styopa decides to telephone Rimsky to check if what Woland says is true. Rimsky confirms that Styopa had indeed approved and signed the contract yesterday, and adds that the posters for the shows are nearly ready. As Styopa turns to look in the mirror, he notices a tall man (Koroviev) wearing a pince-nez that seems to disappear suddenly—and a black cat.

With Rimsky confirming Woland's account of the day before, Styopa is forced to believe that the error is his. This is part of an overall pattern of Wol'nd's, which uses official bureaucracy to bring about his fantastical aims. The two characters Styopa notices are Koroviev and Behemoth.

Styopa calls out to Grunya to ask what the black cat and the tall man are doing in the apartment. Woland responds, saying they are with him, and that he has sent Grunya off for a vacation. The two new figures are now in Styopa's bedroom. Styopa can't believe his eyes: the huge black cat seems to be drinking vodka and eating mushrooms from the tray. Woland reassures him—this is his retinue.

Grunya, like the apartment's previous inhabitants, has been "disappeared." Behemoth's indulgence in food and drink is subtly reminiscent of the preceding scene at Griboedov's. Woland does not use aggressive tactics to manipulate events, instead destabilizing his targets' minds and instilling them with fear.

The tall man with the pince-nez talks with a goatish voice, telling Styopa off for drinking too much and abusing his position in aid of "liaisons with women." A fourth character appears: a short, broad-shouldered man, "with a bowler hat on his head and a fang sticking out of his mouth … and with flaming red hair." This man carries on the other's line of discussion, saying he can't understand how Styopa "got to be a director."

Until this point, the reader has had little sense of Styopa's own wrongdoings—if any. Koroviev's comments show that the gang's targeting of Styopa is directly linked to his own behavior (as was Berlioz's). Essentially, it boils down to Styopa being a self-serving individual who, like the Griboedov writers, abuses his state-endorsed position. The new character is Azazello.

Suddenly the cat shouts "Scat!" Styopa feels a knock on the head and loses consciousness, thinking that perhaps he is dying. But he doesn't die; instead, he wakes up on a jetty in Yalta, a far-away coastal town. Styopa asks a stranger where he is; he passes out when he hears the answer.

The supernatural transportation of Styopa mimics the "disappearing" of people who do not stick to the Soviet script. The comedy of Styopa's punishment allows Bulgakov to show gesture towards state exile and murder while avoiding making it too obvious.

CHAPTER 8. THE COMBAT BETWEEN THE PROFESSOR AND THE POET

At the same time that Styopa is transported to Yalta, Ivan wakes up groggily in the clinic. He presses a button beside him to call for an attendant. A female attendant enters the room and pulls up the blinds, letting in the bright sun. She tells Ivan that it's time for a bath. After washing Ivan, the attendant gives him fresh clothes, offering a choice of pajamas or a dressing gown. Ivan choose the crimson pajamas.

Ivan is infantilized, reduced to the bare essentials of human life and mothered by the clinic staff. The bright sun can be associated both with Ivan's knowledge of Woland's presence in Moscow and "a new dawn" in his character, as becomes clear throughout the chapter.

The attendant takes Ivan to the examining room, where two women and a man, all wearing white coats, are waiting for him. Ivan considers his options: he could violently resist his situation; take up his account of the professor and Pontius Pilate again; or "withdraw into proud silence." He chooses the third option.

In reality, Ivan has tried the first two options already, to no avail. His spirit is weakened by the sterile clinic environment, perhaps suggesting the way that the status quo takes hold over citizens who might otherwise strive for something better.

The clinic staff ask Ivan a series of questions about his life and give him a medical check. Ivan is then sent back to his room and eats breakfast. Just then, the lead clinician, Dr. Stravinsky, comes in with an entourage of people in white coats. Dr. Stravinsky looks over Ivan's chart and talks to the others, mentioning "schizophrenia."

Dr. Stravinsky is the head of the clinic and sees a lot of new patients throughout Woland's visitation to Moscow. As is recurrent throughout, the possibility of evil is explained away as irrationality.

Dr. Stravinsky asks Ivan if he is a poet, which he gloomily confirms. Ivan protests that he isn't mad and proceeds to re-tell what happened to him the day before, once again mentioning that the strange professor he encountered had seen Pontius Pilate in person. Ivan explains that the professor had mentioned "sunflower oil" well before Berlioz had slipped on that same substance and fallen under the tram.

Ivan is hesitant to admit to being a poet because, like Riukhin in the earlier chapter, he is coming to realize that his work is wholly inauthentic. Woland's visit, then, is a kind of shock of reality, despite its supernatural and incredible nature. This casts doubt on whether it is fair to describe Woland—who is Satan—as evil; his character is markedly different from biblical representations.


Dr. Stravinsky has a sympathetic manner and asks Ivan to continue. The latter man goes on to talk about his attempts to chase the strange group of characters, mentioning the cat who "rides the tram all by himself." He reiterates that the professor was "personally on Pontius Pilate's balcony."

At this point, Ivan is still convinced of what he has witnessed, but his general demeanor is being placated by Dr. Stravinsky's insincere sympathies. Ivan is being subtly persuaded that it is easier to believe that he is mad than to continue to believe the truth.

Dr. Stravinsky tells Ivan that he will check him out of the clinic if Ivan states that he is "normal." When Ivan states that he is indeed normal, the doctor says, "if so, let's reason logically." Dr. Stravinsky tells Ivan's story back to him, and reasons that, if Ivan goes to the police for help in catching the professor and his entourage, he will most likely be back in the clinic within two hours. Dr. Stravinsky tells Ivan that his "salvation now lies in just one thing—complete peace." For that reason, insists the doctor, Ivan should stay in the clinic.

Dr. Stravinsky cleverly uses his own powers of suggestion to convince Ivan to stay in the clinic. His technique is not wholly dissimilar from that employed by Woland elsewhere in the novel, who plays on individuals' reasoning and logic to manipulate them into the position he wants.

Ivan agrees to stay. He also agrees to write an account of his story, rather than try and persuade the police to catch the professor. Dr. Stravinsky tells him not to think about Pontius Pilate too much. He reassures Ivan that staying in the clinic is the right thing to do: "You'll be helped here."

Stravinsky humors Ivan by asking him to write down what's happened. Ironically, the novel itself is a written record of both Woland's visit and Pontius Pilate. Ivan thus sits down to write something that is, for once, authentic.


CHAPTER 9. KOROVIEV'S STUNTS

Shortly after news of Berlioz's death gets around, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, the chairman of the tenant's association for the Sadovaya Street apartment complex, finds himself inundated with tenuous claims to Berlioz's rooms (a study, living room, and dining room). These are from tenants who live elsewhere in the building and come in the form of "pleas, threats, libels, denunciations."

Berlioz's vacant apartment is instantly sought due to the shortage of housing supply caused by Soviet policies. This therefore makes Nikanor's position one of considerable power, as he is the appointed citizen tasked with deciding who can live there. Woland and his gang, of course, have other ideas.

Nikanor heads up to Berlioz and Styopa's apartment, which is no. 50 and on the fifth floor. Using his own set of master keys, he lets himself in. He removes the seal from the study and is amazed to see a tall man sitting at Berlioz's desk, wearing a checkered jacket, a jockey's cap, and a pince-nez.

The seal was intended to keep people out of the room but is obviously no match for Woland and his entourage. The man sitting at the desk is Koroviev, whose identity Bulgakov is careful not to reveal immediately.

Nikanor, perplexed, asks the man if he has an "official person." He replies elusively: "What are official and unofficial persons? [...] Today I'm an unofficial person, and tomorrow, lo and behold, I'm an official one!" He reluctantly gives his name as Koroviev and identifies himself as the "interpreter for a foreign individual who has taken up residence in this apartment." He explains that Mr. Woland, "a foreign artiste," has been granted use of the apartment during the week of his scheduled performances at the Variety Theatre.

Nikanor, as a faithful servant of state bureaucracy, sees people as either official or unofficial. Koroviev answers with a glib philosophical point which highlights the stupidity of the distinction. Nikanor is used to doing things by the book, which Koroviev delights in exploiting and teasing. The description of Woland as a foreigner is designed to heighten Nikanor's anxiety.

Nikanor protests that Koroviev should not be sitting in a deceased man's study and, furthermore, that he received no notice from Styopa about his loan of the apartment to Mr. Woland. Koroviev tells him to look in his briefcase, in which Nikanor is staggered to find a letter from Styopa confirming what Koroviev is saying.

Koroviev pulls a similar trick to Woland's in chapter 7, using Nikanor's own officiousness against him. By conjuring the letter and using his powers to place it in Nikanor's briefcase, Nikanor no longer has legitimate grounds to debate Woland's occupancy of the apartment. Woland and his gang delight in using people's cowardly reliance on bureaucracy as a device for their trickery.

Nikanor demands to see the foreigner, but Koroviev objects that he is currently training the cat; Koroviev offers to show Nikanor the cat, "if you like." The officious Nikanor states that foreigners ought to stay in the Metropol hotel, but, according to Koroviev, Woland doesn't want to and is as "capricious as devil know what!"

Koroviev invokes the devil, mimicking the tendency amongst the Moscow inhabitants to do the same. Of course, Koroviev is making a little joke to himself, knowing that Woland is as capricious as the devil because he is *the devil. The Metropol was a hotel expressly for visiting foreigners.*

Koroviev points out that the tenants' association will be handsomely rewarded for letting Woland stay. Tempted by the promise of money, Nikanor calls the "foreign tourist bureau," who readily inform him that they have no objections to Woland's plans.

Koroviev works on Nikanor by appealing to his worst instincts. In fact, one interpretation is that the targets of Woland and his gang generally align with the seven deadly sins—this one being greed. Nikanor goes through the bureaucratic motions but Woland has already manipulated the machinery of officialdom in his favor.

Koroviev calls out to Woland to agree the rental price and tells Nikanor to ask for a vastly inflated sum. Nikanor then grinningly signs a contract for a huge amount—five thousand roubles—and counts the cash. He then can't help but ask for complimentary tickets to the Variety show, to which Koroviev promptly agrees. Koroviev then thrusts extra money into Nikanor's hand, who protests that taking bribes is "severely punishable"; Koroviev points out that there are no witnesses and that Woland will be offended if he refuses.

Greed starts to get the better of Nikanor as his sense of duty gives way to an opportunity for personal gain. Koroviev also pressures Nikanor by appealing to Nikanor's desire to maintain decorum, suggesting his "client" will be offended if the bribe is rejected. Meanwhile, in the face of profit, Nikanor looks past the rules of Soviet society.

Nikanor heads back to his apartment, briefly considering how it was that Koroviev gained access to Berlioz's study when it had been sealed. Meanwhile, Woland tells Koroviev that he doesn't want Nikanor, "a chiseler and a crook," to come to the apartment anymore. Koroviev immediately acts on the instruction, phoning to report Nikanor for being in possession of "foreign currency" (which is in the ventilation duct, he says).

This is often the pattern of Woland's schemes: appeal to the worst part of an individual's character and then expose it for all to see. Strangely, then, Woland is starting to seem like a slightly twisted dealer of justice. Soviet citizens were not allowed to have foreign currency, creating a black market in currency exchange. Nikanor, for his part, doesn't know that the currency is foreign.

Sitting down to a hearty meal, Nikanor's peace is interrupted by the arrival of two men who accuse him of harboring foreign money. They check the ventilation duct and find the foreign money, before leading Nikanor away, as he protests incoherently about Koroviev. He is astonished to find no contract, letter from Styopa, rental money, or theater pass in his his **briefcase**. As he is led away from the apartments, one of his neighbors observes his arrest with great delight.

Though it isn't made explicit, these shadowy men that take Nikanor away are probably the secret police. The briefcase is a symbol of bureaucracy and official status—in fact, citizens would often keep their identity papers in there and carry it with them, in case of an encounter with the authorities. Nikanor's empty case, then, symbolizes his sudden loss of official status—confirming Koroviev's earlier quote that being an "official person" is true one day and not the next.

CHAPTER 10. NEWS FROM YALTA

Around the same time as Nikanor's arrest, Rimsky, the financial director of the Variety Theatre and, Varenukha, its administrator, are sitting in the theatre offices. An usher brings the posters for Woland's performance, which advertise: "PROFESSOR WOLAND—Seancés of Black Magic and its Full Exposure." Neither man has met Woland, and both are annoyed that Styopa, who yesterday had come running into the office "like crazy" to get the performance contract signed, is now nowhere to be seen.

The choice of wording on Woland's poster is interesting: the promise of full exposure is a big draw and helps Woland ensure that he has a full house to perform to. But it also gives a clue to the real purpose of the planned performance—the exposure, not of Woland's powers, but of the populace's cowardice and individualism. From Varenukha and Rimsky's account, it's clear that Styopa spent the previous day under Woland's influence.

Just then, a uniformed woman arrives with a "super-lightning" telegram. It's from Yalta and appears to be from a police authority; it suggests that a shoeless man claiming to be Director Likhodeev (Styopa) has been detained in Yalta as a "mental case." Rimsky and Varenukha assume this to be some kind of prank.

Varenukha and Rimsky saw Styopa the previous day, and there is no way he could have physically travelled to Yalta in the time span that has elapsed. The reader, of course, knows that Styopa is the victim of Woland's powers.

Almost immediately, the same woman brings another telegram, which begs that they believe the first and mentions "Woland" and "hypnosis," asking Rimsky and Varenukha to confirm the man in Yalta is Styopa. The two men are baffled, assuming that Styopa must be drunk.

The speed with which telegrams arrive indicates the frantic way in which Syopa is trying to make contact. The association of Woland with hypnosis recurs throughout the novel, seemingly the only "rational" explanation for the chaos he causes.

To Rimsky and Varenukha's amazement, a third telegram then arrives with a piece of photographic paper clearly showing Styopa's handwriting and signature. This, says the telegram, is proof that it's from Styopa and adds that the two men should "watch Woland." They can't figure out how Styopa could be in Yalta, over nine hundred miles away, given that he had phoned from his apartment that same morning.

The signature seems to be incontrovertible proof (similar to earlier chapters). Styopa heightens the atmosphere of suspicion and fear around Woland.

Rimsky decides to call Yalta but notices that the telephone line is broken. He puts all the telegrams in an envelope and instructs Varenukha to take them to the authorities. Rimsky phones Styopa's apartment and manages to get through; Koroviev informs him that Styopa has gone for a drive "out of town."

Woland and his gang have sufficient supernatural powers to completely avoid detection but deliberately toy with their targets. Rimsky wants Varenukha to go the secret police, another example of an attempt to use their power to regain control of the situation.

Utterly perplexed, Rimsky receives yet another telegram, this time asking for five hundred roubles and saying that Styopa intends to fly back to Moscow the next day. Rimsky sends the money to the telegraph office.

Rimsky sends the money just in case, even though he can't see how Styopa could possibly be where he says he is (if indeed it is Styopa).

Varenukha, carrying a briefcase containing the telegrams, passes by the box office. Tickets for Woland's performance are nearly sold out. As Varenukha goes by, the phone rings for him—a "nasty voice" warns him not to take the telegrams anywhere. Determined to put an end to this pranking, Varenukha hurries out.

Woland's planned spectacle is taking shape. The promise of black magic entices the Moscow citizens, showing that they are interested in the idea of evil and the dark arts—if unable to see how they might practice them too. They want to experience evil from a distance, in the safe space of the theater; Woland wants to show them that evil is alive and well in Moscow. In this way, he takes on a similar role to an artist, intending to hold up a mirror to society (which in this case isn't being done by its own artists).

On his way, Varenukha checks whether the summer toilet has had its light fixture repaired. Just then, he is accosted by a "cat-like fat man" and a man with red hair and a fang (Azazello). They beat him up, pointing out that he had been warned over the telephone not to take the telegrams.

Varenukha is accosted by Behemoth and Azazello, while he makes the comic mistake of trying to check on the maintenance of the theater.

The two strange characters drag Varenukha down Sadovaya street and into apartment no. 50, which Varenukha recognizes as Styopa's apartment. Suddenly he is confronted by a naked woman (Hella), who insists on giving him a kiss. At this, Varenukha faints.

The naked woman is Hella, a beautiful redheaded succubus. She takes the form of a vampire and, in biting Varenukah, makes him one too.

CHAPTER 11. IVAN SPLITS IN TWO

As the rain pours down outside, thunder and lightning filling the sky, Ivan is crying in his room at the clinic. He has been making a concerted effort to write up what happened the previous day but keeps getting confused about how to put it without sounding like a "madman."

The storm echoes Ivan's distressed mental state. That he can't put his account down in a way that makes sense is exactly the point: Woland and his gang prey on Moscow by using elements of the uncanny to sow confusion. The wider point here is that, if all is going to plan, the reader has suspended their disbelief and is trusts in the novel—suggesting that it is the kind of authentic art that the Griboedov writers are incapable of creating.

A nurse visits Ivan and, noticing his distress, grabs Ivan's papers and runs with them to the doctor. The doctor comes in, reassures Ivan, and administers him with an injection that seems to take away all of Ivan's "anguish."

At this point, Ivan's only peace comes from his sedative injections. His fear of Woland sets up the opportunity for the novel to later flesh out an alternative reaction—courage.

Later in the evening, Ivan is surprised by how little he is frightened now, and how calmly he looks on what happened, even the most terrifying parts—Berlioz's severed head, the demonic cat, and so on. Ivan feels one part of himself letting go of the situation, with another part reminding him that the strange professor had known about Berlioz's death before it happened.

Here occurs the split in Ivan's personality: one part of him lets go of the situation, sensing his powerlessness; the other still wants to stop the "foreigner" and has a sense, perhaps, of Woland's true identity. Incidentally, schizophrenia was a common diagnosis during the Soviet era—often applied to dissidents for not following party policy.

As he thinks placidly about the conversation with the professor at Patriach's Ponds, Ivan hears a deep voice call him "a fool." Ivan doesn't mind and starts to fall asleep. Just then, a man (soon revealed to be the master) appears on the balcony, pressing a finger to his lips and telling Ivan to "shhh!"

The man who appears on the balcony is the master. Again, Bulgakov is very careful about the timing when it comes to revealing characters' identities. As shown in the chapter after next, the master arrives right on cue.

CHAPTER 12. BLACK MAGIC AND ITS EXPOSURE

That evening, it's showtime at the Variety Theater. In the packed auditorium, the Giulli family open up for Woland's performance with their cycling trapeze act. Meanwhile, Rimsky, still in the office, wonders why Varenukha has been gone so long.

This chapter is the symbolic center of the first book of the novel. The Giulli family's act is impressive but innocuous, luring the audience into a false sense of security. Varenukha is missing, of course, because he has been turned into a vampire.

A messenger informs Rimsky that Woland has arrived, and Rimsky goes to meet him backstage. He finds Woland sitting with his two companions: "a long checkered one with a cracked pince-nez, and a fat black cat." Koroviev dazzles Rimsky by making Rimsky's gold watch appear behind the cat's ear. To the amazement of Rimsky and the other performers backstage, the cat drinks a glass of water, holding it in his front paw.

Koroviev's little backstage trick is a typical one for magicians, but also carries with it the suggestion of threat and criminality. Behemoth, for his part, is just being himself—but is fully aware of the dazzling effect his anthropomorphic abilities have on onlookers.

The bell rings to signal that the main performance is about to begin. The master of ceremonies, Georges Bengalsky, enters the stage and addresses the audience. He announces "Maestro Woland" and his "séance of black magic," while also pointing out that "there's no such thing in the world" as magic. The most interesting part, says Bengalsky, will be in the explanations of how Woland's tricks work.

Bengalsky is a typical compere that would introduce acts at this kind of show (loosely based on music hall/vaudeville traditions). His fatal error is to suggest that there is no such thing as magic—that is, like Berlioz, he believes that everything can be rationalized away. This represents a kind of cowardly affiliation to the status quo that prevents him from seeing beyond his horizons. In this, he reflects the general attitude of the audience.

The audience welcomes Woland to the stage with Koroviev and the black cat. Woland, addressing Koroviev as "Fagott," suggests that "the Moscow populace has change significantly." "Koroviev-Fagott" agrees, mentioning the Muscovites' clothing style and new modes of transportation. Bengalsky, sensing a dip in the audience's attention, says that "the foreign artiste is expressing his admiration for Moscow and its technological development, as well as for the Muscovites."

Woland's comment to Koroviev indicates that this is not the first time that the devil has come to Moscow. Koroviev's new name is the German word for "bassoon," emphasizing that this is a performance. The reader knows from Woland's earlier conversations that he has been around for vast swathes of time (e.g. with Pontius Pilate two millennia ago), explaining why he remarks on the technological advancement of Moscow. This is also a sly dig at the Soviet authorities, who were desperate to compete technologically with Western capitalism.

Woland asks Koroviev if he had "expressed admiration," causing Koroviev to call Bengalsky a liar. Woland says the more important question is "have the city folk change inwardly?" Sensing the audience's boredom, Koroviev and the cat perform some impressive tricks with a deck of cards, sending it through the air "in a long ribbon." They make the deck appear in the pocket of an audience member—someone shouts that this is "an old trick:" a plant. Koroviev then allays these suspicions by making the deck appear in *that* person's pocket. The audience member excitedly realizes that the cards have turned into ten-rouble bills.

Bengalsky's error is going to be a fatal one, incurring Woland's wrath. Woland's question strikes at the heart of the novel, asking whether the populace is making genuine progress or remain the same. In this way, Woland functions as a kind of anthropologist, interested in how people's attitudes to one another, themselves, good and evil—and the devil. He's also filling a vacuum left by the deficit of genuine artists. As with all good showmanship, Woland and his accomplices are careful to build towards a climax, by starting with small—but impressive—tricks.

Koroviev then makes the audience look upwards. After a flash and a bang, money starts raining down from the ceiling. The spectators frantically snatch at the money, fighting with one another. Bengalsky tries to restore order by stating that they have just witnessed an impressive act of "so-called mass hypnosis." This, he says, is "a purely scientific experiment, proving in the best way possible that there are no miracles in magic." He asks Woland to explain how he did it.

Koroviev's stunt appeals to the materialistic side of the audience, making its members literally fight with one another to snatch at the money. What they don't realize is that this in fact part of the big reveal—of their characters. They show themselves to be individualistic, contrary to the stated aims of the Communist project and thereby highlight the contradictions within Soviet society. Bengalsky's explanation chimes with Styopa's earlier claim to have been hypnotized—this provides a rational reason for what's happening. The performance undermines the official line that Soviet citizens live in a utopia.

Koroviev insists that the notes are real and expresses annoyance with Bengalsky. He asks the crowd what he should to do Bengalsky, who suggest tearing his head off. The cat jumps up in a ball of fur and tears Bengalsky's head from its neck. Koroviev holds the head up as it calls for "a doctor!" He makes the head promise to stop talking "such drivel" before the cat, on Woland's orders, restores the head to the body.

This is the second decapitation in the novel, albeit only a temporary one. It is an immense show of Woland's power (though done by Behemoth) and goes beyond anything the audience might have expected from the show. As with Berlioz's decapitation, this is Woland's way of emphasizing the limits of mankind's knowledge, and its arrogant folly in thinking that everything is understandably with reason.

Bengalsky is rushed backstage. He struggles violently and is taken away in an ambulance. Having "kicked that nuisance out," Koroviev conjures up a "ladies' shop" on stage. He invites the women in the audience to come up and try on the latest fashions from Paris. Furthermore, he says, they can take whatever they want for free. A "red-headed girl" (Hella) with a scarred neck appears "from devil knows where" to assist the women in trying the shoes, garments and handbags. She sings out the brand names sweetly: "Guérlain, Chanel, Mitsouko, Narcisse Noir, Chanel No.5, evening gowns, cocktail dresses."

Koroviev moves the show on by adding "pride" to "greed"; that is, his ladies' shop is designed to draw out the vanity of those in attendance. The women are especially excited because these are the kind of clothes that they simply can't get in a society controlled by state authority. Hella sings a kind of capitalist siren song, tunefully sounding the sonorous names of the most desirable haute couture.

Though reticent at first, the women flood the stage and urgently grab as much as they can. Koroviev announces that the shop will close in one minute, making the women even more crazed and frantic. One minute later, the shop melts into thin air. At this moment, a deep-voiced man, Arkady Apollonovich, shouts down from one of the boxes, saying that, though the trick is impressive, Woland and company must now explain how they did it.

The shop, of course, is an illusion—though made very real by Koroviev's supernatural powers. The frenzy of the women highlights that desire has not been eliminated in Soviet society, merely suppressed. Arkady is the latest citizen to act as the "voice of reason."

Koroviev tells Arkady that they will reveal all—after one last number. He asks Arkady where he was yesterday evening, to which Arkady's wife interjects that he was at a "meeting of the Acoustics Commission." Koroviev reveals that, on the contrary, Arkady went to meet his mistress, an actress. A young relation of Arkady, also in the box, exclaims that she now understands why the actress got a lead theater role recently. She and Arkady's wife fight as the cat announces that "the séance is over!" As the orchestra plays, "something like babel" breaks loose in the Variety. Police try to impose order on the chaos as the stage lies "suddenly empty": Koroviev-Fagott and the cat, who the narrator now reveals to be called Behemoth, have already melted into thin air.

Koroviev and Behemoth stick to another key principle of showmanship—leave the audience wanting more. Before they go, Koroviev is sure to demonstrate one more instance of hypocrisy among the Moscow citizens. Arkady, in trying to dispel the illusion conjured by Koroviev, attempts to impose a moral standard on the proceedings, implying that it is "wrong" for the audience to be deceived in such a way. Koroviev turns this back on Arkady by highlighting his own taste for deception. In this, he implicitly critiques the "one rule for one, one rule for another" way of living that Arkady represents. The reference to "babel" is a gentle reminder to readers of the biblical elements of the novel, and to see what's happening in the Variety as evidence of something more universal.

CHAPTER 13. THE HERO ENTERS

Back at the clinic, Ivan watches as the man who knocked on his window (a.k.a. the master) comes in. This man is clean-shaven and in his late thirties, also a patient. He sits down, explaining that he has a set of keys that he stole from the nurse. Ivan asks why he doesn't escape; the man replies that he has "nowhere to escape to."

This man is the master. Once more Bulgakov uses the technique of delaying letting the reader know a character's identity. The title suggests there is something courageous about the master, which the reader will learn later on. The master's comment reveals that he has, in a sense, given up on life in the Soviet Union.

The master asks Ivan who he is. When Ivan says that he is a poet, the guest makes him promise never to write again; Ivan, with a newfound appreciation of how bad his poems are, agrees. The nurse looks in on the room, causing the man to hide briefly on the balcony.

The master's comment is not as flippant as it might seem. Essentially, if Ivan is a published poem under the Soviet regime—that is, if his poems got past the censors—they must be inauthentic and bad. Ivan, to his credit, swiftly agrees.

Coming back in, the master tells Ivan of a new arrival at the clinic: a fat man (Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy) who keeps talking about "currency in the ventilation." He then asks Ivan to tell him what caused him to be committed to the clinic. At the mention of Pontius Pilate, the guest is astonished at the "staggering coincidence." He listens patiently to Ivan's story, not for a moment thinking that he is a "madman."

The new arrival is Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, the chairman of the tenants' association seen in chapter 9. Nikanor is protesting his innocence but is guilty of accepting a bribe and abusing his position. It is in this chapter that Bulgakov starts to connect the Moscow and Yershalaim narratives.

At Ivan's conclusion, the man puts his hands together "prayerfully," saying "Oh, how I guessed it! How I guessed it all!" Hearing of Berlioz's grim death, the man says he wishes it had been the critic "Latunsky." He tells Ivan that he has been "unlucky," but that he "oughtn't to have behaved so casually and impertinently." Furthermore, says the guest, Ivan should be grateful—he got off lightly.

The master's semi-religious gesture suggests his belief in Woland's true identity as Satan. Bulgakov also hints at part of the master's back story—his treatment by critics.

Ivan begs the master to tell him the identity of the strange professor. Making Ivan promise not to get upset, the guest tells him that yesterday Ivan met "Satan." He expresses surprise that Berlioz, being a learned man, didn't realize. On the other hand, says the man, Woland is "capable of pulling the wool over the eyes of an even shrewder man."

The master's revelation also marks the point that the reader receives confirmation of Woland's true identity. He also highlights Berlioz's naivety in being so steadfastly sure that Woland was a madman. But, as the master intimates, Woland has the capability to fool practically anyone.

If the devil has truly come to Moscow, asks Ivan, shouldn't someone "catch him?" The master says he wishes that he had met Woland, and he'd gladly give up the last thing he has—the clinic keys—to do so. Ivan asks why. After a long pause, the guest tells Ivan that the both of them are in the clinic for the same reason: "namely, on account of Pontius Pilate." A year ago, he explains, he wrote a novel about Pilate; when Ivan asks him if he is a writer, the man replies that he is a "master." He has renounced everything, including his name.

The master would have liked to have been in Ivan's place, but not to prevent "evil" coming to Moscow—that's not how the master sees Woland. Instead, the master shows the attitude of a true artist, ever inquisitive and committed to his subject (even though he has retreated to the confines of the clinic). This passage also marks the first mention of Margarita—though, again, not by name. The master's refusal even to name himself plays on the idea of official and unofficial identity; the master has chosen to forego his.

The master proceeds to tell Ivan his story. He was a historian by education and speaks many languages. He won a hundred thousand roubles with a "state bond" and decided to leave his museum work and write a novel about Pontius Pilate. The writing was going well, and he already knew that the last words of the book would be "...the fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate."

The master won the Soviet equivalent of the lottery and decided to use it to facilitate the writing of his novel—rather than what some of the Griboedov writers might have done: spent it on luxurious food and trips away. Here, Bulgakov also hints at the novel's ending.

The master would frequently take walks during his breaks from writing. On one of these, he astonished by the sight of a woman carrying "repulsive" yellow flowers, "struck not so much by her beauty as by an extraordinary loneliness in her eyes." He followed her, until she stopped down an alley and asked him if he liked her flowers. As he said "no," says the master, he realized "that all my life I had loved precisely this woman!"

Here begins the reader's experience of the love between the master and Margarita, which ultimately is the momentum that carries the book through. Her "loneliness" represents the fact the she was suffering from a paradoxical kind of loss—that she was yet to meet her true love. Bulgakov wants to suggest that there is still some kind of hope to be found, even in the dire situation of the Soviet Union. The flowers hint at Spring, carrying connotations of renewal and vitality (even if not to the master's taste). Margarita's own involvement in the novel is still to come, like flowers waiting to bloom.

The master continues tearfully: "love leaped out in front of us like a murderer in an alley leaping out of nowhere, and struck us both at once. As lightning strikes, as a Finnish knife strikes!" The woman later told him that she would have poisoned herself that day, if it wasn't for meeting him. Both of them were married to other people, but the woman became his "secret wife."

The master's analogy is a sharp reminder of his writerly powers. His description of the meeting with Margarita could easily lapse into sentimental cliché, but he manages to emphasize the immediacy of their connection by linking it to fear.

The master and his lover spent all the time they could together. The woman was very supportive of his writing, believing it to be of great importance. The master describes finishing the novel and having to "leave his secret refuge and go out into life." Ivan notices that his black cap is embroidered with a yellow "M."

The master and Margarita thus represent the first two characters to show any concern for the authenticity of art, and its role in society. His cap links him to Woland, whose business card showed the inverse sign: "W." This is more intended to show that they are linked characters, rather than that they represent opposites.

The master tells of his horror at the literary world he then had to enter. His editor asked him "idiotic questions" and passed the novel on to the other members of the editorial board to decide whether it should be published.

The master showed courage and naivety by even attempting to get his novel published; as the reader has already seen, any writing on Yeshua and Pilate is bound to be inherently critical of state authority.

The master, becoming increasingly agitated and confused, recounting how one day he opened a newspaper to find a public warning stating that he had tried "to foist into print an apology for Jesus Christ." Two days later, a further article compounded the criticism of the master, lambasting him for his "Pilatism." Then the critic Latunsky published an even harsher piece titled "A Militant Old Believer." His lover had rushed in, kissing him and promising to poison Latunsky.

*The criticism that the master received is thus similar to Berlioz's of Ivan—that he betrayed the official state policy of atheism. "Pilatism" is not a well-defined idea but suggests an obsession with Pilate—*The Master and Margarita *itself, then, is an example of Pilatism. The master's story demonstrates the suffocating cultural atmosphere in the Soviet Union, which Bulgakov knew all too well.*

The master felt his novel to be a "monstrous failure" as "joyless autumn days" brought further vindictive articles. "I had the feeling," says the master, "that the authors of these articles were not saying what they wanted to say, and that their rage sprang precisely from that." Over time, he grew mentally ill. His lover was distraught too, insisting that the master take a trip south to recover. The master gave her his remaining money to look after and she promised to come back the next morning.

The master's comment about the authors is a succinct and well-aimed critique at their fundamental contradiction: they are not artists, because they lack the courage to say what they think. Their attack on him, then, was based on their fear, sensing in him an example of a writer who wasn't *afraid to follow their art wherever necessary.*

That night, the master burned the manuscript of the novel in the fire, along with any relevant sketches in his notebooks. Just then, his lover came in. She held him, trembling, promising to save and cure the "sick" man. She wanted to stay but wanted first to return to her husband and be honest with him about her love for the master. The last words she spoke to him were: "Don't be afraid. Bear with it for a few hours. Tomorrow morning I'll be here."

The burning of the manuscript was a symbolic act meant to completely destroy the novel and any ideas that the master had of producing true art. It is this, rather than the novel itself, that produced the "sickness" in the master, as he felt increasingly ostracized form the society that rejected his work. Margarita's words to him are one of the key messages of the book: be courageous and hope.

The master walked out into the night, fear "possessing every cell" of his body. The easiest thing to have done, he says, would have been to throw himself under a tram—but he was too afraid. Instead, he hitched a ride to the newly opened clinic and begged for help. Now, he is too afraid to try to contact his lover, fearing the heartbreak that would overcome her from believing that he is mad. Despite Ivan's requests to hear what happened to Yeshua and Pilate, the master decides it is time to leave Ivan's room, and promptly disappears.

The master's suggested method of suicide is another example of Bulgakov's neat parallels, this one gesturing back to Berlioz's death. The master's refusal to contact Margarita is based less on fear than on sincerity of his love for her. At this point, he genuinely believes that he can best love her by ceasing to exist.

CHAPTER 14. GLORY TO THE COCK!

Rimsky, flabbergasted by what's just happened in the theater, sits in his office, staring at the "magic" banknotes used in Woland's show. Hearing a commotion outside, he looks out of the window to see that the clothes the women took from Koroviev's on-stage shop have disappeared—leaving them naked on the street. The police are frantically trying to restore order.

Though the Variety show is over, the spectacle continues. At this point, Rimsky is utterly isolated, with both Styopa and Varenukha nowhere to be seen.The nakedness of the women represents a stripping-away of pretensions—much to their understandable horror.

Rimsky is about to call for help when the telephone rings. An ominous female voice tells him, "Don't call anywhere, Rimsky, it'll be bad." Rimsky stares out of the window at a **moonlit** tree and is gripped by fear. He decides to get out of there as quick as possible. Suddenly, and much to Rimsky's shock, Varenukha comes into the office, accompanied by a "whiff of some putrid dankness."

Rimsky doesn't know the source of the voice, intensifying the tense atmosphere. As becomes clear later in the chapter, the voice likely belongs to Hella. Vareunkha's smell signifies that he is newly undead as a result of Hella's kiss.

Varenukha seems strange to Rimsky. When Rimsky questions him on why he hadn't returned earlier, Varenukha spins him a story appearing to explain Styopa's disappearance, alleging that the theater director had had a night of drunken debauchery, sent the telegrams as a prank, and is now being held in a "sobering-up cell." Rimsky can't help but think Styopa's inevitable sacking might result in his own promotion. But as Varenukha tells the story, the details become more absurd; with horror, Rimsky realizes that Varenukha is lying.

Varenukha has a hidden agenda: to turn Rimsky into a vampire too. During Varenukha's story, Rimsky's private thought is indicative of the generally self-serving attitude portrayed by many of the novel's minor characters. Ironically, what's actually happened to Styopa is even more unbelievable than Varenukha's yarn.

Growing suspicious, Rimsky scrutinizes Varenukha, who is trying to hide his face with a hat as he speaks. Rimsky tries to ring a bell for help; it's broken. As Varenukha asks him why he rang the bell, Rimsky notices to his horror that Varenukha doesn't appear to be casting a shadow. Varenukha realizes he's been rumbled and locks the door. Rimsky goes to the window but is met there by the sight of a naked girl, (Hella) who thrusts her arm through the vent to try and grab him.

Varenukha tries to hide his face because it would show Rimsky his transformation. Rimsky's ringing of the bell is a desperate attempt to call for help from outside. Varenukha's lack of a shadow is in keeping with his new vampiric physiognomy. Vampires are prototypically evil and so here represent Woland and his entourage at their most unambiguous. The naked girl is Hella, floating by the window.

With Varenukha levitating by the door, Hella, who Rimsky notices shows the putrid signs of being dead, tries to squirm her way into the room. Rimsky realizes that he is about to die. Just then, however, a cock crows outside. The girl curses, Varenukha shrieks, and they both fly out of the window. Rimsky, seemingly having aged by decades, rushes out of the theater to the train station. He hurriedly gets on a train to Leningrad, leaving Moscow forever.

Here Bulgakov conflates vampire folklore with the biblical story of the denial of Peter, in which Peter denies the existence of Jesus before the rooster crows. This gently hints at the novel's opposition between courage and chaos. In this instance the cockerel's crow is fortuitous, signaling to Varenukha and Hella that they must escape the daylight—leaving the terrified Rimsky free to make his own escape.

CHAPTER 15. NIKANOR IVANOVICH'S DREAM

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, the chair of the Sadovaya street tenants' association who was earlier arrested for holding foreign currency, is now a patient in the same clinic as Ivan and the master. Before that, Nikanor had been interrogated and vehemently defended himself against all charges, all the while frightened by apparitions of Koroviev that only he could see. When the authorities followed up his story and went to apartment 50, they found no-one there.

This opening confirms the earlier suggestion that the man complaining of foreign currency in his vent is indeed Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy. It's not clear if his visions of Koroviev are real or not but given that Koroviev is fond of appearing in such a manner (e.g. chapter 4).

Upon arrival at the clinic, the agitated Nikanor was injected with a sedative. He then calmed down and, falling asleep, dreamed a convoluted dream. In this, Nikanor was again interrogated about his foreign currency, but in a more theatrical, ceremonial setting, with a large audience, trumpet fanfare, and a flamboyant master of ceremonies.

Nikanor's dream is an expression of his guilt, his shame at being caught amplified by the theatrical setting. The purpose of the dream-show, like the earlier one at the Variety, is both the exposure of people's wrongdoing and a way of rendering the climate of fear and suspicion in the Soviet Union.

Nikanor's distress at his dream woke Ivan up. The doctor came by to calm Ivan, and as the latter fell back to sleep he began to dream "that the sun was already going down over Bald Mountain, and the mountain was cordoned off by a double cordon…"

The story shifts from one dream to another, setting up the next chapter of Pilate narrative. This dream may be inspired by the master's visit in chapter 13, but the continuity from one Pilate section to another suggests that there is more to it than dreaming.

CHAPTER 16. THE EXECUTION

The story returns to Yershalaim, beginning with the same sentence that ends the previous chapter. A large procession is making its way to Bald Mountain, comprised of spectators, legionaries, executioners, and the prisoners. Around the prisoners' necks hang signs reading "robber and rebel." The sun is unbearable, making the weary soldiers hope the prisoners die quickly. Only the centurion Ratslayer seems to pay the heat no mind.

Bald Mountain is also known by other names, e.g. Golgotha or Calvary, and is the site of executions (actually just outside of Yershalaim). The huge number of participants involved marks this out as a spectacle comparable to what has recently happened in the Moscow narrative. In fact, it represents a kind of theater too. Ratslayer's immunity to the heat represents the hardness of his character.

Matthew Levi hides on the steep side of the mountain. Earlier he had tried to break through the ranks of soldiers and reach Yeshua but was quickly beaten back. He curses himself and cries, clutching a knife hidden under his garment; as the execution drags on, he scribbles notes on some parchment, such as "The minutes run on, and I, Matthew Levi, am here on Bald Mountain, and still no death!"

Matthew Levi is at this stage Yeshua's one true disciple, who Yeshua earlier said had misrepresented him in his writings. The knife is not part of some hair-brained scheme to free Yeshua from execution; instead, Matthew wants to end Yeshua's suffering by killing him.

Levi pleads with God to put Yeshua out of his misery and "send him death." He is angry with himself for leaving Yeshua alone two days earlier and for failing to break through the ranks of soldiers—if he had, he would have stabbed Yeshua in order to shorten his suffering, before stabbing himself.

Bulgakov's use of Matthew Levi as the perspective for this chapter helps humanize the suffering of those being executed, stripping away some of the familiar mythology. Levi's appeals to God here echo Jesus' famous cry: "why hast thou forsaken me?" That phrase is notably absent from Bulgakov's account, marking another divergence from the gospels.

Four hours later, Yeshua is still not dead. Levi demands an "immediate miracle" from God and curses him: "You are deaf! [...] You are a god of evil [...] I curse you, god of robbers, their soul and their protector!" As the sun sets into the sea, a great storm rises up on the horizon, blowing dust in Levi's eyes.

Levi's attacks on God are an important contribution to the complex relationship between good and evil put forward in the book. Levi feels that god is evil for letting Yeshua die, but the counterargument is that, without mankind's capacity for evil, the concept of "good" would cease to have meaning. The storm is suggestive of God's presence.

Slowly dying on their wooden posts, the three prisoners are in differing conditions. Gestas is deranged and singing "a senseless song"; Dysmas suffers most, still conscious; Yeshua is fortunate to be intermittently blacking out. He is covered in flies and horseflies.

Bulgakov's detailed description here is another effort to strip back the mythological layers of a familiar story and bring it to life. The suffering of the three men highlights the cruelty of crucifixion as a method of execution. The undignified imagery of the flies contributes to the sense of Yeshua's stark humanity.

A hooded man (later revealed as Aphranius) orders one of the executioners to raise a wet sponge on a spear up to Yeshua's lips, but Yeshua tells the executioner to give it to Dysmas instead. Just then, the executioner removes the sponge from the spear and "gently pricks" Yeshua in the heart, saying "praise the magnanimous hegemon!" Yeshua dies, whispering only "Hegemon." The storm arrives over the mountain, filling the sky with thunder and lightning. The executioner kills the other two prisoners in the same way.

This hooded man is Aphranius, who does not reappear until much later. The air of secrecy that surrounds him is very much deliberate by Bulgakov, the reasons for which will become clear. Yeshua's refusal of the sponge exemplifies his courage and compassion for his fellow man. Yeshua's last word here is another difference between Bulgakov's text and the various last words of Jesus reported in the gospels. One interpretation is that it is a delusional moment as he faces death, an automatic repetition of the executioner's own words. A more attractive possibility is that Yeshua's word implies the deep bond between him and Pilate that will become apparent later in the novel.

Soon after, only Mathew Levi is left on the hill. He makes his way to Yeshua's post and cuts him down, before cutting the others down too. Levi gathers up the naked body of Yeshua, puts it over his shoulder, and leaves the mountain.

Levi seeks to protect the bodily form of Yeshua in a vain attempt to preserve him. The only way Levi can keep a part of Yeshua alive is by writing more about his life and teachings and disseminating this writing.

CHAPTER 17. AN UNQUIET DAY

On Friday morning, there is a huge queue outside of the Variety theater wanting to buy tickets for Woland's next performance that evening. With Styopa, Rimsky, and Varenukha all missing, the Variety's bookkeeper, Vassily Stepanovich Lastochkin, is surprised to find himself in charge.

Word has got around Moscow about last night's incredible proceedings—the suggestion of free money and clothes has probably helped. Vassily is not a senior member of staff, hence his surprise at his new position.

Investigators come to the Variety offices to enquire about the previous night's events, which Vassily has only heard about second-hand. The investigators bring their best dog, "Ace of Diamonds," who is instantly disturbed and tries to jump out of the window.

The Ace of Diamonds' reaction is in line with the idea that animals can sense thing that humans can't—he can smell the lingering presence of evil in the room.

A sign is put up cancelling that evening's show as the investigators try haplessly to piece together what's happened. All the staff are sent home and the Variety's doors locked. Vassily has to go the "Commission on Spectacles and Entertainment of the Lighter Type" to report on yesterday's events; after that, he needs to deliver the previous day's takings: 21,711 roubles.

Vassily's task is typical of a society with such stringent bureaucracy. The dryness of the commission's name is a meant to be comic, contrasting with the professed purpose of the institution: facilitating light entertainment. This is gently suggestive of the stifling cultural environment and pervasive surveillance.

Vassily tries to take a taxi to the Commission, but the cab drivers keep refusing. One eventually takes him, explaining that he and the other drivers are on guard: when they had earlier picked up passengers from the Variety, the money they had received kept turning into something else, like a bottle label or a bee.

Here the reader learns that, though the money seemed real in the theater, there's something mysterious about it. In a way, this is a continuation of Woland's spectacle, spreading confusion through Moscow by making the money turn into items of no value.

Vassily arrives at the Commission to find distress and commotion. Anna Richardovna, secretary to the commission chairman, Prokhor Petrovich, is distraught. She clutches Vassily by the lapels and begs him to take a look in Prokhor's office. Hearing Prokhor's familiar voice, Vassily is astonished to discover that Prokhor has become an empty suit, performing the usual functions of a human being but with no visible body parts.

Prokhor symbolizes the hollowness of an overly bureaucratic society. He also represents an absence of courage—even when his body has disappeared, he is still trying to do his "official" duty. The image of the empty suit thus gestures towards people doing things they don't believe to be right out of a sense of obligation to the state.

Anna Richardovna explains to Vassily what happened. Apparently, the office was visited by a black cat—as big as a "behemoth"—who barged into Prokhor's room. Prokhor had exclaimed, "get him out of here, devil take me," at which the cat said, "Devil take you? that, in fact, can be done!" Prokhor was replaced by the animate suit there and then. Vassily wonders if it's the same cat that was involved in the black magic séance.

Prokhor makes the mistake, like Berlioz early in the novel, of using the devil's name in vain. Behemoth delights in taking him literally by showing him the power of Woland and his associates. Vassily's hunch is obviously correct. This also gives the reader a sense of why Behemoth has his particular name—because of his size. A behemoth is large biblical beast, variously interpreted as an elephant, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, or buffalo. The Russian word means the second of these.

Feeling that he isn't making any progress, Vassily goes to a different building "affiliate" to the Commission. But here, too, he is confronted with a bizarre sight. Members of staff are hysterical, intermittently bursting into song completely against their will.

The singing workers are a satirical take on enforced patriotism in the Soviet Union. They're also a stand-in for the idea of state-controlled culture; like the Soviet Union more generally, the workers don't have agency over what they sing.

As a doctor arrives to try and help with this "mass hypnosis," one of the members of staff explains how the building had been visited by a choirmaster who wore a "cracked pince-nez" and "wretched checkered trousers" (Koroviev), apparently as a part of extra-curricular activity organized by the management. He had given the staff a brief lesson before leaving, promising to return. But he hasn't returned, and the workers have been unable to stop bursting into song ever since.

Another mention of hypnosis, typical of the Moscow populace's inability to see the true cause of what's happening. The choirmaster was Koroviev, who exploited the regular "organized fun" at the building to set up in the involuntary singing.

Soon, trucks arrive to cart off the entire staff to Professor Stravinsky's clinic. Vassily then heads to the financial sector and tries to deposit the theater's takings from the previous night. But as he hands over the money, it becomes clear that it has been turned into foreign currency. "There he is, one of the tricksters from the Variety," shouts a voice; Vassily is arrested.

Vassily thus falls victim to the same stunt pulled on Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy in chapter 9. It seems that Woland and his gang are able to turn the money to foreign currency—or other things—at just the right moment to cause maximum damage. This moment also shows the fragility of people's status in the book—just a moment ago, Vassily was in charge of the theater.

CHAPTER 18. HAPLESS VISITORS

Berlioz's uncle, the industrial economist Maximilian Andreevich Poplavsky, heads from his home in Kiev to Moscow, having received a perplexing telegram apparently from Berlioz, paradoxically stating that he, Berlioz, has been run over by a tram. It also tells Poplavsky that the funeral will be on Friday 3:00 p.m. He has come to Moscow not to pay his respects but to try and acquire Berlioz's apartment as inheritance.

The telegram is a prank by one of Woland's gang—Berlioz couldn't have sent it posthumously of course. Poplavsky is the uncle that Woland confused Berlioz by mentioning in the first chapter. People in the Soviet Union were not allowed to own their own property, with homes allocated by state-approved chairs of tenants' associations (e.g. Nikanor Bosoy). Poplavsky, then, is part of the clamor for Berlioz's newly vacant apartment.

Poplavsky heads to the management office on Sadovaya Street that looks after Berlioz's building. There, he asks an anxious-looking man if he can see the chairman. Getting nowhere, Poplavsky heads directly to apartment no. 50.

The anxious-looking man is probably part of the tenants' association, intimidated by what has happened to Nikanor Bosoy.

After ringing the doorbell, Poplavsky is let in, but it's unclear who by—all he can see is an "enormous black cat" sitting on a chair. Koroviev comes into the hall from the study. Learning that Poplavsky is Berlioz's uncle, Koroviev pretends to be distraught at the theater director's death, tears streaming down his face.

Koroviev intentionally mimics the emotions that the reader might expect Poplavsky to be showing, playing on Paplovsky's insincerity and self-interested reason for coming to Moscow.

Poplavsky asks if Koroviev had sent the telegram, sure that it could not have been Berlioz posthumously. Koroviev points to the cat, saying "he did!" Behemoth admits sending the telegram, asking "what of it?" Poplavsky can't believe he's talking to a cat; Behemoth asks, "I believe I asked in good Russian?" and then demands to see Poplavsky's passport.

Behemoth delights in acting casually when people first see him, allowing him to feign offence when they are understandably baffled by his being a cat. Behemoth plays up to the importance of official documentation in Soviety society by insisting on seeing the passport.

Behemoth looks at the passport, insults Poplavsky and rescinds his invitation to Berlioz's funeral. He summons Azazello, the red-headed man with the yellow fang, and asks him to "see off" Poplavsky. Azazello promptly whacks Poplavsky with a "huge roast chicken," sending Poplavsky (and the chicken) tumbling down the stairs. Running for dear life down the rest of the stairs, Poplavsky passes a melancholy man in a suit heading the other way.

There's no clear symbolism behind the roast chicken, it just makes for an especially undignified way to be attacked.Poplavsky's literal downfall is a result of his own selfish desires, keeping with the tendency of Woland's gang to draw the worst out of people. Generally speaking, though, he gets off quite lightly.

This other man is Andrei Fokich Sokov, barman at the Variety. He has come to apartment no. 50 to complain that that the bar's takings are down on account of the "fake" money Woland used in his séance. Hella, naked, putrid-smelling, greets Andrei at the door, before seeing him into Woland's room. Woland is sitting by the fire.

The audience members spent the free money from the show at the bar. Hella has the characteristic smell of the undead (as Varenukha did in chapter 14).

On learning that Andrei is the Variety barman, Woland lambasts the food served at the Variety buffet, specifically the sturgeon. Andrei, slightly confused, says that the sturgeon is of "second freshness," which Woland thinks is a "nonsense" idea.

Woland's complaint about the food is in part a satirical comment on the Griboedov's preoccupation with fine dining. "Second freshness" is typical of the Soviet tendency to assign grades; Woland thinks food is either fresh or it's not. This also represents the way in which Woland likes to disorient people, shifting the conversation onto a topic of his choice.

Andrei then tries to raise the question of the money. Woland invites him to sit down, but the stool collapses, spilling red wine all over Andrei, who declines the suggestion that he should take his trousers off. Frighteningly, an owl flies in and lands on the mantlepiece.

The collapsing stool and wine spill further intimidate Andrei, hinting that he is in the presence of a great supernatural power.

Woland offers Andrei a drink and asks if he would like to play dominoes or cards. Andrei declines both, leading Woland to say that "there's something not nice hidden in men who avoid wine, games [...] Such people are either gravely ill or secretly hate everybody around them."

Woland subtly drops a hint about what he is going to tell Andrei before the end of the chapter. Woland likes games because they involve winning and losing, which can be viewed as proxy versions of good and evil—games need winners and losers to work, just as the world, in Woland's view, needs good and evil.

Andrei again tries to ask about the money, referring to Woland's séance. Woland tells Andrei a secret: "I'm not an artiste at all, I simply wanted to see the Muscovites *en masse*, and that could be done most conveniently in a theatre." Andrei explains that the audience had spent the notes used in the séance, receiving change from the bar in real currency.

Woland is extremely candid here, giving Andrei a true account of the reasoning behind of the Variety show. Whereas the audience thought they were coming to see him, he was coming to see them and all their faults.

Woland asks Andrei if the Muscovites are crooks, to which Andrei admits that some of them are. Woland then asks if Andrei is a poor man, and what he has in savings; Koroviev calls outs from the other room that Andrei has "249 thousand roubles" and a small amount of gold. Woland says this is "not a great sum," but explains that it doesn't matter—Andrei will die in nine months from liver cancer.

Andrei's answer to Woland is an honest one. The treatment of Andrei is perhaps the strongest example of a character being treated evilly without seeming to have done anything to deserve it. Andrei is a humble man of modest means; but by the looks of it has been condemned to die by Woland. Alternatively, Andrei was dying anyway—Woland simply has foreknowledge.

Koroviev comes in and instructs Hella, the naked woman, to see the disoriented Andrei out of the apartment. As he leaves, Andrei returns to get his hat, which he forgot in his confusion. Descending the stairs, Andrei's hat doesn't quite feel right; suddenly it turns into a black kitten that scratches his head, before going back up to no. 50.

Another prank by Behemoth, who has pretended by Andrei's hat.

Worried by Woland's prediction, Andrei heads right away to a nearby doctor, who happens to be a specialist in liver disease. Professor Kuzmin, the doctor, thinks it's unlikely that Andrei has liver cancer, but sends him to a neurologist in order to get an examination of his nervous condition. Andrei insists on paying Professor Kuzmin and leaves.

Andrei, unlike Berlioz, doesn't dismiss Woland's prediction out of hand. Enough happened in the room—and at the theater—to make him respect and fear Woland. Kuzmin's referral of Andrei to a neurologist is another example of characters trying to explain Woland and his actions away.

Later on, Professor Kuzmin notices that the money left behind by Andrei has turned into wine bottle labels. He complains to his secretary before returning his room to find a black kitten on his desk where the labels were, drinking from a saucer of milk.

Andrei has obviously used the supernatural money from the Variety. It's not clear whether this was a deliberate deception or not. The black kitten is Behemoth.

To Professor Kuzmin's shock, a sparrow flies in and lands on his desk, while a nearby gramophone starts playing a foxtrot all by itself. The sparrow appears to dance to the music, before laying a dropping in the doctor's inkstand. It then flies to Kuzmin's graduation photograph and smashes the frame with its beak.

Like the bird at the palace in the Pontius Pilate narrative, this one is probably Woland too. Though Bulgakov doesn't state this explicitly, the presence of Behemoth and Azazello here makes it more than likely. There's no indication that Kuzmin is any way morally compromised, showing that sometimes Woland and his gang just like to have fun in creating terror and chaos.

Professor Kuzmin makes a phone call to order some leeches. They are brought impossibly quickly by a nurse with "a man's mouth," dead eyes, and a "single fang"—Azazello. Later, a mustachioed doctor friend of his comes to reassure him that what happened was "all nonsense."

Woland and his gang enjoy nonsense; in fact, it is one of their tactics. They create events that seem impossible to believe, making it difficult for their victims' accounts to be believed.

The narrator addresses the reader, saying the time has come "for us to go on the second part of this truthful narrative. Follow me, reader!"

The narrative tone varies a lot throughout the book. This is one of the rare instances when the narrator directly addresses the reader, here heralding the end of Book 1, indicating that something is fundamentally different about Book 2. As Margarita is about to make her appearance, perhaps this is an indication that her character has something that the Moscow people in Book 1 lack: courage.

CHAPTER 19. MARGARITA

The narrator again implores the reader to "follow me," asking "who told you that there is no true, faithful, eternal love in this world!" and promising "I will show you such a love!" The narrator then reveals that the master's lover is Margarita, and that the master is completely wrong to think she has forgotten him.

The narrator's continuing interjection sets up the premise of Book Two: that there is such thing as "true, faithful, love" and that what follows will prove it. This is the reader's first encounter with Margarita, remarkable given that this past the halfway point. By delaying her entrance Bulgakov underscores her importance. Her name is another reference to Goethe's Faust.

Margarita is a beautiful, intelligent woman and thirty years old. She is childless and married, though she does not love her husband. Her husband loves her, however, and she has all she needs, materially speaking, including money and a nice house. Without the master, though, she is resolutely unhappy.

Margarita, in other words, has what many others in the Moscow society lack: a life of material fulfilment. As the reader knows from chapter 13, both she and the master already had spouses when they met (though nothing is said of the master's). Of course, Margarita's love for the master completely overpowers any material concerns.

Margarita is angry that she left the master on that fateful night. She came back the next day but was too late, "like the unfortunate Matthew Levi." She has been grieving all through winter, not knowing if the master is alive or dead. Today she wakes up at noon (it is the same Friday).

Margarita is thinking of the night when the master burned the manuscript of his novel. She didn't stay because she had to return to her husband. Her reference to Matthew Levi shows the profound impact that the master's novel had on her—she thinks in terms of his characters.


On waking, Margarita feels her spirits lift; she has had a dream of the master, which she takes to be a premonition that "something was finally going to happen." Either, she thinks, the master is dead and the dream means she will die too; or he's alive and she will find him.

Dreams occupy an important role in the novel, often hinting at what is to come or actively moving the story forward (as in Ivan's dream of Yershalaim). Margarita's thoughts of suicide echo the master's mention of similar thoughts in chapter 13, underlining both the lovers' suffering and the way in which their fates are linked.

With her husband away on business, Margarita goes into one of the rooms in their house and opens up a drawer, hidden in which are a photo of the master, his bank savings book, a dried rose petal, and a partially charred notebook. She takes these to her bedroom, leafing through the notebook, in which she reads a short excerpt from the master's novel.

All that's left of the master's novel, it seems, are a few charred pages. Her focus on the novel instructs the reader to do the same—the novel is a representation of true art, juxtaposed with the work produced by the Massolit writers.

Putting these possessions away, Margarita decides to go for a walk. On her way out, she has a discussion with her housemaid, Natasha, who tells her gossip she's heard about yesterday's unbelievable goings-on at the Variety theater.

Woland's plan to unsettle Moscow is coming to fruition—the Variety show is the talk of the town. This then informs Margarita's mindset when she meets Azazello later in the chapter.

Margarita leaves, taking a "trolley-bus" on which she overhears two strangers talking about a "scandal" involving "mysticism"; they also mention that a dead body has had its head stolen from a coffin that very morning. She gets off and sits on a bench near the Kremlin, thinking of the master.

Bulgakov's masterful tactic of delaying the entry of characters and the information that they are privy to functions like pieces being moved on a chess board. The reader, here, knows much more than Margarita about what she overhears. But the mention of a stolen head is gossip for the reader too, with the inference that the head is Berlioz's.

Margarita notices a funeral procession going by. Wondering who it's for, her thought is suddenly answer by a man by her side, who informs her that the deceased is Berlioz, chairman of Massolit. This man (Azazello) is short, red-haired, and has a fang. Berlioz's head was stolen from the coffin as it lay the hall of Griboedov's this morning, the man adds.

Margarita is not a fan of Massolit—they are the same group of writers that rejected the master's novel. The fanged man is, of course, Azazello—the reader knows this, but Bulgakov is careful to point out that Margarita doesn't. The purpose for the theft of the head—and the culprits—will become clear in a subsequent chapter.

Margarita, assuming there to be many writers among the mourners, asks the Azazello if "Latunsky" is one of them. He points Latunsky out, noticing Margarita's hatred for the critic. The stranger shocks Margarita by addressing her by her name.

Latunsky, as the master explained in chapter 13, was his worst critic. Naturally, Margarita shares in the master's hatred. Azazello gives Margarita a sign of his supernatural powers by using her name, also indicating that she has been specifically chosen by Woland for what is to come.

Azazello admits that he is there to speak to Margarita about some "business." He explains that "a very distinguished foreigner" would like her company that very evening. She takes this as an indecent proposition, becoming angry. To her amazement, the man then quotes a passage from the master's novel.

Margarita momentarily thinks she is being asked to prostitute herself. Azazello's is offering a kind of pact between a mortal and the devil, much like the deal Faust takes up in Goethe's text. His quotation from the novel serves a similar purpose to his use of her name, but also underscores the novel's importance.

Margarita demands to know the redheaded man's identity; he reluctantly explains that his name is Azazello. She implores him to tell her if the master if his alive, which Azazello confirms. If she wants to know more, says Azazello, she needs to meet with the "foreigner."

This is a significant development for Margarita, marking the first sign that the master is still alive. This spurs her on and gives her courage to agree to Azazello's proposition.

Azazello gives Margarita a golden box containing an ointment, instructing her to cover herself with it at "exactly half past nine." She accepts, saying, "I agree to perform this comedy of rubbing in the ointment, agree to go to the devil and beyond!"

Margarita's prediction earlier in the chapter that "something" would happen today proves correct, hence her energetic acceptance of the offer. She has an inkling of the "foreigner's" identity by virtue of what she heard from Natasha and the strangers on the trolley-bus.

CHAPTER 20. AZAZELLO'S CREAM

That night, Margarita sits in the bedroom, waiting for it turn half past nine, staring at the box Azazello gave her. When the time finally comes, she rubs the "rich, yellowish cream," which smells of "swamp slime," all over herself.

According to the apocryphal book of Enoch, Azazel—Bulgakov's inspiration for Azazello—is responsible for teaching women to use cosmetics, perhaps explaining the use of cream in this chapter.

When she looks in the mirror, Margarita is amazed. She is suddenly youthful, looking about twenty years old. On top of that, she feels refreshed, strong, and full of life. She feels certain that she is "leaving her house and her former life for ever."

Margarita senses a significant change on the horizon, knowing that it is linked to the master. The return to youthfulness represents an emboldening of her inner self.

Margarita writes a note for her husband, which asks for his forgiveness and explains that she is leaving for ever: "I have become a witch from the grief and calamities that have struck me. It's time for me to go."

Margarita feels an obligation out of respect to tell her husband the truth. The fact the she knows that she is now a witch indicates her sense of the supernatural.

Natasha comes in, astonished at Margarita's changed appearance. "It's the cream!" exclaims Margarita. Natasha hugs Margarita, amazed at her glowing skin. Margarita, sensing that she won't be coming back, tells Natasha to keep all of her clothes for herself. Margarita impassionedly cries out that Azazello is about to call, and that "the foreigner's not dangerous, yes, I understand now that he's not dangerous!"

Margarita divests herself of her material wealth by offering her clothes to Natasha. The supernatural quality of the cream helps Margarita understand the extent of Woland's power. She is not afraid of this power, instead embracing it courageously in the knowledge that it may help her find the master.

Margarita sits in the windowsill, lit by moonlight. She hears her neighbor, Nikolai Ivanovich, park his car and gets out with his **briefcase**. She shouts at him, calling him "boring." Just then, Azazello calls and tells her it's time to "take off"; "when you fly over the gate, shout "invisible." He tells her to fly over the city and head south for the river.

Margarita feels instantly liberated from her former self and revels in speaking her inner thoughts about Nikolai, knowing that she is unlikely to see him again. Nikolai represents the repressed, unfulfilled life she has been leading recently.

A broom flies into the bedroom, which Margarita jumps astride. Delightedly, she flies out of the window, grabbing something to wear. As soon as she's outside, she throws the clothing to the ground, and soars away—completely naked—from her old life.

In making Margarita a witch, Bulgakov mixes the biblical power of Satan with more folkloric ideas of sorcery and witchcraft. Witches have a traditional association with the devil and evil. Margarita is willing to confront—or even embrace—both in order to find the master.

CHAPTER 21. FLIGHT

Margarita gets the hang of flying the broom, relishing the sense of freedom that comes with being both airborne and invisible. Flying around the city, she comes across a plush marble building. Looking closer she sees that it is "Dramlit House"—"House of Dramatists and Literary Workers"—and counts the critic Latunsky as one of its inhabitants.

In granting Margarita the freedoms of flight and invisibility, Azazello gives her the immunity to take revenge on the Massolit writers on behalf of the master. Latunsky, of course, was the worst critic of all.

"Latunsky," shrieks Margarita, "he's the one who ruined the master!" She flies through an open window into his apartment; he is not at home, attending Berlioz's memorial gathering. She wrecks the apartment completely, smashing up Latunsky's piano with a hammer and flooding the place with water from the bath.

Events seem perfectly orchestrated to grant Margarita the opportunity to wreck Latunsky's apartment. The destruction of the piano is symbolic: the instruments represents Soviet culture, and, in being such an expensive item, also stands for the corruption of those willing to sell their art form in exchange for material reward.

As neighbors from below rush up to Latunsky's apartment, Margarita flies out of the window. She smashes the windows of the other apartments, causing panic on the street below. Peeking through a third-floor window, Margarita notices a young boy, evidently scared; she reassures him it's just some other boys playing with a slingshot, and that he's just having a dream.

The destruction of the apartment represents a kind of ablution, a temporary cleansing of artistic corruption. Margarita's efforts to reassure the innocent boy—in between her acts of vandalism—show the complicatedness of her character. Yes, she is vengeful—but she is also fundamentally caring.

Margarita flies away from the city, climbing higher and higher. She zooms past entire towns, before slowing down a little to enjoy the experience. Suddenly she is overtaken by something which seems to make the sound a "woman's guffaw"—it's Natasha.

The way Margarita "zooms out" from the city is a physical manifestation of her distancing herself from her previous life. Both her and Natasha see this as a joyful experience, an escape from the confines of Soviet society.

Natasha is riding a "fat hog" which is clutching a **briefcase**. She shouts through the air: "I confess I took the cream! [...] Forgive me, my sovereign lady, I won't go back, not for anything!" Jabbing the hog, Natasha reveals it to be Nikolai Ivanovich, the neighbor. Heading to Margarita's room to return her falling clothing, Nikolai, amazed at Natasha's sudden youthfulness, had propositioned Natasha in Margarita's room, offering her money for sex. Natasha had dabbed him with the cream, which turned him into a hog.

Nikolai Ivanovich's transformation into a pig is a darkly comic rendering of the greed that has been shown throughout the book by previous characters (e.g. the Massolit writers). The briefcase is a hilarious depiction of Nikolai's absurd commitment to being a "dutiful citizen." He is clearly morally compromised, and in a biblical sense guilty of the deadly sin of lust. Woland, of course, doesn't really mind—he just enjoys showing that these sins are alive and well. The cream seems to turn people into what they deserve to become; Natasha and Margarita are evidently "good."

As they fly over the forest down below, Margarita promises to do whatever she can to help Natasha stay as a witch. Margarita lands near a secluded river and takes a swim. A drunken fat man appears from a bush, addressing her as "Queen Margot."

In this parallel supernatural universe, Margarita is not a depressed woman stuck in an unhappy marriage, but a Queen. The fat man's use of the term indicates the central role that Margarita will play in the events of the following chapter.

Margarita notices a party on the opposite bank and heads over. A march is being played in her honor, and amidst the gathering are naiads, naked witches, and a goat-legged creature who gives her champagne. This creature informs her that Natasha is on her way to Moscow to "warn them that Margarita would soon arrive and to help prepare her attire."

The ceremonial gathering for Margarita pays respect to her newfound authority. The goat-legged man is a satyr, and, like the naiads, originates in Greek mythology. Bulgakov enjoys mixing biblical content with mythology and folklore from other spheres, increasing the sense of universality in the novel and lending Margarita's story a sense of timelessness.

The "goat-legged one" asks why Margarita travelled by broom, saying that it's an "inconvenient" way to travel. Making a telephone out of two twigs, he orders a car, which arrives almost instantly. The driver is a rook "in an oilcloth cap and gauntlets." Margarita is helped into the car, which then soars up towards the moon—and Moscow.

In many cultures, the rook is considered an omen of bad luck. But as Margarita is embracing her involvement with Satan, the category of "bad" does not really apply.

CHAPTER 22. BY CANDLELIGHT

The rook drives Margarita through the sky as she contemplates her life, "fearless" with the "hope that she would regain her happiness." The car soon arrives in Moscow and Margarita is dropped in a deserted cemetery. Azazello appears, wearing a black cloak.

This chapter and those surrounding it increase the fantastical elements of the novel. This works both as a representation of Woland's powers and as a suggestion that they are working towards a climax. Margarita is courageous despite the incredible nature of what is happening to her.

Margarita, on her broom, and Azazello, on a rapier, fly to the apartment on Sadovaya Street. The authorities have placed men around the apartment, hoping and failing to catch its mysterious inhabitants.

These men represent the secret police, who, of course, are no match for Woland's Satanic abilities. They remind the reader of the atmosphere of surveillance in Soviet society.

Margarita and Azazello go in and climb an impossibly long staircase in darkness. Koroviev meets them at the top of the stairs, dressed in smart evening wear and holding a small lamp. Koroviev takes Margarita into an enormous hall and introduces himself. He explains the physics-defying interior: "For someone well acquainted with the fifth dimension, it costs nothing to expand space to the desired proportions!"

Koroviev is dressed up for Satan's Ball, described in the following chapter. His comment to Margarita indicates that Woland and his gang can exploit not just the fourth dimension—time—but a mysterious "fifth." This fifth dimension lies outside of human perception and represents the ability to use physical space in seemingly impossible permutations. An interesting interpretation might be that Koroviev is gesturing to the separate dimensionality represented by the actual reader holding the book. There's also a satirical target aimed at the enforced communal living in the Soviet Russia and the lack of personal space that came with it. This also explains why the apartment seems empty whenever the authorities come to search it.

After they make small talk about Moscow apartments, Koroviev moves on to their "business" that night. Margarita confirms that she has guessed who is the "host" of the evening. Koroviev explains that "Messire" (Woland) puts on an annual "spring ball of the **full moon**." Margarita, he says, is to be the hostess.

Full moons are often associated with madness and magical phenomena. Spring, of course, represents renewal and rebirth—and love. All of these are relevant for the story of the master and Margarita.

Tradition has it, says Koroviev, that the hostess is always called Margarita, and she must be from the place where they hold the ball. They selected her from 121 Margaritas in Moscow. Margarita feels her heart go cold, and "the hope of happiness" making her head spin. She firmly accepts the role of hostess.

The fact that the hostess is always called Margarita is another contribution to the sense of timelessness and universality in these scenes. The events are both extremely specific—Moscow, Margarita, etc.—and representations of Satan's eternal being. Margarita accepts because she is willing to do anything to find the master.

Koroviev leads Margarita down a corridor, talking of the "magnificent" ball to come, adding that it will be attended by "persons the scope of whose power in their own time was extremely great." That said, their powers are nothing compared to Woland's, continues Koroviev. He also implies that Margarita has royal blood, offering a relation to a distant French queen.

By power, Koroviev means capacity for "evil" (as will become clear in the next chapter). The historical queen he refers to is Marguerite de Valois, a French monarch in the 16th and early 17th centuries.

Margarita and Koroviev enter a small room, in which there is a candelabrum "with sockets in the form of bird's claws" and an "artful" chess board. Azazello is there, dressed in tailcoats. The naked Hella sits on the floor, stirring a pot of "sulphurous steam." Hella and Behemoth, who is playing chess, pause to bow to Margarita.

The candelabrum is the menorah, a lamp stand with a long tradition in Judaism and Christianity. It is, of course, a parodic modified version befitting Woland's identity. Hella's pot is reminiscent of witches' cauldrons, another literal mixing together of different mythologies associated with evil.

In the candlelight Margarita sees Woland reclining on the bed, staring at her. She notices one eye "with a golden spark," "drilling anyone to the bottom of his soul," and the other one empty and black as a void. His face looks as though it has been "burned for all eternity by the sun."

Woland's eyes, now slightly different from the first chapter, signify his ability to draw the worst out of people and his eternal nature. The same is true of his face.

Woland greets Margarita, asking her to excuse his "homely attire." He places his hand, "heavy as if made of stone and the same time hot as fire," on Margarita's shoulder. He shouts to someone under the bed, which turns out to be Behemoth, looking for his knight chess piece. When Behemoth reveals himself, he is dressed with a white bow-tie and opera glass, and has gilded whiskers.

Like Koroviev, Behemoth is dressed up for the great Ball. His trickery with the chess board ties in with his taste for mischief.

Woland introduces Margarita to his retinue: Behemoth, Azazello, Koroviev, and Hella, who is rubbing his knee with ointment. Behemoth analyses his position on the chess board; on the board, his king, seemingly alive, is covering his face in despair. Behemoth winks at his king, who, understanding the signal, runs off the board. Woland, exasperated by these antics, asks Behemoth to give up.

Woland has an injured knee, traditionally associated with Satan's fall from heaven.

Hella leaves the room; Margarita takes over with the ointment. Woland says that his "attendants" insist that his knee trouble is caused by rheumatism, but he suspects it "was left me as a souvenir by a charming witch with whom I was closely acquainted in the year 1571 [...] In another three hundred years it will all go away!"

Margarita taking over from Hella indicates her willingness to make a pact with the devil in order to find the master. Bulgakov's explanation for the bad knee diverges from the usual biblical story. Woland's story is a reference to passage in Goethe's Faust.


Woland shows Margarita his globe, which sits on a nearby table. It seems to show an up-to-date depiction of what is happening in the world. He points to a section filling with fire, explaining that "a war has started there."

This fits with Woland's role as a kind of recorder of or ambassador for evil. He doesn't necessarily fill the world with the evil but rather observes it and draws it out. The way he looms over the globe suggests his immense power.

On Woland's invitation, Margarita looks closer at the globe. She sees a house get destroyed, and "a small female figure lying on the ground" holding a dead child. Woland says what she's seeing is the work of "Abaddon." He adds that "Abaddon" has a "rare impartiality" and treats both sides in a conflict equally.

Abaddon is an angel of the abyss in the biblical book of Revelation. His name literally means "destroyer." Abaddon is impartial because mankind has an infinite ability to war with itself, symbolizing the futility and hopelessness of conflict.

Woland makes Abaddon appear; he is a gaunt man wearing glasses. Margarita asks if he can take his glasses off, which Woland says is impossible. Just then, Natasha arrives with "her hog." Woland agrees to let them stay but insists that the hog—Nikolai Ivanovich—will not be allowed in the ballroom. Woland instructs Margarita not to "become flustered" during the ball, and to only drink water.

Abaddon's glasses tie in with the idea of witnessing evil, which then links with the following chapter.

CHAPTER 23. THE GREAT BALL AT SATAN'S

Woland's entourage prepares Margarita for the ball: Hella douses her in blood and rose oil and Behemoth rubs her feet; Koroviev hangs an "**oval-framed picture of a black poodle**" around her neck. She puts on golden-clasped slippers and diamond crown. Koroviev advises her to show deference to *all* of the guests and make certain not to ignore anyone. For this, he says, "the Queen" will be rewarded a hundredfold.

The mention of rose oil is a callback to the fragrant smell of rose that contributes to Pontius Pilate's headache in chapter 2. The black poodle necklace, like Woland's walking stick, is another reference to Goethe's Faust. In Goethe's work, the devil first appears to Faust as a poodle. Here Margarita learns for certain that with her role comes with reward.

With Margarita ready, Behemoth shouts "The ball!!!" Arm in arm with Koroviev, she is transported first briefly to a tropical forest before arriving in a lavish ballroom. An orchestra of around 150 men is playing a polonaise. On Koroviev's instruction, Margarita stands by a wall of tulips and calls out to the conductor: "Greetings to you, waltz king!"

The ball takes place in a kind of parallel universe, conjured by Woland's ability to control the fourth and fifth dimensions (it also takes up no actual real-world time). It is an extravagant sensuous occasion, linking Woland with the idea of indulgence and hedonism.

Margarita moves into the next room. Here, fountains spurt out jets of champagne as a jazz band plays "unbearably loud." Margarita takes position at the top of a huge, carpeted staircase, with Azazello, Koroviev and Behemoth beside her. Margarita notices an "enormous fireplace" in the distance.

This builds the sense of extravaganza. The fireplace signals a portal between the party and hell—where the guests usually reside.

As it turns to midnight, coffins and gallows materialize from the fireplace. The human remains exit their coffins—or fall down from their gallows— and transform into well-dressed party guests, who start walking up the stairs. All of the guests that arrive and greet Margarita have committed some kind of terrible crime when they were alive, including Madam Tofana, who provided poison to women who wanted to poison their husbands in the 18th century.

The party, then, seems to be a ceremonial tribute to evil in the world. The guests who Margarita meets are mostly real historical figures. Because they are all already dead, Bulgakov can get away with naming them specifically. He couldn't, for example, have written in Stalin as one of the attendees.


Margarita then meets a woman called Frieda, who is carrying a handkerchief. Koroviev explains that she carries this handkerchief because she used it to suffocate her child, which may have been the result of a rape, and since then, no matter how she tries to get rid of it, the handkerchief keeps reappearing on her bedside table. Margarita asks the whereabouts of the child's father. When Behemoth interjects that "it wasn't he who smothered the infant," Margarita pinches his ear and scolds him for interrupting.

Bulgakov's text is ambiguous about whether Frieda was raped or not. Assuming that she was, Frieda's story is a comment on the cyclical nature of evil—the way evil begets more evil.

The guests keep coming in great numbers, with the women naked except for ornate headdresses and the men wearing tailcoats. Margarita grows exhausted, mentally and physically, from greeting so many macabre guests one after the other.

The dress code emphasizes the ceremonial atmosphere of the occasion.

Eventually the stream of guests starts to slow. When the last few, including two vampires, have arrived, Margarita is transported back to the room in which she had prepared for the ball. Hella and Natasha massage her with blood, reviving her. Koroviev appears, reminding "Queen Margot" to fly around the rooms so that "the honourable guests don't they've been feel abandoned."

Blood is both a representation of the macabre and of vitality. Margarita's role seems to be chiefly centered around paying the guests respect and thereby honoring the role of evil in the world.

Back at the ball, Margarita sees that the musicians have all been turned into various animals, such as orangutans and mandrills. Behemoth performs a magic trick by turning champagne, spewing from a huge fountain, into cognac.

Behemoth revels the hedonism of the Ball. It seems he enjoys dazzling those around him, both alive and dead.

Koroviev tells Margarita that she has one last "appearance" to make. She climbs onto a platform in the ballroom. Woland, limping and carrying a sword, joins her as the crowd falls silent and a clock seems to strike midnight. Azazello holds a decapitated head on a platter—it's Berlioz's head, seemingly still living.

This represents the climax of the ceremony, and of Margarita's royal duties. Berlioz becomes the figurehead (literally) for everything that Woland wishes to expose: cowardice and false knowledge. This also explains why the head was missing from the funeral.

Woland addresses Berlioz's head, talking about Berlioz's theory that when a person dies they go into "non-being." He adds that another theory says each person will be given whatever accords with their faith. In that light, says Woland, he will grant Berlioz his "non-being." He then raises his sword, causing the flesh to slough off from Berlioz's head and a lid to open on its top. The head becomes a ceremonial cup.

The terrified Berlioz is granted a fate in line with his beliefs: but "non-being" as presented by Woland sounds more like a torturous state of meaningless existence rather than an actual cessation. Woland's quip, which is based on a passage in the biblical book of Matthew, essentially means that individuals can have the illusion of choice but that ultimately they are all governed by the same eternal laws.

Just then, a final guest arrives: Baron Meigel. Woland introduces him to the audience as "an employee of the Spectacles commission, in charge of acquainting foreigners with places of interest in the capital." According to Woland, the baron helped him arrange his trip to Moscow.

Baron Meigel works at the same institution as Prokhor Petrovich's empty suit (chapter 17). He is tasked with surveilling foreigners under the pretense of assisting them, hence why he is also being punished by Woland.

Woland, however, is suspicious of Baron Meigel, thinking he is a "stool-pigeon and a spy." Abaddon takes his glasses off and looks at the baron; simultaneously, Azazello shoots him. As blood spurts from the baron's chest, Azazello fills the cup (Berlioz's head). Woland raises a toast to everyone present, takes a sip, and passes the cup to Margarita. She too drinks the blood. Suddenly the entire ball melts away as a voice tells Margarita not to be afraid: "the blood has long since gone into the earth." Margarita is transported to a "modest living room." She goes out through the slightly opened door.

Abaddon's look at the baron brings him instant destruction in the form of Azazello's shot. The baron and Berlioz thus become the two sacrificial victims of the Ball, representing Soviet paranoia and "duty." The voice Margarita hears—Woland's— reinforces her sense of courage. By drinking from the same cup, Woland and Margarita seal their pact. She has assisted and now will learn if he is going to keep good on his vow to help her.

CHAPTER 24. THE EXTRACTION OF THE MASTER

Margarita finds herself back in Woland's bedroom with Woland and his entourage. Behemoth pours her drink, which restores a "living warmth" through her body. Suddenly hungry, Margarita gobbles up some skewered meat.

The title of this chapter suggests the master's retrieval from the clinic and more widely his salvation from his conviction that he is insane. The drink that Behemoth provides is unspecified by restores vitality throughout the chapter.

Margarita, feeling revived, asks whether Azazello shot Baron Meigel. He did, he replies, and boasts about his shooting skills. To show off his aim, Azazello shoots a pip of Margarita's choosing on a seven of spades card; what's more, the card is hidden by a pillow and Azazello fires the gun over his shoulder without looking. Behemoth tries to show his shooting skill, too, but, perhaps deliberately, kills the sleeping owl on the mantlepiece and breaks a clock.

It's no surprise that Azazello is a great shot given Woland's gang's supernatural abilities. Behemoth's "misfiring" is likely deliberate.

Margarita feels like it's time for her to leave and is newly embarrassed by her nakedness. She fears she may have been deceived and that she will receive no reward for being the hostess. When she thinks better of asking for help in finding the master, Woland declares how impressed they all are with her behavior—that she has passed the "test": "never ask for anything!"

The parameters of Margarita's test seem to be whether she can behave courageously without asking for anything in return. This passage represents a momentary doubt by Margarita as to whether the devil might have deceived her. By being selfless, Margarita has passed the test; her character thus provides a counterbalance to the instances of greed and self-interest in Book One.

Woland asks Margarita to make a wish. She asks for Frieda, one of the ball guests, to be granted peace and to no longer have to carry the handkerchief that reminds her of her dead child. Frieda appears, and it is left to Margarita to say, "You are forgiven." Frieda prostrates herself before Margarita and then vanishes.

It is not Woland's place, as Satan, to grant mercy—but he is able to give that power to Margarita. The forgiveness of Frieda exemplifies Margarita's courage and selflessness.

Margarita gets up to leave, but Woland insists that she demand something for herself. Without hesitation, she requests that "my beloved master be returned to me right now, this second." With a burst of wind, the master suddenly materializes in the room, wearing his hospital clothes.

Woland's decision to grant a second wish indicates that part of his plan is to facilitate the reunion between the master and Margarita. Coupling this with the narrator's earlier description of their love as being "eternal" and "true" gives the reader a sense of Woland's complex nature.

Margarita flings herself at the master, kissing his face tearfully. The master is extremely disorientated, believing that he is hallucinating. She tells him not to be afraid: "I'm with you." Koroviev gives the master a drink, which Margarita implores him to gulp down immediately. The drink brings the master back to his senses, and after a second glass "his eyes became alive and intelligent."

This is the reunion of the master and Margarita. His belief that he may be mad prevents him from recognizing the reality of the situation, with Margarita's affirmation of their existence helping him to orient himself in his new surroundings. The mysterious drink restores the master's vitality, as it did Margarita's.

Woland converses with the master, who says he has come "from the house of sorrows" and that he is "mentally ill." Margarita begs Woland to "cure" the master. The master explains to Woland that his fellow patient at the clinic, Ivan Homeless, told him about their meeting at Patriarch's Ponds.

This chapter represents the point at which the three distinct narratives—the Moscow visit, Pontius Pilate, and the lovers—start to merge.

When Woland asks why Margarita calls him "the master," the master tells Woland about his Pontius Pilate novel. Woland bursts into laughter, asking to see the novel. The master explains that he burned the novel in his stove long ago. Woland objects that this is impossible, stating that "manuscripts don't burn." On Woland's request, Behemoth holds up the master's novel, which it appears he has been sitting on.

Woland is being slightly disingenuous, because Azazello's quoting of the master's novel in chapter 19 shows that he and his entourage are already aware of it. The "manuscripts don't burn" quote is key, Bulgakov's way of saying that authentic art always survives. The quote itself became an oft-quoted line when the book was published, proving Bulgakov's point that, despite the obstacles, his art lives on. Many Soviet writers memorized their work to avoid detection by the authorities; indeed, Bulgakov is said to have known this novel by heart.

Margarita rushes to Woland, calling him "all-powerful!" The master clutches the novel, lapsing into "anxiety and uneasiness." Koroviev gives him another drink, which seems to steady his nerves. Woland asks Margarita to tell him "everything you need."

Woland's power here is clearly being used with a benevolent aim, underlying the fact that he can't be considered as a simply evil figure.

Margarita requests that she and the master be returned to "the basement in the lane off the Arbat, and that the lamp be burning, and that everything be as it was." The master laughs, telling Woland that someone else has been living there for a long time.

Margarita wants life to go back to how it was before, when she and the master were happy. She does not need material fulfilment, happy with a humble existence as long it's with the master.

Azazello makes Aloisy Mogarych, the current occupier of the master and Margarita's old flat, suddenly appear. Azazello accuses Aloisy, who is in his underwear and clutching a **briefcase**, of deliberately defaming the master so that he could take his apartment. In a fit of rage, Margarita scratches Aloisy's tearful face; Koroviev pulls her away. Woland magically turns Aloisy upside down and sends him out of the open window.

Aloisy Mogarych's physical appearance is an image of the terror of Stalin, his suitcase at the ready with the necessary papers in case of a visit from the secret police. Aloisy is guilty of greed, having manipulated his way into the master's apartment.

The master worries that the hospital staff will notice that he's missing. Koroviev, suddenly in possession of his hospital records, throws them in the fire. He also holds the house register for the master's apartment and, blowing on it, erases Aloisy from its records. When the master observes that "if there are no papers, there's no person," Koroviev agrees, and grants the master his own papers and the savings that Margarita has been looking after.

Koroviev uses his powers to destroy the symbolic representation of the master's "insanity," contributing to his overall salvation by then restoring the master's identity papers. The master and Koroviev's discussion echoes the one Koroviev had with Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy in chapter 9 regarding the thin line between "official" and "unofficial" persons.

Woland asks Margarita what she would like to do with Natasha. Natasha comes in and begs to remain a witch; Woland grants her requests and she flies out of the window. Then Nikolai Ivanovich appears, returned to human form. Woland dismisses him "with special pleasure," after Behemoth and Hella type an "official document" certifying that Nikolai spent the night at Satan's ball.

Margarita still has a degree of authority based on her service as the hostess at the Ball. Natasha's request is, in a way, another request for mercy—which is not Woland's area. Nikolai's absurd request for documentation for having attended Satan's ball is another joke at the expensive of overbearing Soviet bureaucracy.

With Nikolai gone, Varenukha appears. He requests to no longer be a vampire, which Azazello grants. Woland instructs his entourage to leave him alone with the master and Margarita. The master denounces his novel, but Woland insists that it will still bring him "surprises." Margarita tells the master not to "talk like that," saying she put her "whole life into this work."

Varenukha's appearance marks the beginning of a return to "normality" in Moscow, which gathers speed towards the end in chapter 27. It remains to be seen whether those affected by Woland's antics have learned anything from the experience. Margarita's comment is evidence of her courageous selflessness, highlighting the sacrifices she has made for the master and his work.

Woland gives Margarita a memento: "**a small golden horseshoe studded with diamonds**." Woland wishes Margarita and the master happiness and bids them goodbye. They leave with a **suitcase** containing the novel. Azazello summons the car with the rook to drive them home.

The horseshoe is a symbol of luck, a reward for Margarita's service. But the horseshoe is also traditionally associated with keeping evil away (based on the story of St. Dunstan). Perhaps then, the gift is a way of Woland telling Margarita that she no longer needs to fear evil. It's also part of an overall presence of horse-related imagery in the novel. The symbol of the suitcase is subverted here, signaling contentment and resolution rather than paranoid bureaucracy.

Just as Margarita is about to get in to the car, she realizes that she's lost **the horseshoe**. The narrator explains the loss by recounting events that have happened just moments before. These revolve around Annushka, the woman who spilled the sunflower oil that caused Berlioz to slip under the tram.

Annushka's reappearance is part of Bulgakov's design to link the novel's far-reaching parts together. This adds to a sense of fate and destiny.

It transpires that Annushka lives in the flat below the one occupied by Woland and his entourage. She watched in amazement as a series of distressed individuals fled apartment no. 50 through a broken window: Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, Nikolai Ivanovich, and Varenukha. She then witnessed Woland leave with his entourage, alongside the master and Margarita. Annushka found the **jeweled horseshoe** on the floor and stole it.

This sequence represents the return to "normality" mentioned earlier. Annushka's theft is another occurrence of the kind of selfish opportunism that has got so many Moscow citizens in trouble throughout the book.

Azazello tells Margarita and the master to wait for a moment. He finds Annushka and snatches **the horseshoe** back, but also gives her two hundred roubles. Azazello returns the horseshoe to Margarita. Woland and his entourage come to the car to see the master and Margarita on their way.

Annushka is a poor woman, hence Koroviev's seemingly charitable gesture. His record when it comes to money—and its transformations—suggests it could be a trick.

The rook delivers the master and Margarita to the basement flat in the Arbat district. Everything there is the same as it was before the two lovers had parted. The master falls into a deep sleep on the sofa as Margarita, weeping, begins to read from his novel. Feeling in awe of Woland's power, she kisses the notebooks and reads: "The darkness that came from the Mediterranean Sea covered the city hated by the procurator…"

The master and Margarita are restored to the blissful state they once knew. Margarita becomes the fourth character to channel the Pilate narrative, illustrating the novel-within-a-novel's importance and the indestructible authenticity of the master's art.

CHAPTER 25. HOW THE PROCURATOR TRIED TO SAVE JUDAS OF KIRIATH

The narrative returns to Yershalaim, beginning with the sentence read by Margarita at the end of the previous chapter. As the storm rages on, lightning intermittently illuminates the great temple through the otherwise "pitch darkness." The storm develops into a hurricane, wrecking the palace gardens. Pontius Pilate lies on the couch, drinking wine and growing impatient.

The storm is a signal of the magnitude of the events that have taken place. Pilate might not have realized the significance of executing Yeshua at first, but it is starting to dawn on him. The title of the chapter is ironic, as will become clear.

As the storm dies down, the hooded man who was present at the execution now comes in. He is Aphranius, the head of Pilate's secret police. The procurator makes his servants fetch dry clothes and hot food for Aphranius, who is soaked through. The two men drink a toast. Pilate asks about the mood of the city, which Aphranius describes as "now satisfactory," adding that the only guarantee in the world is "the power of the great Caesar."

Aphranius is a murky figure and suggestive of the secret police in the Moscow narrative. He occupies a powerful position in Yershalaim, overseeing its security from the shadows. He is a dutiful servant to the Roman empire.

Pilate complains about Yershalaim: "there's no more hopeless place on earth […] I get sick every time I have to come here." He especially hates the "feasts," which attract "magicians, sorcerers, wizards"; he cites Yeshua Ha-Nozri as the latest example of these "fanatics." He expresses a wish to return to Caesarea.

Pilate is trying to underplay the effect that his brief exchange with Yeshua had on him by likening to others who have come before. It is an attempt to absolve himself of his guilt, which he himself knows isn't working.

Pilate asks Aphranius about the execution. Aphranius explains that Yeshua had refused the offer of water; Pilate calls Yeshua a "madman." Aphranius reports that Yeshua said he was "grateful" and did not blame anyone for "the taking of his life." The only other thing Yeshua said was "that among human vices he considered cowardice one of the first."

Aphranius' recollection of Yeshua's actions buries itself in Pilate's psyche, exemplifying the courage to Pilate's cowardice. Yeshua would have known that a report would be sent to Pilate and so these words represent his message to the latter man.

Pilate requests that Aphranius bury Yeshua's body, along with the other executed men, in a secret location so that there will be no possibility of him acquiring "admirers or followers." They then move on to discuss Judas of Kiriath.

Pilate doesn't want there to be a shrine for Yeshua, but it's also an attempt on his part to make sure there as little reminder of Yeshua—and Pilate's decision—as possible. Pilate's feelings are more complicated than that, as will become clear.

Aphranius explains that Judas is to receive money from the palace of Kaifa for turning in Yeshua. The procurator says he has received information that Judas will be killed that night. Aphranius is surprised not to have heard this himself. Pilate refuses to tell Aphranius his source but adds that it is one of Yeshua's "secret friends" that will do the deed; according to Pilate, this friend will also give the money back to the high priest with a note saying, "I return the cursed money."

Pilate has in fact decided that he himself will kill Judas, showing that deep down he believes in the authenticity of Yeshua's beliefs and actions. Pilate is thus "the secret friend" that he refers to, and he wants to atone for his earlier cowardice. Pilate and Aphranius talk euphemistically on purpose, keeping the murder plot as secret as possible. Judas's story is a parable of greed, chiming with what's happened elsewhere in the novel.

The two men discuss the potential assassination of Judas, saying it will cause trouble for the high priest Kaifa and will "cause a very great scandal." Aphranius points out that it will be difficult to pull off. Pilate insists that he has a "presentiment" Judas is certain to be killed that evening. Aphranius: asks, "So they will kill him, Hegemon?" When Pilate says yes, Aphranius salutes him and bids him goodbye. Pilate requests a report later that night on both the burial of the bodies and on the Judas "matter."

Aphranius's question is not about any other people killing Yeshua, but a request for confirmation that Pilate is sure about what he wants to do. Pilate can obviously say he has a presentiment because it is his own intention to kill Judas.

CHAPTER 26. THE BURIAL

As twilight comes on, Pontius Pilate's headache returns slightly. He thinks to himself that he has "lost something irretrievably," but tries to dismiss the thought. Pilate whistles, causing his dog, Banga, to come rushing in, panting and licking his master. Banga's evident joy shows that the storm is over, as storms are the only things he fears. Meanwhile, Aphranius goes to the barracks and orders some of his men to go and bury the executed bodies.

Pilate's sense of loss is brought on by the finality of his decision to approve Yeshua's execution. He has lost his opportunity to act courageously. Banga represents loyalty, which is oddly what Pilate is starting to feel towards Yeshua.

Aphranius then visits a small stone house in the Greek area of the city. Here, he meets with Niza, a beautiful young woman that he knows. She whispers that her husband is not there; Aphranius goes inside and spends five minutes with her. Aphranius leaves.

The reader is not privy to the conversation between Aphranius, but presumably it is to arrange the events that follow. There is also the hint that Aphranius and Niza are lovers.

Niza gets changed and sneaks out of her house. Meanwhile, Judas visits the high priest Kaifa to receive his money for turning in Yeshua Ha-Nozri. Niza finds Judas near a market place and entices him to follow her, pretending that their meeting is a coincidence.

The air of subterfuge in this chapter echoes the atmosphere of duplicity and secrecy in the Moscow narrative. Judas' cowardly self-interest is behind his willingness to turn Yeshua over to the authorities, but also leads to his downfall. Bulgakov's story differs from the biblical account, in which Judas, wracked by guilt, commits suicide.

Judas wonders where Niza is going, as they had arranged to meet that evening. She says she didn't want to sit around waiting for him and is going out of town to listen to "the nightingales." Judas begs to go with her. In an atmosphere of secrecy, Niza takes Judas aside and tells him to meet her at the grotto by the olive groves in Gethsemane—and not to follow at her heels but leave some distance between them. Niza walks on.

Niza wants to lure Judas out of town, for reasons that soon become clear. The nightingale has associations with love and death, both appropriate in this instance.

Later, Judas arrives at the **moonlit** grotto, which seems completely deserted. Suddenly, two men appear. They threaten Judas, forcing him to tell them how much money he received from the high priest Kaifa. Begging for his life, Judas hands over the "thirty tetradrachmas." Just then, one of the men thrusts a knife through Judas' back all the way to his heart. A third man, wearing a hood, appears, and tells the other two not to "linger." He gives them a note to attach to the purse containing Judas' money.

This extrajudicial killing forces the audience to think about the morality of revenge—whether violence is justified for a greater good. A further quandary is whether Judas's actions, too, are justified: according to the biblical story, his betrayal of Jesus sets in motion Jesus's crucifixion, which in turn serves the purpose of bringing salvation to mankind.

Back at the palace, Pontius Pilate has his bed moved into the **moonlight** on the balcony. He tries restlessly to fall asleep. Around midnight, he takes off his cloak, puts down a knife that was attached his belt, and eventually drifts to sleep. Banga the dog sleeps on the bed next to him.

The knife gives the reader a clue as to the identity of the hooded killers in the previous scene.

Pilate sinks into a blissful dream. In this dream, he walks up towards the moon accompanied by Yeshua. Pilate feels that "there had been no execution," and that it would be "terrible" to execute "such a man" as Yeshua. They converse, debating intensely but respectfully. Yeshua states that "cowardice" is one of the worst vices; Pilate counters that it is *the* worst.

Pilate's innermost thoughts come to the surface while he sleeps, showing how deeply affected he is by his meeting with Yeshua. He clearly sees Yeshua as fundamentally good and senses the magnitude and meaning of his death. Pilate's subconscious corrects his error of judgment, erasing the decision to execute Yeshua while simultaneously revealing that Pilate knows that decision to have been cowardly.

Pilate, sobbing in his sleep, promises to Yeshua that he will throw away his career just to save Yeshua's life, "for the sake of a man who has committed a crime against Caesar." Yeshua tells him: "Now we shall always be together [...] Where there's one of us, straight away there will be the other!" Pilate asks Yeshua to remember him.

Pilate's dream is a way of playing out the alternative scenario in which Yeshua is pardoned. Pilate is re-evaluating the hierarchy in which he holds his authority, seeing it as—for all its pomp and might—hollow and meaningless in comparison to Yeshua and his message. Yeshua's comment is about loyalty.

Pilate is woken abruptly by the arrival of Ratslayer, who informs him that Aphranius has come to see him. Pilate instructs Ratslayer to fetch Aphranius and complains that "even by **moonlight** I have no peace." Aphranius reports that Judas has been killed and shows Pilate the bloody purse.

Pilate is often depicted as retreating into moonlight, a symbolic representation of his need to find peace. The conversation between him and Aphranius, as with the earlier one, is euphemistic—they both know who killed Judas.

Aphranius explains that he has not yet found Judas's body but assumes that he would have been killed out of town. Pilate wonders how a believer could be lured out of the city on the night of the Passover meal. Aphranius informs him that the purse was thrown over the wall of Kaifa's palace. Aphranius suggests that Judas may have travelled away from the city in order to hide his money, a theory Pilate likes.

Pilate's suggestion that Judas is morally compromised is based on the latter's betrayal of Yeshua. The return of the purse represents an attempt on Pilate's part to restore things to how they were before his decision to approve the execution, a subconscious attempt to turn back time.

Aphranius adds that no one at Kaifa's palace will admit to paying Judas any money, which Pilate suggests will make it "much harder to find the killers." Pilate says that Judas' death may have been suicide, and that rumor of this will soon get around the city.

The return of the money also lets Kaifa know that someone is aware of his complicity in Yeshua's death.

The conversation moves on to the burial of the executed bodies. Aphranius explains that Yeshua's body was no longer on the hill, cut down and stolen by Matthew Levi. Some of his men, continues Aphranius, found Levi cradling the body in a cave. Though Levi was very agitated, the men calmed him by allowing him to participate in Yeshua's burial.

Levi is completely devoted to Yeshua, who has become an all-consuming passion. Before meeting Yeshua, Levi was a tax collector; his transformation thus adds to the overall argument in the book against material possession.

Pilate says he "needed to see this Matthew Levi," not realizing that Aphranius has brought Levi to the palace. Pilate thanks Aphranius for "everything that has been done" and gives him a seal ring as a memento. He orders the men who were supposed to be surveilling Judas to be reprimanded, and those who performed the burial to be rewarded.

The punishment for Aphranius's men is nothing but a gesture, part of Pilate's need to be seen to follow appropriate protocol.

Once Aphranius is gone, Matthew Levi is brought in to see Pilate. He is muddy and disheveled, wavering on his feet. Refusing a chair, Levi sits on the floor and looks at Pilate contemptuously. Pilate has Ratslayer bring in the knife that Levi used to cut down Yeshua. Levi says that he needs it back in order to return it to the bakery from which it was stolen; Pilate insists that they will return it for him.

Levi feels contempt for Pilate because he feels that he is responsible for Yeshua's death. Pilate's decision to hold on to Levi's knife is perhaps part of a scheme to cover up who killed Yeshua, a prop that can be placed somewhere. Levi's gesture of sitting on the floor is his way of symbolically denying Pilate's authority over him.

Pilate orders Levi to show him the parchment scrolls on which he has written about Yeshua. Pilate can't make sense of what he reads, seeing "an incoherent chain of certain utterances, certain dates, household records, and poetic fragments."

This chimes with what Yeshua said earlier regarding the inaccuracy of Levi's writings. Pilate asks to see them under the pretense of exerting his authority, but in fact he wants to know more about Yeshua.

Pilate offers Levi work in the great library at Caesarea, which Levi rejects. Pilate then offers him money, which Levi also refuses. Levi says that Pilate wouldn't be able to look him in the face having ordered Yeshua's death. Pilate retorts that Yeshua had said that "he did not blame anyone" just before he died, and that, if Yeshua were in Levi's position, he would have accepted something from Pilate.

If Levi were to accept Pilate's offers, which are an attempt by Pilate to absolve his guilt about Yeshua's killing, he would be acknowledging the Hegemon's authority. Levi wants to mark himself out as fundamentally different from the society Pilate represents—as Yeshua did. Levi's refusal also marks him out as different from the corrupt Moscow characters.

Levi gets up suddenly and leans over Pilate's table, stating that he is going to "kill a man in Yershalaim." Levi says he knows he can't kill Pilate but will devote his life to killing Judas of Kiriath. Pilate informs him that Judas has already been killed and, furthermore, it was he, Pilate, who committed the murder.

Here Bulgakov reveals the identity of Judas' mysterious hooded killer—Pontius Pilate. This completely changes the surface meaning of the preceding chapter. Pilate kills Judas in an attempt to assuage his guilt for not preventing Yeshua's execution.

CHAPTER 27. THE END OF APARTMENT NO. 50

By the time Margarita finishes the chapter of the master's novel, it is dawn. She feels a deep sense of contentment. Meanwhile, a big group of investigators have been up all night looking into the strange events that have visited Moscow over the last few days.

Margarita has been rewarded for her courage with exactly the life that she longed for.

The investigators interview Arkady Apollonovich about his experience at the theater, who confirms that the magician's name was Woland. Investigators visit the Sadovaya Street apartment more than once but find no-one there. Nor is there any official trace of Woland's visit at any of the relevant government agencies. Meanwhile, Prokhor Petrovich is returned to his formerly empty suit, much to his receptionist's relief; but he knows nothing about Woland.

The apartment is always vacant when investigators try to go there, showing that Woland and his entourage can choose who encounters them and when. Both Arkady and Prokhor are returned to relative normality—similarly to the characters at the end of chapter 24. Prokhor's lack of memory is indicative of the general sense that the Moscow residents learn nothing from their experience.

The investigators are baffled: Woland seems to have vanished, along with the top tier staff of the Variety theater. They find Rimsky hiding in a hotel room wardrobe in Leningrad, but he is too scared to talk about what happened to him. They also track down Styopa, who is returning to Moscow on a flight from Yalta. They can find no trace of Varenukha.

The investigators are portrayed comically and shown them to be misguided and haphazard. This satirizes Soviet authority, suggesting it too is not as all-seeing as it thinks.

Investigators then head to Professor Stravinsky's clinic, figuring out that Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, George Bengalsky, and Ivan Nokolaevich Homeless have all been victims of Woland's gang. They interview Ivan, but he longer seems interested in helping to catch Woland or avenging Berlioz: his "eyes looked now somewhere into the distance." Instead, he daydreams about Yershalaim. The departing investigator wishes Ivan a recovery and says he hopes to read Ivan's poetry again soon, to which Ivan replies that he won't be writing any more.

Ivan is in a kind of stupor, partly because of Woland and partly because he is so deeply interested in the Pilate story. Ivan's commitment to stop writing poetry shows that it has dawned on him that his work is inauthentic and without value; this change is largely brought on by the impact of the Pilate narrative.

The investigators theorize that Berlioz was made to kill himself through hypnosis. When Styopa returns and tells his story, they assume that he too has been a victim of hypnosis. He is confined in a secure cell at his own request. Varenukha turns up and tries to lie about what's happened to him, scared of incurring Woland's wrath. He too asks to be placed in a cell.

Another instance of the popular hypnosis explanation for Woland's antics. The investigators are attracted to this theory because it is resolutely scientific and eliminates the possibility of any supernatural element being involved. Styopa and Varenukha's request to kept in cells is a representation of their cowardice.

Annushka is arrested for trying to spend foreign currency in a department store. The investigators listen with interest to her story about seeing people fly out of the fifth-floor window at her apartment block. She also tells them about **the jeweled horseshoe** and insists that she was paid roubles—not dollars—for giving it back. She is released.

Koroviev's motivations for giving Annushka the money are revealed to be insincere. It provides another example to the investigators of this strange money that is doing the rounds in Moscow.

Next to be interviewed is Nikolai Ivanovich, who shows the investigators his certificate recognizing his attendance at "Satan's ball." He tells them about what happened to him—becoming a hog, being flown by Natasha, going to "hell and beyond"—but leaves out that he had propositioned Natasha and requests that nothing is told to his wife. Spurred on by his testimony, the investigators discover that both Margarita and her housekeeper are missing.

Nikolai's absurd behavior satirizes Soviet era bureaucracy, demonstrating an overreliance on official documentation. He, too, has learned little from the experience, witnessed by his request to keep his wife in the dark.

Later that day, the investigators get a call attesting to signs of life at the Sadovaya street apartment. Apparently, singing and the sounds of piano have been heard coming from its windows, and a black cat has been seen basking in the sun on the windowsill.

Woland and his entourage are toying with the authorities, enjoying the game of cat and mouse.

The investigators descend on apartment no. 50 in large number. As they come up the stairs, Koroviev and Azazello calmly drink coffee and cognac, fully aware of what's happening.

Koroviev and Azazello's calm demeanors demonstrate that Woland and his gang have nothing to fear when it comes to the investigators. They have already shown themselves to have control of time and space, hence their laidback attitude.

The men go into the apartment from the front and the rear. They are shocked to find "an enormous black cat," who warns them that he is doing nothing wrong and that, furthermore, "the cat is an ancient and inviolable animal." The men try to ensnare Behemoth in a net but he is too quick for them.

Behemoth once again delights in dazzling and amazing his "audience." The net is a comically inept tool with which to catch Behemoth, lending the scene a slapstick quality (and thereby mocking Soviet authority).

A gunfight ensues between Behemoth and the investigators. Behemoth relishes the excitement; despite many shots being fired, miraculously no-one is hurt. Koroviev, Azazello, and Woland complain about the commotion from another room. Koroviev says: "Messire! It's Saturday. Then sun is setting. Time to go."

The gunfight is another kind of spectacle, ultimately pointless in terms of trying to catch Behemoth (or, on his part, to injure the officers). Like Woland and his gang's other antics, it's a show, and one that they demonstrably enjoy.

Behemoth sets fire to the apartment and climbs out onto the roof. The investigators flee the blazing building; as the fire spreads, so too do the other flats' inhabitants. As fire engines arrive on the scene, the people outside notice the silhouettes of Woland and his entourage flying out of the fifth-story window.

Behemoth's fire is ceremonial, symbolizing a kind of purging of Moscow. It also has clear connotations of Hell, which reminds the reader of Woland's true identity.

CHAPTER 28. THE LAST ADVENTURES OF KOROVIEV AND BEHEMOTH

Behemoth and Koroviev visit a currency store. When the doorman tells them that cats aren't allowed in, he instantly morphs into a "fat fellow" with a cattish face. Once inside, Koroviev and Behemoth praise the store as "wonderful!"

Currency stores were government-operated shops in which customers could pay for foreign clothes and fine good using only foreign currency. They were not intended for the general public as possession of foreign currency was banned; they were aimed at foreigners and high-ranking officials, or Soviet citizens that received some income from overseas (e.g. Bulgakov himself).

Behemoth and Koroviev go past expensive fabrics and shoes to the grocery section. An employee is skinning a salmon with a knife "much like the knife stolen by Matthew Levi." Without paying, Behemoth helps himself to some mandarins; a salesgirl comes over to try to stop him. Behemoth takes a chocolate bar, causing the other artfully balanced bars to go flying, before tucking into some herring.

The store is a place of abundance, full of delicious food that the general populace doesn't have access to do. It is therefore a symbol of greed and the corruption of the Soviet state. The knife is a neat touch by Bulgakov to link the Yershalaim and Moscow narratives.

The distressed salesgirl calls for the manager, who in turns calls for the doorman. As they surround Behemoth and Koroviev, the latter appeals to the gathering onlookers on Behemoth's behalf, saying "the poor man spends all day reparating primuses. He got hungry … and where's he going to get currency?"

Koroviev and Behemoth's antics here, though undeniably mischievous, highlight the fundamental contradiction of there being this site of luxury with the fact that many citizens struggle to get enough food. They are drawing out the latent feeling of being treated unfairly that resides in the Moscow population.

As the shop descends into chaos, Behemoth sets fire to the counter. The narrator then says that, according to later unconfirmed reports, Behemoth and Koroviev fly up to the ceiling and "pop" away like balloons. Exactly one minute later, they are at Griboedov's, the Massolit headquarters.

Behemoth continues with his ceremonial fire-starting, signaling that the book is drawing to a close and emphasizing his demonic status.

Standing outside Griboedov's, Behemoth and Koroviev talk sarcastically about the idea that someone in there is writing the next *Don Quixote* or *Faust*. They go to the restaurant, where the hostess asks for their identity cards to prove that they are writers. They quibble with her, asking whether Dostoevsky would need to bring his.

The point, of course, is that no-one Griboedov's is writing the next Don Quixote *or* Faust *because they're too busy enjoying the spoils of their state-approved cultural output. Dostoevsky is held up as an example of an authentic, uncompromising artist, and highlights the absurd insistence on bureaucracy and official status (which represents the extending arm of the state).*

The hostess insists that Koroviev is *not* Dostoevsky, and that Dostoevsky is dead. Koroviev continues, saying that "a writer is defined not by any identity card, but by what he writes. How do you know what plots are swarming in my head?" The hostess asks Koroviev and Behemoth to step aside to let one of the writers go past. Just then, the restaurant manager, Archibald Archibaldovich, instructs the hostess to let them in.

Bulgakov's implication here is that Dostoevsky is, in fact, not dead. His art—because it is true and real—lives on. Koroviev's point makes the contrast between people's private and public selves: the outward-facing "dutiful" citizen and the real thoughts harbored within.

Archibald shows Koroviev and Behemoth to the best table on the verandah and ensures that the staff wait on them hand and foot. Archibald, it turns out, has heard about the strange goings-on of the past few days and has guessed the identities of Koroviev and Behemoth.

Archibald thinks that he can avoid the fate that has befallen so many others and get the better of Koroviev and Behemoth. Though Behemoth has changed form, he still has a distinctly cattish appearance.

As Archibald goes to fetch the restaurant's two finest fish fillets for Koroviev and Behemoth, two diners at a nearby table discuss the rumor that the recent trouble-makers in Moscow are somehow bullet-proof. Just then, armed men arrive and open fire at Koroviev and Behemoth.

The fish fillets are intended as an acknowledgment of status, meant to placate Koroviev and Behemoth for just long enough to have them caught. The reader has confirmation that Behemoth is bullet-proof.

Koroviev and Behemoth disappear, sending the restaurant up in flames. The fire quickly spreads to the entirety of Griboedov House as the diners run for their lives. Archibald, meanwhile, has already left the building with two fish under his arm.

Griboedov is ceremonially sacrificed, signaling a kind of momentary purge of what it represents—cowardice, corruption, inauthenticity.

CHAPTER 29. THE FATE OF THE MASTER AND MARGARITA IS DECIDED

It's now sunset—Azazello and Woland sit on a stone terrace overlooking Moscow. Woland ask "such an interesting city, is it not?" Azazello replies that he prefers Rome. They notice Griboedov's burning down below, assuming it to be the work of Behemoth and Koroviev.

Azazello and Woland's discussion underscores the universality of the latter's powers.

Suddenly, Matthew Levi appears, saying he has come to see Woland. Woland tells Levi that he ought to wish him a good evening, but Matthew responds that he doesn't wish him a "good anything." Woland tells Levi that he is being absurd because he doesn't acknowledge "shadows, or evil either." Good and evil depend on one another, continues Woland.

This is a key exchange in the novel's overall argument that evil can't just be ignored away. Instead, it is part of a continuum with "good" that gives morality its meaning, reflecting the complexity of life itself. Levi, in his unflinching loyalty to Yeshua, wants to live in an impossible world that is only "good." This moment represents the first proper meeting point between the two distinct narratives and shows that Matthew Levi was rewarded for his devotion with the chance to serve Yeshua eternally.

Matthew Levi informs Woland that Yeshua Ha-Nozri has read the master's novel and asks that Woland reward the master with peace. "Is that hard for you to do, spirit of evil?" asks Matthew Levi. Woland asks why the master isn't being taken "into the light"; Levi replies that "he does not deserve the light, he deserves peace. Woland agrees to make it happen and asks Levi to leave.

This exchange is interesting because it suggests that Woland and Yeshua are not enemies, standing at the opposite poles of morality. Woland seems to respect Yeshua, even obey him as a kind of authority. The reader knows from Yeshua's comments on Levi from chapter 2 that the latter man is fervently loyal, perhaps explaining his simplistic hatred for Woland. Yeshua's instruction regarding the master's fate is much debated. It could be interpreted that the master doesn't deserve "light" because he no longer wants to practice his art; alternatively, "peace" seems to be exactly what the master wants, so perhaps it is ample reward in and of itself.

Matthew Levi adds that Yeshua's request extends to Margarita too; Woland agrees to this as well. As Matthew Levi disappears, Woland instructs Azazello to "fly to them and arrange it all."

Both Yeshua and Woland respect the love between the master and Margarita, and the sacrifices that the latter has made on its behalf.

Behemoth and Koroviev arrive, telling Woland that Griboedev's has been "reduced to ashes." Behemoth is holding a picture looted from one of the rooms under one arm, and a salmon under the other.

Behemoth is an opportunist and a trickster—and with his cattish nature, can't resist a high-grade fish from Griboedov's as a memento of his visit.

Behemoth and Koroviev say that they await Woland's orders, but he tells them there are none: "you have fulfilled all you could, and for the moment I no longer need your services. You may rest. Right now a storm is coming, the last storm, it will complete all that needs completing, and we'll be on our way." Behemoth and Koroviev disappear as a great storm gathers on the horizon.

Like the master and Margarita, Behemoth and Koroviev are granted "rest," implying that their services to Woland were not simply as willing sidekicks but as some kind of penance to his authority. The idea of "all that needs to be done will be done" recurs throughout the final chapters, heralding the book's end.

CHAPTER 30. IT'S TIME! IT'S TIME!

Margarita, still naked except for the black cloak given to her by Woland, and the master, still in his hospital gown, sit in their apartment, conversing happily. Both of them have a slight ache in the left temple. The master asks Margarita if she really believes they met Satan, which she does. Margarita is ecstatic: "how happy I am that I struck a bargain with him! Oh, Satan, Satan!"

Margarita is paralleled with Goethe's Faust one final time—both are characters that have made a bargain with the devil in the hope of something in return (in Faust's case, knowledge). The headache felt by both is similar to Pontius Pilate's, perhaps a bodily sign of proximity to either Woland or Yeshua. The chapter's title is a reference to the great Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin.

The master briefly tries to convince Margarita to return to her own life and not to ruin it "with a sick man." She cradles him, and he promises not to give into such "faint-heartedness" again. The master says they are both mentally ill: "Well, so we'll bear it together." Margarita is sure that Woland will fix everything for them.

The master is still concerned about whether their reunion is the best thing for Margarita—she clears this up and reaffirms the value of their love. The master's point about them being mentally ill is a more a representation of their outsider status, removed from society.

Just then, Azazello arrives, greeting the master and Margarita with "peace be unto you." Margarita is delighted to see him. As Margarita pours Azazello a cognac, he explains that Woland requests both the master and Margarita for a "little excursion." Also knocking back a cognac, the master realizes that everything about Woland and his entourage is perfectly real.

Azazello's greeting is humorous on Bulgakov's part, being a direct quotation from the biblical figure of Jesus. The master, in confirming to himself that Woland is real, differs from the rest of Moscow, which insists on explaining the devil away with science and rationality (e.g. hypnotism). The master, by virtue of his art, is shown to have the ability to sense what is real and what is not.

Azazello gifts the couple a bottle of wine from Woland, which he says is the same wine that Pontius Pilate drank. They drink a toast to Woland's health. Immediately, Margarita collapses; as the master too feels his consciousness slide away, he cries out, "poisoner."

The reader would be forgiven here for thinking there is something malicious going on (as does the master). It soon becomes clear that this is mistaken. In fact, the master and Margarita have to be divorced from their earthly bodies in order to attain the peace that Yeshua has granted them. The crumpled bodies of the poisoned lovers recall Romeo and Juliet.

As the master and Margarita lie poisoned on the floor, Azazello transports himself to Margarita's old house. Amazingly, Margarita is there too, waiting gloomily for her husband's return. She has a heart attack and falls to the floor, calling out for Natasha. "Everything's in order," says Azazello.

This is a disorienting and hallucinatory moment in the novel where Margarita is shown to be in more than once place at once, destabilizing the reader's sense of what is real and what is not. With her earthly body gone, she is no longer weighed down by the concerns of her old life (these might have been divorce or the scorn that comes with being unfaithful., etc.). Dying represents a restoration of purity.

Azazello returns to the master and Margarita's basement flat, where he revives Margarita with a few drops from the same wine. The master wakes up groggily. Azazello reassures them both as they call him a murderer. He tells them that it's time to go, as the storm is brewing.

The same wine that killed the lovers also restores their vitality. This scene emphasizes that the master and Margarita have a new beginning, a reward for their courage and devotion (and Margarita's participation in the Ball).

The master realizes that he and Margarita are dead, calling it in "intelligent" and "timely." Azazello says they're not dead, and asks if it's "necessary, in order to consider yourself alive, to sit in a basement and dress yourself in a shirt and hospital drawers? It's ridiculous!"

Azazello's comments add to the sense that the lovers are leaving their petty, earthly concerns behind (as symbolized by the master's clothes).

As they prepare to fly away, Margarita tells the master to bring his novel with them. He says there is no need—he knows it by heart. Azazello sets fire to the apartment. Three black **horses** await the group outside.

The master's memorization of the novel is representative of the way writers in the Soviet Union—those who didn't want to solely write propaganda—would learn their work, storing it mentally to prevent its detection by authorities. The horses are linked to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, found in the biblical book of Revelation. As in the bible, the signal a sense of ending and finality.

The master, Margarita, and Azazello soar over Moscow on **horseback** as the storm gets going. The master shouts to Azazello that he wants to "bid farewell to the city." They fly over Griboedov House before landing at Dr. Stravinsky's clinic.

The master wants to pay symbolic tribute to the places that had an impact on his earthly life.

The master and Margarita go into the clinic while Azazello waits outside. They find Ivan's room and go in; Ivan greets the master excitedly. The master explains that is leaving, which Ivan says he had already guessed, asking if he has met "him." Ivan promises not to write any more poems and says he wants to write "something else." The master tells Ivan to write a sequel to the Pilate novel, which he himself won't do.

Though on the surface Ivan has been becoming increasingly stupefied during the course of the novel, this actually represents a "retuning" of his perception in line with the reality of Woland, Yeshua and all that they represent. The master insists that he won't write any more of his novel, offering that task to Ivan in a mirroring of Levi's discipleship.

Ivan asks if the master found Margarita, and if she remained faithful to him. The master introduces her, and Ivan admires her beauty. Margarita kisses Ivan, calling him a "poor boy," and asks him to trust her that everything "will be as it should be." The master and Margarita bid Ivan goodbye and leave.

Margarita comforts Ivan just as she has comforted the master, contributing to her sense of virtue and care.

Ivan calls for the nurse. She asks if the storm is upsetting him, but Ivan actually just wants to know what has happened in room 118—the master's room. True to Ivan's premonition, the nurse confirms that the master has just passed away. Ivan reacts calmly and, raising a finger in the air, tells the nurse that he is certain that another person has just passed away in the city: "It's a woman!"

Ivan intuits the master and Margarita's separation from their earthly bodies. The nurse, of course, thinks his comment is just a manifestation of his fragile mental state.

CHAPTER 31. ON SPARROW HILLS

The storm is swept away without a trace and a rainbow appears over Moscow. The master, Margarita, and Azazello join up with Woland, Koroviev, and Behemoth, who are also sitting on **black horses**.

Bulgakov often uses the weather to represent transitional moments in the story. The storm and the rainbow can be read as the collaboration of good and evil—the rainbow needs the storm in order to exist.

Woland instructs the master and Margarita to bid goodbye to Moscow. The master runs to the edge of the hillside and looks at the city. He feels a mixture of emotions: a "wringing sadness" gives way to a "sweetish anxiety" and a "gypsy excitement." For a moment, he feels "deep offence" before finally settling on an "enduring peace."

The widening and heightening of the vantage point underscore the sense that the novel is drawing to a close. The master, just for a moment, considers going back to Moscow, perhaps to try again along the parameters of his old life. Enduring peace, though, is what he really wants.

Just for fun, Behemoth whistles, making the **horses** rear up and birds spring from the trees below. On a riverboat, several passengers lose their hats. Koroviev, not wanting to miss out, whistles even louder, bringing trees up by their roots and causing the riverboat to wash up on the bank.

Bulgakov is having fun here, playfully giving the reader one last demonstration of the group's supernatural powers. It's one final and comedic disruption of the status quo in the Moscow society below.

Woland shouts "it's time!" as the group rides up into the evening sky. Margarita looks behind her to see that the city has disappeared—"only mist and smoke were left."

The vapors into which the city disappears shows Margarita that her hold life is gone forever.

CHAPTER 32. FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL REFUGE

The night draws on as the riders soar through the sky, growing weary. Margarita looks at her travelling companions and notices that they have been transformed back to their original forms as "all deceptions vanished."

It appears that the forms of Woland and his entourage were specifically selected for their Moscow visit. The "vanished deceptions" don't only refer to this, but also to the letting go of the daily deceptions in Moscow life.

Koroviev is now a "dark-violet knight." Woland explains to Margarita that Koroviev once made a bad joke about "light and darkness" and has only just paid his debt. Behemoth's true form is that of "a slim youth [...] the best jester the world has ever seen." Azazello is "the demon of the waterless desert, the killer-demon." Even the master has changed: his hair is now white and gathered in a braid.

These are the true forms of Woland's entourage. Koroviev's comment is a reminder of the stretches of space and time that are involved in Woland's work. Behemoth's true form as a jester explains why he has taken such delight in using his cat-like appearance to startle his "victims."

The riders land on a **moonlit** platform. Margarita can see an armchair in which sits a "white figure," seemingly oblivious to their arrival. Beside this man, who is staring up at the moon sits a dark dog. Woland explains to the master that the man is Pontius Pilate (with Banga).

This moonlit platform represents the site of Pilate's personal purgatory, in which he relives eternally (until now, that is) his cowardly decision not to save Yeshua. Banga, ever loyal, is by his side.

Woland tells the master that "your novel has been read" but "it is not finished." Pilate has been on this platform for two thousand years, tormented by insomnia and with just his faithful dog for company, explains Woland. Mentioning that the only thing Banga fears is a storm, Woland remarks that "he who loves must share the lot of the one he loves."

The Master and Margarita *itself, then, draws to a close as the master's own novel would have done. It is down to the master to free Pilate, which underscores the sense that true art—as in the master's novel—has real consequences. Woland offers a neat definition of love, which applies well to the master and Margarita too, and is an argument against selfishness.*

Woland explains that Pilate constantly repeats himself, saying that **the moon** gives him no peace, and that when he does fall asleep, he dreams of going up a path of moonlight with Yeshua Ha-Nozri, but can never join the path. Pilate also hates his "immortality and his unheard-of fame," wishing he could trade places with Matthew Levi.

For Pilate, the moon, is inverted from being a symbol of peace and rest to representing the unrelenting mental torture brought on by his wrong decision. Pilate's reference to fame is probably tied to his ambiguous reputation throughout mankind.

Margarita screams at Woland to let Pilate go. Woland laughs, causes stones to tumble down the mountains. He turns to the master and tells him to finish his novel "with one phrase." The master, prepared for the task, shouts to Pilate: "You're free! He's waiting for you!" The master's voice is thunderous, making the mountains collapse.

It falls to the master to finish his novel by granting Pilate his freedom; the distinction between art and life is intentionally blurry. The whole scene represents a kind of psychedelic landscape.

A "boundless city" appears, and then the path of **moonlight** reveals itself. Banga runs down the path, followed by the amazed Pontius Pilate. Woland turns to the master to discuss his fate; the master mistakenly thinks he has to follow Pilate. Woland asks the master, "can it be that you don't want to go strolling with your friend in the daytime under cherry trees just coming into bloom, and in the evening listen to Schubert's music?" He explains that "the house and the old servant" are waiting for them.

Banga leads the way, rewarded for his patient loyalty by being able to help his dazed master find solace. Pilate will now be able to continue his conversation with Yeshua. Schubert can be seen as the archetypal romantic artist: supremely talented, ever-suffering—and a young death. The master wants only peace, with Margarita.

The master and Margarita walk down a path pointed at by Woland and bid him farewell. Woland and his entourage vanish. As the dawn rises, the lovers cross over a "mossy little stone bridge," listening to the "stillness" and "peace." They walk to their "eternal home," where, Margarita says, the master will be "visited by those you love" and she will watch over him. The master senses himself being set free, just as he had freed Pilate.

As Woland departs, clearly approving of the master and Margarita's fate. He is a complicated figure—if he were pure evil, surely he would want to stop them getting the peace they so desire. The particular set-up into which the master and Margarita go symbolizes their humble requirements from life—their rejection of the material.

EPILOGUE

The narrator describes what happens in Moscow in the aftermath of Woland's visit. Rumors abound of "unclean powers," which the "developed and cultured people" explain away as being the work of a highly-skilled "gang of hypnotists and ventriloquists."

In the final chapter, Bulgakov continues the comedic foolery of the authorities in Moscow as they attempt to explain what's happened. The reference to ventriloquism is specific to explaining away the talking cat, Behemoth.

Investigations continue. As well as Woland's own victims, a number of black cats are exterminated by the police. A few citizens with a passing resemblance to members of Woland's gang are detained mistakenly. A magician on a train is wrongfully arrested. The investigators conclude that the hypnotism/ventriloquism theory is the correct, ignoring any evidence to the contrary.

The slaughter of the cats demonstrates how far the investigators are from the truth.

The investigation is eventually closed, and years go by. Georges Bengalsky never returns to the theater, and weeps anxiously every spring **full moon**. Styopa moves to another town and becomes the manager of a food store. Rimsky takes a job at a children's marionette theater, still afraid of the Variety. All of the characters who encountered Woland remain deeply affected by the experience. True to Woland's prediction, Andrei Fokich dies of liver cancer.

Each character targeted by Woland is fundamentally changed; that is, they are scared to return to their old ways. But they don't expressly "learn" something—they express no moral revelation—making the reader question whether Woland was motivated by exposing evil or the thrill of chaos—or most likely, both. Andrei Fokich is probably the character least deserving of his fate in the book.

Ivan becomes a professor at the "Institute of History and Philosophy." Each spring **full moon**, he sits at Patriarch Ponds, on the same bench as when he met Woland. He feels sure that he "fell victim to criminal and hypnotists and was afterwards treated and cured." Yet still the spring moon makes him anxious.

Ivan occupies two worlds at once. On the one hand, he buys into the hypnotism theory, perhaps because it is the easiest way for him to regain a sense of sanity and move on with his life. On the other, part of him is still fixated with Woland and the Pilate narrative; that fixation becomes bodily, outside of the confines of his rational mind, whenever the same time of year comes around. This emphasis on seasonality exemplifies the cyclical nature of good and evil described by Woland in chapter 22.

After sitting on the bench, Ivan's spring **full moon** ritual takes him to a Gothic mansion in the lanes of the Arbat. Here he observes an elderly man with piggish features—Nikolai Ivanovich Bosoy—who stares at the moon longingly, regretting his decision not to fly off with Natasha forever.

Nikolai regrets trading in his ticket to the supernatural world and returning to the mundane and cowardly life that he lived before. Ivan doesn't know him, of course, but can sense that he and the other man have something mysterious in common.

Ivan then returns home, where his wife watches over him as he weeps in his sleep—the same thing every spring **full moon.** She gives him an injection which calms him down. Ivan always dreams of the execution at Yershalaim, but once he is given his medicine, he imagines Pilate walking towards the moon with Yeshua Ha-Nozri.

Ivan attempts to live a normal life but always struggles at this time of year, needing sedation just as he did in Stravinsky's clinic.

In this dream, Pilate implores Yeshua to tell him that the execution never happened. Yeshua promises that it didn't. Banga follows faithfully behind the two men as they rise towards the moon. As a river of moonlight spreads in all directions, Ivan encounters the master and Margarita. Ivan asks if "it ended with that?" The master confirms that "it ended with that, my disciple," as Margarita comforts Ivan. Then, light fills Ivan's mind entirely. Each time, he wakes up calm and well, not thinking of Pontius Pilate again until the next spring **full moon**. The novel then ends with the same words that the master earlier said would end *his* novle: "the cruel fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate."

Ivan's dream echoes Pilate's own dream about Yeshua, in which the latter two men agree that the execution never happened—Pilate's way of replacing his cowardice with courage. As Ivan's sedation kicks in, it informs the dream with a sensation of peace (linking it to the ending of the previous chapter). Margarita's comforting of Ivan is also a way of comforting the reader, drawing the novel to a close and implying that, though the book is mysterious and resists easy interpretation, yet everything the reader needs is in there. The closing lines in a way give the novel's ending to the master, suggesting perhaps that the entire story belongs to him and yoking together all of its different strands.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Howard, James. "*The Master and Margarita*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 11 Jan 2019. Web. 11 May 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Howard, James. "*The Master and Margarita*." LitCharts LLC, January 11, 2019. Retrieved May 11, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-master-and-margarita.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Master and Margarita* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Bulgakov, Mikhail. The Master and Margarita. Penguin Random House. 1965.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Bulgakov, Mikhail. The Master and Margarita. New York: Penguin Random House. 1965.