

RICHARD W. F. POPE

## Ambiguity and Meaning in *The Master and Margarita*: The Role of Afranius

Perhaps the most mysterious and elusive figure in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*<sup>1</sup> is Afranius, a man who has been in Judea for fifteen years working in the Roman imperial service as chief of the procurator of Judea's secret police. He is present in all four Judean chapters of the novel (chapters 2, 16, 25, 26) as one of the myriad connecting links, though we really do not know who he is for certain until near the end of the third of these chapters, "How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Karioth." We first meet him in chapter 2 (which is related by Woland and entitled "Pontius Pilate") simply as "some man" (*kakoi-to chelovek*), face half-covered by a hood, in a darkened room in the palace of Herod the Great, having a brief whispered conversation with Pilate, who has just finished his fateful talk with Caiaphas (E, p. 39; R, pp. 50–51). Fourteen chapters later, in the chapter dreamed by Ivan Bezdomnyi and entitled "The Execution" (chapter 16), we meet him for the second time, now bringing up the rear of the convoy escorting the prisoners to Golgotha and identified only as "that same hooded man with whom Pilate had briefly conferred in a darkened room of the palace" (E, p. 170; R, p. 218). "The hooded man" attends the entire execution sitting in calm immobility on a three-legged stool, "occasionally out of boredom poking the sand with a stick" (E, p. 172; R, p. 220). When the Tribune of the Cohort arrives, presumably bearing Pilate's orders to terminate

1. Michael Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: New American Library, 1967); Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Possev-Verlag, 1969). Michael Glenny's translation (hereafter cited as E) has been used because it contains the complete novel. All translated passages below are based on Glenny's very readable but far too free translation, though corrections have been made and indicated when necessary. Of the two versions of the full Russian text, the Possev-Verlag version (hereafter cited as R) has been used for this article because it so conveniently indicates in italics all the material censored in the *Moskva* edition (November 1966 and January 1967 issues), though the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* version has also been consulted in every case (Mikhail Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia, Teatral'nyi roman, Master i Margarita* [Moscow: *Khudozhestvennaia literatura*, 1973]). A cursory comparison of these two Russian versions revealed a significant number of differences in single words, phrases, sentences (occasionally), whole passages (occasionally; for example, the Mogarych addition on pp. 560–61 of the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* edition), order of the text (rarely), paragraphing (frequently), and punctuation (very frequently). Oddly enough, the Glenny translation seemed to follow the Possev-Verlag version except for the order of the text. It is impossible to say at this point which edition should be preferred. The reviewer in the *Russian Literature Triquarterly* (no. 9 [Spring 1974], p. 583) suggests that we should prefer the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* version, "since the word from Moscow is that there were many corruptions in the Western version, as well as punctuation changes etc., made by his widow." However, the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* version also contains "corrections and additions

the execution, he (the Tribune) speaks first to Krysovoi (Muribellum), who goes to pass on the orders to the executioners, and then to "the man on the three-legged stool," according to whose gestures the executioners arouse Yeshua from his stupor, offer him a drink which he avidly accepts, and then kill him by piercing him "gently" (*tikhon'ko*) through his heart with a spear. After Dismas and Hestas are also executed, "the man in the hood" carefully inspects the bloodstained body of Yeshua, touches the post with his white hand, and says to his companions, "Dead." He then does the same at the other two crosses and departs with the Tribune and the captain of the temple guard.<sup>2</sup>

Nine chapters later in part two of the novel, in the chapter written by the Master and entitled "How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Karioth" (chapter 25), we find Pilate after the execution impatiently awaiting someone, and that someone again turns out to be the man in the hood whom we now meet for the third time. It is only during this meeting that we learn that the mysterious "man in the hood," now referred to mainly as the procurator's "guest," is named Afranius, is the chief of the procurator's secret service, and answers the following noteworthy description:

The man was middle-aged, with very pleasant, neat, round features and a fleshy nose. The color of his hair was vague, though its shade lightened as it dried out. His nationality was hard to guess. His main characteristic was a look of good nature, which was belied by his eyes—or rather not so much by his eyes as by a peculiar way of looking at the person facing him. Usually the man kept his small eyes shielded under eyelids that were curiously enlarged, even swollen. At these moments the chinks in his eyelids showed nothing but mild cunning, the look of a man with a sense of humor. But there were times when the man who was now the Procurator's guest, totally banishing this sparkling humor from the chinks, opened his eyelids wide and gave a person a sudden unwavering stare as though to search out an inconspicuous spot on his nose. It only lasted a moment, after which the lids dropped, the eyes narrowed again and shone with goodwill and sly intelligence.<sup>3</sup>

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made from the dictation of the writer by his wife, E. S. Bulgakova" (p. 422). One wonders just what role E. S. Bulgakova did play and how many manuscripts with her additions did come down. M. Chudakova ("Tvorcheskaia istoriia romana M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1 [January 1976], pp. 218–53), though she appears to consider the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* text authoritative inasmuch as she cites from it, says nothing about the authenticity of the various printed texts. Clearly, the history of the text being what it is, until someone devotes a special study to this problem based on firsthand examinations of *all* the manuscripts, anyone wishing to do close work with the novel would be naïve not to consult both full Russian versions. As G. Struve points out in his article, "The Re-Emergence of Mikhail Bulgakov" (*Russian Review*, 27, no. 3 [July 1968]: 341), the story of the text "reads like something out of his [Bulgakov's] own fiction."

2. For the foregoing details, see E, pp. 176–79; and R, pp. 227–31.

3. E, pp. 295–96; R, pp. 382–83. Though absent from the Glenny translation, the words "totally banishing this sparkling humor from the chinks" were added by me, because they occur in both the Possev-Verlag and the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* (p. 718) versions. Bulgakov's Afranius (Russian Afranii) does not seem to bear any meaningful resemblance to or have been inspired by any of the numerous people bearing this name who are listed in A. Pauly's *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. Georg Wissowa. (Stuttgart, 1894), vol. 1, pp. 708–13.

Afranius, apparently, is the ideal amorphous secret police chief, with only his manner of suddenly transfixing people with a penetrating stare betraying that all is not sheer good will behind his face.

In the ensuing conversation between Pilate and Afranius about Yeshua and then Judas, a conversation which, as E. Proffer notes, “is a masterpiece of subtle psychology,”<sup>4</sup> there are two important points that should be noted. First, Afranius reports to Pilate details of the execution that we did not see happen in Bezdomnyi’s dream (chapter 16), where we as readers witnessed both the execution and Afranius’s role in it. In answer to Pilate’s question—“And tell me, were they given a drink before being gibbeted?”—Afranius says that they were but that Yeshua refused to drink (a detail that shocks Pilate, since he had presumably given orders that the prisoners be given some kind of soporific, which Yeshua apparently spurned considering it cowardly to accept it). Afranius goes on to describe how Yeshua said “that he was grateful and blamed no one for taking his life,” without specifying to whom he was grateful; said only “that he regarded cowardice as one of the worst human sins”; “kept staring at individuals among the people standing around him, and always with that curiously vague smile on his face”; and did “*nothing more*.”<sup>5</sup> In Bezdomnyi’s dream we are told nothing about what happened between the time when the prisoners were led off the cart and when Yeshua began to faint during the first hour on the cross. What we do see in the dream is that Yeshua, while already on the cross and immediately before being transfixed by the executioner’s spear, drinks avidly when offered the sponge, says nothing about cowardice being one of the worst human sins, and stares at no one, since he was unconscious almost from the first hour. But, significantly, he does do two things more which Afranius never mentions to Pilate: after Dismas complains about Yeshua being given a drink, Yeshua “turned aside from the sponge” and “tried to make his voice sound kind and persuasive, but failed and could only croak huskily, ‘Give him a drink too,’” thereby dying the way he lived, performing an act of kindness on the very threshold of death; and after the spear was run through his heart, Yeshua “shuddered and whispered, ‘Hegemon . . . ,’” dying, therefore, with Pilate’s name on his lips (E, pp. 177–78; R, pp. 228–29).

The second thing to be noted in this conversation is that, after asking Afranius to bury the bodies of the prisoners secretly and to stay with him even if he is offered promotion and transfer, Pilate raises the question of Judas of Karioth. He informs Afranius in a low voice, after first checking to make sure that no one is on the balcony, that he has “information” that “one of Ha-Notsri’s secret followers, revolted by the money changer’s monstrous treachery, has plotted with his confederates to kill the man tonight and to return his blood money to the High Priest with a note reading ‘Take back your accursed money!’” (E, p. 300; R, p. 389). Pilate then charges Afranius to “look after the affair,

4. Ellendea Proffer, “On *The Master and Margarita*,” *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, no. 6 (Spring 1973), p. 562, n. 21.

5. Italics mine. For this conversation, see E, p. 298; and R, pp. 385–86. Glenney’s use of the term “to be gibbeted” here, to render “*poveshenie na stolby*,” is an unfortunate one, since the posts referred to are the uprights of two-barred crosses, as traditionally recognized by the Orthodox church, whereas gibbets were posts with single arms from which one was hanged by the neck.

that is to take all possible steps for the protection of Judas of Karioth,"<sup>6</sup> and hands Afranius a purse full of money, purportedly to pay back some money he had earlier borrowed from Afranius.

We meet Afranius, at first identified only as "the procurator's guest," for the fourth and last time in the chapter entitled "The Burial" (chapter 26). Having dispatched fifteen men in gray cloaks to take care of the burial, he himself, wearing a dark-colored chiton with a hood, rides into the city, briefly visits the Fortress of Antonia, goes down into the Lower City to the Street of the Greeks where he spends about five minutes with the mysterious, young, married Greek woman Niza, then disappears into the feast day crowd and "where he went from there is unknown" (E, p. 304; R, p. 394). Shortly after her meeting with Afranius, we find Niza overtaking and passing Judas who is hurrying home, having just come from the palace of Caiaphas where he was presumably paid off. Niza guilefully persuades the infatuated Judas, who we now learn is her lover, to meet her at the grotto in the olive grove in Gethsemane, instructing him to go alone and under no condition to follow her immediately. Upon his arrival at the grotto, Judas is accosted by two men armed with knives who, upon learning he received thirty tetradrachmas for betraying Yeshua, murder him forthwith. At this point a third figure wearing a cloak with a hood—obviously Afranius—appears, gives the murderers a note to go with Judas's purse, and orders them to make haste, presumably in delivering the bundle to Caiaphas. The "man in the cloak" then meets his groom with two horses standing in a nearby stream, rides for a while in the stream before climbing the bank, separates from the groom, changes into the military uniform of a Roman officer by turning his cloak inside out and donning a helmet, and reenters Jerusalem heading once more in the direction of the Fortress of Antonia.<sup>7</sup>

Later the same evening, when reporting back to Pilate as he promised he would, Afranius's first words to Pilate are: "You may charge me with negligence, Procurator. You were right. I could not save Judas of Karioth from being murdered. I deserve to be court-martialed and discharged" (E, p. 312; R, p. 405). Afranius then shows Pilate Judas's bloodstained purse, given to him by an angry Caiaphas immediately after it was thrown into Caiaphas's palace with the note, and tells Pilate he does not know where Judas's body is but that he will look for it not far from the oil press in the Gethsemane olive grove, because Judas would not have allowed himself to be caught in the city but could not have been far from it if the blood money was thrown into Caiaphas's palace so soon. In answer to Pilate's surmise that Judas might have been lured out of the

6. E, p. 300 (translation altered); R, p. 389.

7. Like such novels as *The Last Temptation of Christ* (a novel with which the Judean chapters have many points of contiguity) and *Crime and Punishment*, *The Master and Margarita* is a very physical novel, both on the Judean and Moscow levels. For example, using a map of Jerusalem in Christ's time, one can follow Afranius's every movement as he prowls around the old city. One wonders whether such things as his trips to the Antonia—a fortress built by Herod the Great and used to house the Roman garrison—have any hidden meaning.

The wealth and accuracy of the physical detail in the Judean chapters is all the more surprising because, as V. Lakshin points out in his excellent article, "Roman M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," *Novyi mir*, no. 6 (June 1968), p. 287 (pace M. Gus, "Goriat li rukopisi?," *Znamia*, no. 12 [December 1968], pp. 213–20), Bulgakov never actually saw Jerusalem with his own eyes.

city by a woman, Afranius explains in some detail why this is impossible and tells Pilate that his guess is that Judas left the city on his own to hide the money and chose Gethsemane as the best place in the vicinity to hide something. At this point, Afranius reiterates his intention to submit himself to be court-martialed for having lost track of Judas and for failing to protect him, to which Pilate replies that he does not consider this necessary since Afranius did all he could and—at this point Pilate smiles—“no one in the world . . . could possibly have done more” (E, p. 315; R, p. 408). Afranius then relates to Pilate how the money was returned to Caiaphas just as the procurator had said it would be, claims he was told that no one in Caiaphas’s palace had paid out the money, and rejects Pilate’s last conjecture that perhaps Judas committed suicide. After Afranius’s description of how his men found Yeshua’s body guarded by Matthew the Levite and then buried it together with the other two bodies with Matthew’s help, Pilate thanks Afranius, commends his deputy who handled the burial, and rewards Afranius for his good work with a ring, after which Afranius departs from the scene for good.

At this point, the reader admits to a justifiable confusion and asks himself what is going on here.<sup>8</sup> The only thing that is really clear is that nothing is clear at all. Has Afranius lied to Pilate, and if so, once or twice (about the execution, about the murder of Judas, or both), or has he been consistently honest? We have a puzzle on our hands and one that admits of *at least* four possible solutions: (1) Afranius has been consistently faithful to Pilate; (2) he tells the truth about the execution but lies about the murder of Judas; (3) he lies about the execution but has been faithful to Pilate in the murder of Judas; (4) he has been consistently unfaithful to Pilate, lying to him both about the execution and about the murder of Judas. William Empson has written that it is only worth detaching the various meanings of a “literary conundrum” “in so far as they are dissolved into the single mood of the poem.”<sup>9</sup> This statement seems to apply equally well to prose genres and in particular to novels such as *The Master and Margarita*. Anticipating the conclusion that all four of the above mentioned possibilities *are* dissolved into the single mood and *are* integral to the overall meaning of the novel, it has been assumed that it is indeed worth detaching the various possible answers to our puzzle and each possibility has been isolated and scrutinized in turn below. The reader will soon see that the same set of facts has been arranged into four different patterns or solutions which obviously differ in degrees of likelihood. Though individual readers will probably be attracted only to one rather than several of these interpretations, they should at least consider the other possibilities, because, again anticipating, no one interpretation can be categorically demonstrated to be uniquely correct. We shall begin with the most obvious and best substantiated explanation.

If Afranius is consistently faithful to Pilate, then we must assume both that the actions and words attributed by Afranius to Yeshua at the execution are real ones and that Pilate, in one way or another, ordered the murder of Judas.

8. For a brief discussion of mystification as a deliberate device in *The Master and Margarita*, see Barbara Kejna-Sharratt, “Narrative Techniques in *The Master and Margarita*,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 16, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 3.

9. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd ed. (London, 1963), p. 138.



Turning first to Afranius's account of the execution to Pilate (chapter 25), there are several ways that one can account for this while assuming that Afranius is telling the truth. First, when Pilate discusses the execution with Afranius, he asks "Were they given a drink *before suspension* on the uprights?" (*pered pove-sheniem na stolby*),<sup>10</sup> to which Afranius answers yes but that Yeshua refused to drink. If Afranius is only referring to Yeshua's actions *before* being raised on the cross, a time when we did not see Yeshua at all, he is in fact not misrepresenting Yeshua's last actions on the cross (where Yeshua did drink avidly), as one is tempted to assume on first reading. It could be argued that Yeshua did say and do the things attributed to him by Afranius and that we were simply not informed of these things in the earlier chapter (chapter 16). Afranius, after all, would hardly dare misinform the procurator about a public execution, especially because he knows Pilate has sources of information other than himself. Moreover, one could use the fact that Matthew the Levite's scroll contained as its last disjointed entry the words "greatest sin . . . cowardice" (E, p. 319; R, p. 415) as proof of the fact that Yeshua really did say this, and, if this part is true, why should we doubt the rest of Afranius's account. Second, it is also possible that we did not witness the things attributed to Yeshua by Afranius because our account of the execution was dreamed by the poet Bezdomyi. As a novice, Bezdomyi was not yet ready to intuit the whole truth, whereas Afranius's account of the execution appears later in a chapter of the Master's novel, where, presumably, the whole story is known.<sup>11</sup> In any case, either or both of these explanations allow us to assume Afranius was telling Pilate the truth about the execution.

Turning now to the question of Pilate's role in the murder of Judas, there is good reason to believe that Pilate did order the murder using Aesopian language<sup>12</sup> and that the title of the chapter "How the Procurator Tried to Save

10. Italics mine. E, p. 298 (translation altered); R, p. 385.

11. For a different view, see the article by Edward E. Ericson, Jr., "The Satanic Incarnation: Parody in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *Russian Review*, 33, no. 1 (January 1974): 26, who argues—implausibly, I feel—that the Master's account is a distortion of the New Testament resulting from the fact that it was perceived "through the filter of diabolical influence." "The Master's novel is the moon-inspired parody of the story of the Sun of Righteousness," a story which "the Master perceives . . . only fragmentarily."

12. E. Stenbock-Fermor, in her highly interesting article, "Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Goethe's *Faust*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 13, no. 3 (Fall 1969): 309–25, adheres to the view that Pilate planned the murder of Judas as a "belated action," hoping thereby to obtain moral satisfaction and peace of mind, but she objects to including this sequence among the Aesopian passages in the novel: "The aim of the Aesopian language was to attack social and political ills without attracting the suspicion of the censor. Therefore I do not include in that category . . . the detailed planning of Judas' murder by Pilate and his chief of police. Those were such obvious hints at real events and persons, that even thirty years later the editors deleted whole pages" (*ibid.*, p. 324, n. 2). In the first place, however, not one word of the planning of the murder was deleted by the Soviet editors (see *Master i Margarita: Roman* [Possev-Verlag, 1969], pp. 387–90) and, even if one were to accept the above definition of Aesopian language, one could actually argue that in this case Bulgakov used it very successfully, attacking planned political murder in such a general way as to not attract the censor's attention. In the second place, the above definition of Aesopian language seems needlessly restrictive and one should perhaps prefer the following definition as found in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*: "conveying an innocent meaning

Judas of Karioth" is an ironic one. Pilate had good reason to want Judas murdered and the blood money returned to Caiaphas with the offensive note. Judas, who like his analogue, Baron Maigel, betrays other men for money and whom Pilate refers to as a "dirty traitor" (*griaznyi predatel'*)<sup>13</sup> and a "scoundrel" (E, p. 315; R, p. 409), has played a man whom Pilate wanted to save into the hands of the police. Furthermore, Caiaphas, in thwarting Pilate's plan for saving Yeshua, has fanned the procurator's longstanding hatred to the point where Pilate even threatens him with armed Roman military intervention and swears to him that ". . . henceforth you shall have no peace! Neither you nor your people" (E, p. 38; R, p. 48). Thus, in the scene at the end of the chapter "How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Karioth," where Pilate and Afranius discuss Judas, one might well expect Pilate to be out for revenge, attempting to exonerate himself from blame for the role he played in the death of Yeshua, and this may really be what he does. When, for example, he asks Afranius if Judas has any special passion, Pilate seems to be wondering what is Judas's Achilles heel. Pilate, according to this line of reasoning, then goes on to explain to Afranius exactly what he would like to see happen, disguising it as information from a secret source to the effect that Judas is to be murdered and his blood money returned to the high priest with the damning note. Afranius begins to get the message and when Pilate asks him "Do you think the High Priest will be pleased at such a gift on Passover night?" Afranius replies with a smile, "Not only will he not be pleased . . . but I think, Procurator, that it will create a major scandal" (E, p. 300; R, p. 389). Afranius, mentally weighing the task he has been confronted with, points out that it will not be an easy job. Pilate, however, repeats firmly, "Nevertheless he will be murdered tonight," stressing that he has a presentiment and that his presentiments are never wrong (E, p. 301; R, p. 389). Rising to leave, Afranius makes sure he has understood Pilate aright, asking him straightforwardly, "You say he will be murdered, hegemon?" "Yes," answers Pilate, "and our only hope is your extreme efficiency" (E, p. 301; R, p. 390), an answer which, while implying on the one hand that Afranius alone can save Judas, also implies that Judas is to be murdered, that it will be a diffi-

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to an outsider but a concealed meaning to an informed member of a conspiracy or underground movement." It is in this sense that I use the term here, the informed member in this instance being not the reader but Afranius, and the outsider not the censor but anyone who might be eavesdropping on the conversation, perhaps even the reader.

Most critics, incidentally, have assumed that Pilate did order the murder of Judas. In addition to Stenbock-Fermor, see A. Vulis, "Posleslovie" to *Master i Margarita: Roman*, in *Moskva*, 11 (1966): 129; V. Lakshin, "Roman M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," pp. 298 and 307; L. Skorino, "Litsa bez karnaval'nykh masok: Polemicheskie zametki," *Voprosy literatury*, 6 (June 1968): 30; A. Krasnov, "Khristos i master: O posmertnom romane M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," *Grani*, 72 (1969): 170; D. G. B. Piper, "An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 7, no. 2 (April 1971): 140-41; A. C. Wright, "Satan in Moscow: An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *PMLA*, 88, no. 5 (October 1973): 1169; E. K. Beaujour, "The Uses of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov," *Slavic Review*, 33, no. 4 (1974): 704, n. 21; Edythe C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," *Russian Review*, 34, no. 4 (October 1975): 405.

13. E, p. 32 (translation altered); R, p. 42.

cult job, and that only Afranius will be able to bring it off. Just before Afranius exits, Pilate gives him the purse full of money, which according to this line of reasoning represents payment for the job, and he instructs Afranius to report back to him on the matter later that night.

Any doubt that this scene represents Pilate charging Afranius to kill Judas would seem to be dispelled by the scene that immediately follows it. Here we see a fearful and exhausted Pilate coming to the realization that, in the morning, he had irretrievably lost something. He now wishes “to compensate for that loss with some trivial and worthless and, more important, belated actions” and tries “to persuade himself that his actions this evening were no less significant than the sentence that morning.”<sup>14</sup> He fails to persuade himself, of course, realizing that avenging Yeshua’s death cannot undo it; but, even so, the revenge gives him some satisfaction, however little. The “wolfish eyes” (E, p. 312; R, p. 405) that Pilate turns upon Afranius while the chief of police gives his account of the Judas affair betray Pilate’s true feelings, and, later, when he tells Matthew the Levite that he killed Judas—“I did it. . . . It is not much, but I did it” (E, p. 321; R, p. 416)—his eyes gleam with pleasure and he rubs his hands just as he did when he told Afranius that Judas would be murdered. A final point in this scene worth noting is the fact that Pilate maintains a degree of irony in his language even when telling Matthew not to be jealous about not having been the one who murdered Judas, pointing out that Judas had “other admirers” besides Matthew (E, p. 321; R, p. 416).

The only question at this point is why would Pilate bother to order Judas’s murder so cryptically instead of simply saying it right out? The answer is that Pilate obviously chose this method not out of any love of wit and irony but out of his paranoid fear of being overheard and denounced to Caesar for ordering the murder of a man who had helped capture a fanatic (a fanatic who had made seditious statements to the effect that Caesar’s rule would be supplanted by a kingdom of truth and justice). Pilate’s fear of being overheard in the arcade of the palace of Herod the Great, by people who might denounce him to Tiberius (whose head Pilate sees in a vision intoning the words: “The law pertaining to high treason . . .” [E, p. 30; R, p. 39]), is established as early as the scene in which he interviews Yeshua—Pilate seems to fear not only Caiaphas’s spies but also his own soldiers and secretary. For example, instead of advising Yeshua directly on how to answer so as to help himself, Pilate hides his eyes with his hand and surreptitiously throws Yeshua “a glance that conveyed a hint” and then gives him a verbal hint: when Yeshua says that Judas asked him his views on government, Pilate says, “And so what did you say?” adding with a note of hopelessness in his voice, “Or are you going to reply that you have forgotten what you said?” (E, pp. 31–32; R, p. 41). After Yeshua’s incriminating answer, Pilate loudly affirms the perfect government of Tiberius and then asks to be left alone with the “criminal.” Even when alone with Yeshua, questioning him on the kingdom of truth, Pilate feels obliged to establish his loyalty to Caesar and yells out “Criminal! Criminal! Criminal,” “barking out the words so that they would be heard in the garden” (E, p. 33; R, p. 42). After speaking with Caiaphas, Pilate goes into the palace and briefly confers with Afranius, who

14. E, pp. 302–3 (translation altered); R, p. 391.



presumably has been present in the background throughout both the interview with Yeshua and the one with Caiaphas, which brings us to another point.

It seems highly likely that Pilate is most afraid of his own chief of police, a man with whom he drinks loud toasts to Caesar, whom he treats very kindly, and whom he praises and rewards lavishly. Perhaps Pilate uses Aesopian language as a means to determine Afranius's position, leaving himself an out if he feels Afranius is not going along with him but is, rather, going to denounce him to Caesar or use this opportunity to blackmail him. Perhaps it is as a final test of Afranius's loyalty that, just before the question of Judas is brought up, Pilate asks Afranius if he would stay with him even if offered promotion and transfer, pointing out that Afranius would be well rewarded in other ways. Pilate is certainly aware that Afranius, by virtue of his position in the imperial service, is not answerable only to Pilate but also directly to Rome. The idea that Pilate is mainly afraid of Afranius is strengthened by the fact that, once he is sure of Afranius, he is not afraid to tell Matthew the Levite out loud that he killed Judas.

Whether or not Pilate actually fears Afranius or just spies in general, such as the one he warns Caiaphas not to send to spy on him (E, p. 37; R, p. 48), Afranius in his turn also seems aware of the fact that the walls have ears. He obviously realizes that when something is being discussed, which may not be in the best interests of Caesar, one cannot be too careful. Having understood that his orders are to assassinate Judas, and realizing that he too will thereby be guilty of having acted against Caesar's best interests, Afranius, when he arrives back to report on the murder he has just supervised, acts out another involved charade with Pilate rather than simply reporting the details of the assassination as it actually happened. Afranius hopes in this manner not to disclose any evidence that might incriminate him later if trouble arises. He is careful not to disclose the exact circumstances of the murder—the reader knows more about it than the Judean procurator does—and only through an involved question and answer process does Pilate manage to get most of the information he desires. Anyone listening in on the conversation would assume Pilate had actually ordered that Judas be protected.

According to the foregoing interpretation, one can conclude that Pilate ordered the murder of Judas as an act of vengeance calculated, at least partially, to assuage his guilty conscience and to punish Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, that Afranius did faithfully carry out his orders, and that the two of them masked their intentions and actions by using Aesopian language. Even in the light of this interpretation, the chief of the secret police is a sinister character. His sinisterness results not from any hint of double dealing with Pilate or of the demonic, but from such things as his eyes, his sudden, penetrating stare, his hood, his reversible cloak, his lurking habits, his network of connections, his "extreme efficiency" and near omniscience of the Judean scene, his acceptance of money and rewards (bribes?), his willingness to murder on orders, his concealment of certain details of the murder, and last but not least his strange relationship with Pilate which results in his betrayal of Caesar's best interests. It is disconcerting, to say the least, when a highly placed government official, through flattery and rewards, induces the local secret police chief to betray the imperial interests. The suggestion that Pilate fears Afranius and that Afranius

can be bought is particularly significant in that it raises the specter of the unbridled power of secret police organizations and their potential evil. The duplicitous Afranius holds the future of the local head of state in his hands. Still, in conclusion, it must be admitted that, of the four interpretations to be considered, this one puts Afranius and his organization in the least unfavorable light.

A second possible interpretation of Afranius's actions and role is to assume, as we did above, that Afranius told Pilate the truth about the execution but that he thwarted Pilate's desires in the case of Judas. If this were the case, one would, of course, interpret the chapter title "How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Karioth" and the conversations between Pilate and Afranius straightforwardly with no question of irony. A case would then have to be made first for Pilate's desire to save Judas and second for Afranius's motive in destroying Judas.

It can be argued that Pilate had good reason to want to save Judas, even though he clearly disdains the traitor. Pilate loathes the city of Jerusalem and is happy to spend as little time there as possible. One of his main complaints in his diatribe against Caiaphas is that Caiaphas is responsible for the fact that Pilate himself had to come to Jerusalem to take charge (E, p. 38; R, p. 49). If Judas is murdered, both Pilate and Afranius expect "a major scandal" (E, p. 300; R, p. 389) and, as a consequence of such a scandal, the procurator's stay in Jerusalem will either turn into a lengthy one, which is the last thing he wants, or he will be recalled in disgrace for allowing trouble to break out. After hearing Afranius's account of the murder, Pilate can at least take solace in the fact that "we did our best to protect the scoundrel" and "no one in the world . . . could possibly have done more" to prevent the murder than Afranius (E, p. 315; R, pp. 408–9). If we were to assume that Pilate's conversation with Afranius is an ironic one, as we did above, how could we account for this use of the word "scoundrel"? If Pilate is choosing his words so as not to alert possible spies that he is anti-Judas, why would he lapse and call him a "scoundrel" here and a "dirty traitor" earlier? These details clearly undermine our ironic interpretation. It seems more likely that Pilate, though openly disdaining Judas, had decided to do his duty and protect him. This explains his admonishing Afranius to reprimand the secret service men whose alleged negligence made the assassination of Judas possible but not to reprimand them severely. After all, though Pilate has done his duty and tried his best to save Judas, now that Judas is dead Pilate does not have to be sorry that the man directly responsible for putting Yeshua into the hands of the police and thus forcing Pilate to do something distasteful and cowardly has come to grief.

That Pilate really ordered Judas protected can be further surmised from the fact that Afranius, while telling Pilate he was unable to prevent the murder, feels Pilate's eyes upon him like those of a wolf, and from the insistence with which Afranius tries to throw Pilate off the track when he is trying to guess how the murder was performed, even going so far as to tell Pilate he is wrong when Pilate guesses correctly. Why would Afranius throw Pilate off the track and confuse him if his real intent were to inform Pilate of what actually happened by means of Aesopian language? Even if Afranius were being cryptic lest one of Caiaphas's spies overhear him, which is unlikely because he has made sure there was no one else but Banga on the balcony, would not his insistence on

submitting himself to be court-martialed, his offense at Pilate's question "But are you certain he was killed?" (E, p. 312; R, p. 405), and his categorical rejection of all Pilate's correct conjectures have been carrying the game a little far? There are many little details which make it difficult to read this passage simply as a charade in which Afranius is trying to tell Pilate how he carried out his orders. Thus, from this point of view, it seems clear that Pilate really did give orders for Judas's protection and that he simply lied outright to Matthew the Levite when he claimed to have killed Judas, doing so to exonerate himself morally in the eyes of the only completely righteous man in the book other than Yeshua. This second act of cowardice is hardly out of keeping with Pilate's craven nature.

Turning now to Afranius's motive for murdering Judas, there are several ways of accounting for it. One possibility is that Afranius may have been a double agent—a secret police chief in the Roman imperial service and a secret Christian and follower of Yeshua—who as such wished to avenge his master's death (as did Matthew the Levite), to foment trouble for the established Jewish religion in Judea, and to see the high priest of the Jews brought low. As Pilate himself reminds us, even though no followers or disciples of Yeshua had yet been uncovered, "we nevertheless cannot be certain that he had none" (E, p. 298; R, p. 386). Perhaps not only Afranius but also the people in the crowd, whom Yeshua kept trying to look in the eyes before his execution, were secret followers.

Afranius's actions during the execution tend to strengthen the possibility that he was a devotee of Yeshua. He attends the execution in his official capacity, as a highly placed secret follower of Yeshua might have done; sits on a three-legged stool (mentioned twice here and again when we meet Afranius in chapter 25—a Trinitarian allusion?); orders that Yeshua be given a drink before he dies; gives the signal for him to be mercifully put to death ending the ordeal (whether or not he is following Pilate's orders perhaps transmitted by the Tribune); and after Yeshua's death touches the post of his cross with his *white* hand, a detail not mentioned elsewhere but in the Christian tradition symbolizing purity. Another secret follower, Matthew the Levite, it will be remembered, also wanted to kill Yeshua before the execution even began. Possibly the executioner who "gently" pierced Yeshua through the heart is yet another secret follower and colleague of Afranius. After the execution Afranius departs and reports back to Pilate, leaving the body at the site of the execution where it could be (and actually was temporarily) stolen by disciples—a strange oversight for a secret police chief "who never makes a mistake" (E, p. 317; R, p. 411), but an understandable move for a disciple who hoped one of his colleagues, such as Matthew, would be able to appropriate the body. If we accept this line of reasoning, it presents a rather nice irony that Pilate's mysterious information to the effect that one of Yeshua's secret followers was going to kill Judas that night turns out to have been exactly correct.

There are, however, grounds in the novel for concluding that Afranius was not a secret Christian—for example, could even he really have masked his inner agitation so perfectly as to be able to sit through the whole execution "in calm immobility, occasionally out of boredom poking the sand with a stick" (E, p. 172; R, p. 220). Thus, a second explanation of his motive must be considered,

the more so since this second possibility is generated (as are so many answers in this book) out of the structure of the novel. If, as we would expect from the parallelism of the novel, there be a demonic presence in the Judean chapters analogous to that in the Moscow chapters, that presence is surely connected with Afranius. Though the possibility of Afranius being an instrument of the Devil will be discussed more fully below, suffice it for now to point out that Afranius's action in murdering Judas thwarts Pilate's desire to protect Judas and avoid more trouble, thwarts Matthew the Levite's desire to kill Judas, thwarts Caiaphas inasmuch as he loses a trusty informer, and in general promises nothing but trouble both for the Romans and the Jews and a "major scandal." What could be more devilish? Will the scandal perhaps be similar to the scandal set off in Moscow by Berlioz's death? If Afranius's goal was to foment discord and strife, he could hardly have taken a more promising initiatory action.

Whether Afranius was a secret Christian and double agent, or even in league with the Devil, the fact still remains that, in this second interpretation of his role and actions, whereby he tells Pilate the truth about the execution but lies to him about the murder of Judas, we have a very sinister situation. The secret police chief is acting contrary to the desires of the head of state and ultimately to the interests of Caesar himself. Here Afranius is clearly duplicitous and possibly even demonic, and his organization, the secret police, is not only seen to have almost unbridled power, but still more significantly is seen to be beyond state control, which makes it a very frightening organization indeed.

A third possible way of interpreting Afranius's actions in the novel is to assume, as we did in interpretation one above, that he faithfully carries out Pilate's Aesopian order to assassinate Judas but that he was not honest with Pilate concerning the execution. Since the case for Pilate's desiring to have Judas murdered has been presented above, let us turn to the question of Afranius's report to Pilate on the actual execution.

It is possible, because we as readers did not witness the things described by Afranius to Pilate, that Afranius made up the whole thing. This would fit well with the conjecture that Afranius was a secret Christian. He could, for example, have known of the words about cowardice being one of the worst human sins not only from having read Matthew's scroll in his capacity as chief of police, but also because he was intimately acquainted with Yeshua's teachings, and he could have told Pilate that Yeshua uttered these words at the execution in order to punish the already guilt-ridden Pilate, who is clearly agonizing precisely over his own cowardice.

More likely, however, Afranius was reporting something that actually happened during the early part of the execution, which we did not see, and his dishonesty with Pilate is not a sin of commission but one of omission. In answer to Pilate's request, "Now tell me about the execution" (E, p. 298; R, p. 385), Afranius describes Yeshua's words and actions only before he was raised on the cross; and when the agonizing Pilate asks in a "husky voice" (*khriplyi golos*), "Nothing more?" Afranius replies categorically, "Nothing more" (E, p. 298; R, p. 386). In actual fact, however, there *was* something more to tell about the execution and the question arises: why did Afranius fail to mention such important details as Yeshua's last act of kindness on the cross and the fact that he died with Pilate's name on his lips? Obviously this last detail could have

had great significance for the grieving, conscience-stricken Pilate, who might have convinced himself that Yeshua was going to thank him for ordering that the execution be mercifully terminated or even that Yeshua was going to forgive him.<sup>15</sup>

All through the passage where Pilate and Afranius discuss the execution, Afranius appears to be playing some kind of a cruel game with Pilate. As soon as Pilate starts to broach the subject of the day's events, Afranius fixes him with his "peculiar stare" (E, p. 297; R, p. 385), as if he sensed something suspicious about this turn in the conversation. Pilate, on the other hand, is forced to act as casual as possible, lest Afranius get the idea that he is more interested in the subject than he ought to be, and tries to conceal his impatience by "gazing wearily into the distance, frowning with distaste and contemplating the quarter of the city which lay at his feet," until Afranius's stare finally fades and "his eyelids lowered again" (E, p. 297; R, p. 385). When Pilate asks if the prisoners were given a drink before being suspended on the crosses, Afranius, apparently making sport of Pilate, closes his eyes and says "Yes. But he refused to drink" (E, p. 298; R, p. 385). When Pilate asks which one he means, Afranius, still playing the game and knowing full well he has not said whom, exclaims (*voskriknut'*) "I beg your pardon, hegemon! . . . Didn't I say? Ha-Notsri!" (E, p. 298; R, p. 385). Afranius maintains this cat-and-mouse behavior throughout the rest of the conversation, giving Pilate another of his strange penetrating stares when the procurator brings up the subject of Judas of Karioth, again in the most casual and disinterested manner he can put on ("Now for the second question. It concerns that man—what's his name?—Judas of Karioth" [E, p. 299; R, p. 387]).

Perhaps the best way to account for Afranius's strange behavior is to return to the question of his association with demonic forces. One does sense a mysterious presence throughout the Judean chapters of the novel, and one wonders, for example, what is Pilate's "casual, vague, and unreliable" source of information that cannot be doubted concerning the coming murder of Judas (E, p. 300; R, p. 389). Although Pilate may simply have invented this as part of his Aesopian presentation of the order to kill Judas, it is also possible that someone really did inform Pilate or at least put the idea into his head. Who could have done this? If we have recourse to the Moscow plane of the novel and ask ourselves who predicted future deaths and all their details, the answer is, of course, Woland, who correctly predicted the death of both Berlioz and the bartender Andrei Fokich Sokov. Thus, it might have been Woland who passed the information to Pilate or stimulated him to think it up for himself, the more so because, as Woland himself tells us, he was present in Jerusalem on the day of the execution: "I was there myself. On the balcony with Pontius Pilate, in the garden when he

15. Although Yeshua's last word—"Hegemon . . ."—may simply have been invoked by the words "Hail to the merciful hegemon!" (*Slav' velikodushnogo igemona!*) said by the executioner as he kills him, it likely has more symbolic meaning. If Yeshua had been answering the words "Hail to the merciful hegemon!" (which do not beg any answer here), he would have said "*Slav' igemona*" or even elliptically just mumbled ". . . *igemona*," whereas what he actually says is "Hegemon . . ." (*Igemon . . .*; nominative case), which suggests that he was thinking about Pilate or perhaps even trying to address him (E, p. 178; R, p. 229).



talked to Caiaphas and on the platform, but secretly, incognito so to speak . . .” (E, p. 45; R, p. 57). Although it is possible that Woland was present as the mysterious swallow flitting around the arcade and the balcony<sup>16</sup> (though a swallow is not a common devil’s familiar) or as the mysterious column of dust that swirls up to Yeshua just before Pilate learns that there is evidence of treason against Yeshua (E, p. 30; R, p. 38),<sup>17</sup> we are also invited to toy with the possibility that Woland actually may have been Afranius himself, whom we know was lurking in the background the whole time. After all, the two do have certain things in common that are hardly accidental. They both, for example, wear shabby dark-colored clothing—before the murder of Judas we see Afranius in a “shabby, dark-colored chiton” (E, p. 304; R, p. 393—*temnyi ponoshennyi khiton*)—and neither of them kills, both having henchmen to do the actual killing for them.

Further comparison with the Moscow plane of the novel tends to identify Afranius as much with Woland’s henchmen as with Woland himself. For example, it is Koroviev and Azazello who arrange and carry out murders in Moscow, such as those of Berlioz, Bengalskii (albeit temporarily), Baron Maigel, and the Master and Margarita. In Jerusalem, this role is fulfilled by Afranius, who personally arranges and oversees the murder of Judas and, in a way, the deaths of Dismas, Hestas, and Yeshua too. It is Koroviev who first and foremost lies and misrepresents things on the Moscow plane whereas, at least in this interpretation, it is Afranius who does this on the Judean plane. Afranius is linked to both Woland and his gang by a physical feature—his strange eyes: Woland’s left eye is green and his right eye is black; Koroviev has tiny eyes and a ridiculous pince-nez; Azazello has one walleye; Afranius has small eyes shielded under eyelids that were curiously enlarged and even swollen. Just as Woland and his henchmen change into majestic if grim horsemen after performing their role in Moscow, so Afranius after supervising the murder of Judas in Gethsemane

16. Val Bolen, “Theme and Coherence in Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*,” *Slavic and East European Journal*, 16, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 435, n. 4. Cf. E. Proffer, “On *The Master and Margarita*,” pp. 545–46, who feels that “the Devil is completely absent from the Pilate chapters” (p. 546). See also V. Lakshin, “Roman M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*,” p. 296, who writes that “we do not find traces of the presence of Woland in the chapters about Yeshua,” with the possible exception of the casually dropped detail where Pilate, while awaiting news of the burial, stares at an empty chair with his cloak thrown over its back and suddenly shudders, probably because “it seemed to the tired procurator that he had seen someone sitting in the empty chair” (E, p. 302 [translation altered]; R, p. 391). Though Lakshin does not go on to point it out, this scene is clearly intended to recall the famous scene in “The Devil: Ivan Fedorovich’s Nightmare,” where Ivan Karamazov is sitting staring at the sofa in his room and “suddenly someone seemed to be sitting there” (F. Dostoevskii, *Brat’ia Karamazovy*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v desiaty tomakh* (Moscow, 1958), 10:160. This connection with Ivan’s meeting with the Devil greatly strengthens our feeling that Woland is somehow present throughout the Judean chapters, especially since Woland and Ivan’s Devil have a number of things in common such as the fact that they both wear dirty linen.

17. Just before Yeshua’s actual moment of death on the cross, “a dust cloud covered the place of execution and it became very dark” (E, p. 178 [detail omitted]; R, p. 229). These details remind one of the dust cloud that stalks Peredonov in Sologub’s *The Petty Demon* (trans. A. Field [Bloomington, 1970], see in particular pp. 259–60, where the column of dust takes the form of a serpent)—*The Master and Margarita* has more in common with *The Petty Demon* than first meets the eye.

changes into a Roman officer in a purple cloak on horseback. Thus, there is a definite suggestion that the police chief Afranius (and his organization) is somehow connected with supernatural and demonic powers, which in turn implies that Pilate's secret police force is not controlled by him, the state, or men at all.

Returning to the problem of Afranius's strange behavior and his account of the execution (given to Pilate), the situation in this third interpretation seems to be one in which the secret police chief, be he a double agent, an agent of the Devil, or simply some perverse and insensate will, manipulates the local head of state and influences his decisions, goading him into deciding to avenge himself and Yeshua. Afranius's account functions as a catalyst, stimulating Pilate's conscience and bestirring him to attempt to partially redeem himself for his cowardice by punishing the evildoer Judas. Had Afranius withheld the information about Yeshua saying cowardice was one of the worst human sins and had he mentioned Yeshua's last act of kindness and forgiveness instead, Pilate might not have been spurred into positive vengeful action. In this interpretation, then, the secret police chief determines the actions of the head of state.

The fourth way of interpreting Afranius's various actions is to assume that he both misrepresents the execution to Pilate and murders Judas contrary to Pilate's desires, in short that he lies to Pilate regularly.<sup>18</sup> One assumes here, as in the third interpretation above, that Afranius either invented his account of the execution or held back important details (or both) in order to toy with Pilate and to cause him spiritual anguish. In regard to the murder of Judas, one assumes that Afranius thwarted the desire of the cowardly Pilate, who chose to protect Judas lest there be any further disorder in Jerusalem and then later lied to Matthew to save face. It is possible in this case that Afranius was some kind of perverse agent provocateur wishing to cause as much trouble in Judea as possible, or a villainous and depraved police chief acting on his own authority and for his own mysterious reasons. It is also possible, of course, to assume, as we did above, that Afranius was a secret Christian or in league with the Devil, because either of these assumptions would account for his duplicity and provide adequate motivation for the murder of Judas. No matter which of these possibilities we adopt, however, in this fourth explanation of Afranius's actions, we still have a secret police chief rather than a head of state determining events. Afranius both toys with Pilate concerning the execution, as in our third interpretation above, and thwarts Pilate's desires concerning Judas, as in our second interpretation, which makes him more perverse and sinister than in any of the other suggested explanations.

We have now examined four possible interpretations of Afranius's role in the novel together with a number of possible motivations for his actions. None of these explanations, however, can be definitively proven to be the only correct one. The complexity and wealth of conflicting details in the novel simply do not allow of it. As part of the current rage to force clarity on a text, one *could*, I

18. Though she does not say Judas was murdered contrary to Pilate's wishes, E. Proffer, in her article, "On *The Master and Margarita*" (p. 547), does write that ". . . Arthanius regularly lies to Pilate."

suppose, adopt one interpretation and stick to it, somehow manipulating the signifiers strewn throughout the text which are meant to clash with the chosen interpretation. But why should we reduce the number of signifiers when Bulgakov has so carefully and deliberately multiplied them? Why should we try to reduce to one *fabula* what appears to be a clearly ambiguous *siuzhet* admitting of multiple reconstructed *fabulae*, thereby forcing a unity where there is none?<sup>19</sup> If we are interested in the meaning of Bulgakov's text rather than in the significance it may hold for ourselves or any other posited reader, and if we assume that the text has a meaning which can be determined and reproduced ("Ambiguity . . . is *not* the same as indeterminateness"<sup>20</sup>), should we not admit that we are dealing with ambiguous and imprecise meaning and attempt to come to grips with it instead of pretending it is univocal and precise? It seems absolutely necessary to take the competing meanings into account somehow in formulating our overall understanding of the novel if we wish to avoid distortion through oversimplification. In reference to submeanings and borderline meanings in a text, Eric Hirsch warns that in a way "such ambiguities simply serve to define the character of the meaning so that any overly precise construing of it would constitute a misunderstanding."<sup>21</sup>

If we were to read the text simply as in the first interpretation above, we would have to consider it a classic case of what Wayne Booth calls stable irony, "in the sense that once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions."<sup>22</sup> It seems to me, however, that Bulgakov has continuously and intentionally invited us to undermine our first reconstruction of meaning by filling his text with internal cancellations and hints that meanings reconstructed from irony are themselves being ironized, in turn causing what Booth has so succinctly called "the successive annihilation of seemingly stable locations."<sup>23</sup> The seemingly stable irony of the first interpretation offers us a clear invitation to reconstruct the meaning, but as we begin to adapt our reading to countenance conflicting indications, our reconstruction continually undergoes modification, with new mutations and constructs being eroded in turn. No matter how much one might desire to make any one interpretation stick, conflicting details immediately arise which undermine our position even as it is taking shape and occasion the streamlining of the theory at hand or the adoption of a new theory, until the same thing happens again, time after time forcing one into further thought.

This situation is clearly closer to what Booth has called unstable irony, irony "in which the truth asserted or implied is that no stable reconstruction can be made out of the ruins revealed through irony."<sup>24</sup> There is, however, an

19. Gérard Genette, speaking in a different context (explaining why he has not written a conclusion tying together all the different characteristics of the Proustian narrative revealed in his study), makes a comment we would do well to heed: "il me paraîtrait fâcheux de chercher l'unité à tout prix, et par là de *forcer* la cohérence de l'oeuvre—ce qui est, on le sait, l'une des plus fortes tentations de la critique, . . . n'exigeant qu'un peu de rhétorique interprétative" (*Discours du récit*, in *Figures III* [Paris, 1972], p. 272).

20. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1975), p. 230. I am, of course, indebted to Hirsch for the distinction I have made between meaning and significance.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

22. Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974), p. 6.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

important difference. The situation—which I have called ambiguous—in *The Master and Margarita* is not simply unstable irony. The text here does have meaning outside or beneath the continuous negation process of its irony and a stable platform does emerge which the implied author does not undermine. We are *certain*, for example, that he neither approves of Pilate nor Afranius nor the tyranny they live under, no matter how we choose to interpret the text. Aware that such literary possibilities seemed to escape his classification system, Booth calls works that “clearly attempt to keep the reader off balance but that yet insist on having a meaning” cases of “unstable-covert-local irony,” using local in the sense that the ironies are not infinite and do not continue on down the line.<sup>25</sup> This seems, however, to contradict Booth’s own notion of “instability.” Thus, returning to the notion of ambiguity in the sense in which Empson defines it—“we call it ambiguous, I think, when we recognize that there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading”<sup>26</sup>—it would seem best to conclude that in the case of Afranius the novel is ambiguous, allowing of multiple meanings, but that this is a case of what might best be called (in the rhetoric of ambiguity) stable ambiguity, as opposed, say, to unstable or infinite ambiguity where (as with infinitely unstable irony) there is no possibility of bottoming out on a meaning that undoubtedly was intended by the implied author.<sup>27</sup>

Bulgakov has used stable ambiguity to present a situation too complex and full of nuances to render directly or through stable irony. It is not simply a question of whether Pilate did or did not order the murder of Judas. Bulgakov wants his reader to do the necessary thinking and to realize all the possible factors that influence a man’s behavior in such a situation. Had he made Afranius a more stereotyped figure—the faithful servant obeying the tyrant’s evil orders or the evil servant thwarting the ruler’s commendable intentions—and nothing more, the marvelously sinister and unfathomable aura that surrounds Afranius and makes the whole situation so intriguing would have been absent. Thus, the ambiguity that surrounds Afranius functions as a device involving the reader and forcing him to devote a good deal of attention to the role of the secret police in the novel and its moral implications. The reader must puzzle over the various possibilities in an attempt to arrive at an overall understanding of the problem in its larger perspective.

Upon examination it becomes clear that the answer lies *somewhere* in the tension among the various possibilities,<sup>28</sup> which, in a sense, is the same situation

25. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

26. W. Empson, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. x.

27. It should be noted that we are clearly *not* dealing with ambivalence which Holman, Thrall, and Hibbard, in *A Handbook to Literature*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, 1972), p. 16, define as “the existence of mutually conflicting feelings or attitudes,” and correctly point out can be properly used only for Empson’s sixth (“a statement that is so contradictory or irrelevant that the reader is made to invent his own interpretation”) and seventh (“a statement so fundamentally contradictory that it reveals a basic division in the author’s mind”) types of ambiguity.

28. This type of ambiguity is a rather close prose analogue to Empson’s fourth type of poetic ambiguity where “two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state in the mind of the author” (W.

we often find in myth or in the Four Gospels. Within individual myths and in the mythologies of various peoples, for example, we frequently encounter ambiguities and conflicting accounts which illustrate what has been called "a curious multiplicity of approaches to problems which is characteristic for the mythopoeic mind."<sup>29</sup> This multiplicity of approaches results from the attempt to express the essentially ineffable in narrative form; and the multiplicity of descriptions and images in mythopoeic thought, while fully recognizing the essential unity of whatever is being presented in this multifaceted manner, simply "serves to do justice to the complexity of the phenomena."<sup>30</sup> We find a similar situation in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and death. In spite of the ambiguities, however, which result from the fact that the four canonical Gospels (to say nothing of the apocryphal Passion Gospels of Peter and Nicodemus) differ widely in the detail of their accounts of the Passion, the *essential message* of each is the same and is reinforced by a collective reading of the four.<sup>31</sup> Though Bulgakov's account cannot be reconciled from a strict Christian theological point of view to the essence of the canonical Gospels—there are problems more serious than the obvious differences in detail—we do in a sense have a nice parallel in literary effect: in both the biblical account taken as a whole and Bulgakov's account, narrative ambiguity functions similarly, invoking meticulous examination of detail and deep thought, and leading in turn beyond analysis of detail to ultimate contemplation of the very essence of the account.

Let us turn now to the essential meaning of the Afranius-line in the Judean chapters of the novel. Viewed overall, Afranius appears to be a sinister, feared, treacherous liar who can be bought, who has license to murder, and who, in the drama of Good and Evil, is obviously on the side of Evil, a fact which is strongly brought out by suggestions that his actions may be beyond the control of the State and of Man in general. Afranius and his secret police are not just the eyes and ears of the imperial power (which is betrayed in *any* interpretation) or even of the local procurator. Though the question of the degree of autonomy of the secret police is left open, the fact—which raises the specter of the great power of secret police organizations in all tyrannies—is not. Furthermore, as a representative of the secret police, Afranius symbolizes the evil of the system within which he functions, a system based on an ideology that claims for itself powers given only to God,<sup>32</sup> for example, the right to dispose of lives such as those of Yeshua and Judas and the right to function outside of any morality based on absolutes of Justice and Good (inasmuch as there is no question in the book but that Yeshua is a good man who is, nonetheless, executed in the presumed interests of the state). No matter how we might prefer to regard Afranius, we

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Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 133). In the case of this novel, of course, we are talking about two or more meanings of a plot thread rather than of a single poetic statement.

29. H. and H. A. Frankfort, "Myth and Reality," in *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 25.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

31. See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1968).

32. See, for example, the conversation between Yeshua and Pilate where Yeshua chides Pilate for thinking he controls Yeshua's destiny (E, p. 28; R, pp. 36–37; see also John 19:10–11).



cannot escape the thought that, in one way or another, ineluctably arises out of the combined possibilities and comes to represent "the most important aspect" of the thing<sup>33</sup> and the central point of reference in our minds when we think of Afranius: secret police forces in general tend to acquire a measure of their own autonomy and function in a manner rather different than that intended by the powers that spawn them and, like the sorcerer's apprentice, only presume to control them. Thus, this particular ambiguity underscores the frightening dimensions of evil that can be generated even unwittingly by a power, such as that of Tiberius, which uses totalitarian means to suppress anything that comes into conflict with its ideology and is, therefore, intrinsically evil whether or not it comprehends itself to be so. This, then, is the semantic aspect of the ambiguity surrounding Afranius. Obviously, the alternative meanings did not have to be sifted out to convey their sinister and evil overtones to the novel, but when examined they do enhance our understanding of the meaning of the Judean chapters and, I think, collectively point toward the overall meaning of the whole novel.

In regard to the importance of the meaning of the Afranius line for the meaning of the novel as a whole, I would like to stress forthwith that my interpretation of this aspect of the novel is directly generated by the parallel structure of the novel itself. Bulgakov certainly did not create the elaborate system of parallels between the Judean and Moscow planes "*prostotak*," and the intended analogy suggests (among other things) that the ubiquitous secret police in the Stalinist period of the late twenties and thirties are evil and not entirely under state control, thereby becoming even more sinister and dangerous than was already known.<sup>34</sup> By means of this analogy, Bulgakov transferred to the Stalinist police the whole plethora of associations that he developed around the police in the Judean chapters and said things about the Stalinist police that he obviously could not say directly, because, incredible as it seems, he definitely planned to submit his novel for publication in his lifetime.<sup>35</sup> In the light of this analogy, we better understand and appreciate such things as the explanation of the strange

33. Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 133, writes: "One is conscious of the most important aspect of a thing, not the most complicated; the subsidiary complexities, once they have been understood, merely leave an impression in the mind that they were to such-and-such an effect and they are within reach if you wish to examine them."

34. It is interesting to note several recent attempts to make one think that the novel reflects the NEP period rather than the thirties (and late twenties) when the purges were in full swing. The library card entry at the back of the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* edition of the novel states that it represents "pages full of humor and satire of NEP Moscow of the twenties" (*nepmanovskoi Moskvvy 20-kh godov*), and Konstantin Simonov, in his constrained "Foreword" to this edition entitled "O trekh romanakh Mikhaila Bulgakova" (p. 9), writes that "people of the older generation" when reading the novel immediately understand that the main target of Bulgakov's satire was the petty-minded Muscovite environment "of the end of the twenties" with its "regurgitations of NEP" (*otryzhki nepa*).

For attempts, sometimes convincing, often frivolous, to associate characters in the novel with real people, see D. G. B. Piper, "An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 134-57.

35. M. Chudakova, "Tvorcheskaiia istoriia," p. 244, informs us that in 1937 "Bulgakov, as one can judge from entries in the diary of E. S. Bulgakova, comes to the decision to once again return to the 'novel about the devil'—and then to complete it without fail and submit it for publication."

disappearance of all the occupants of Anna Frantzevna's apartment: "Witchcraft once started, as we all know, is virtually unstoppable" (E, p. 77; R, p. 97). Moreover, a comparison of the role of Afranius and the Judean secret police, not just to the Muscovite secret police, but to the actual role of Evil on the Moscow plane of the novel suggests a sort of philosophical corollary to the above conclusion about the Stalinist police which, though paradoxical, gives us one aspect of the core meaning of the novel: the secret police, despite its frightening and duplicitous nature and while still being essentially evil and hateful, is connected to that power mentioned in the epigraph to the novel taken from Goethe's *Faust*, which "wills forever evil and does forever good" ("who art thou, then?— I am a part of that power which wills forever evil and does forever good" [E, p. 7 (translation altered); R, p. 9]).

The power of evil throughout the novel is *not* represented by the Devil in any traditional sense, much less Woland.<sup>36</sup> It is also quite clear that Woland is *not* the power referred to in the epigraph.<sup>37</sup> Any attempt to make him into that power would necessitate a completely new definition of evil, because: Woland wills good things when he so desires and carries them out; Woland does not kill people—fate does, although with the aid of Woland's crew;<sup>38</sup> Woland warmly defends the existence of Jesus and, in an almost Manichean manner, even seems

36. Joan Delaney, "The Master and Margarita: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp," *Slavic Review*, 31, no. 1 (March 1972): 98, writes: "Instead of the traditional angelic and demonic powers, we have a different opposition: Margarita is allied with the devil in her battle against those who would crush the artist's soul. Bulgakov clearly suggests that the real forces of evil in the situation are the latter."

For a different view, see Edward E. Ericson, Jr., "The Satanic Incarnation: Parody in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 20–36, who sees Woland in terms of traditional Russian Orthodox theology and as a "parody of God"; and A. Krasnov, "Khristos i master: O posmertnom romane M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," pp. 150–59.

37. On this point, see V. Bolen, "Theme and Coherence in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 429–30; and Edythe C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," who demonstrates convincingly that Woland is not to be confused with Mephistopheles and writes that "at least with regard to the devil, *The Master and Margarita* is *Faust* turned upside down" (p. 389). Cf. G. Struve, "The Re-Emergence of Mikhail Bulgakov," p. 340; V. Lakshin, "Roman M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," p. 295; J. Delaney, "The Master and Margarita: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp," p. 92; and E. Proffer, "On *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 544–46.

The best commentaries on Woland since Lakshin's seminal discussion of the figure ("Roman M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," pp. 291–95) are Ewa Thompson, "The Artistic World of Michael Bulgakov," *Russian Literature*, 5 (1973): 56–60 (though one cannot agree with all her conclusions); and Edythe C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 402–6 (where she discusses ties between Woland and Yeshua). For a discussion of Woland's Old Testament nature, see A. C. Wright, "Satan in Moscow: An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 1164–65. For interesting comments on Woland's nontraditional nature, see E. K. Beaujour, "The Uses of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov," pp. 696–97, 702–3. For the possible influence of Stalin on the figure of Woland, see A. Krasnov, "Khristos i master: O posmertnom romane M. Bulgakova *Master i Margarita*," p. 156; and Abram Terts (A. Sinyavsky), "Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii," *Kontinent*, 1 (1974): 158–60.

38. V. Kaverin writes: "A simple thought lies at the basis of the novel: those who do evil are punished long before we see their acts. They are doomed. Sooner or later all will be well, because life is beautiful (Blok)" ("Bulgakov," *O literature i iskusstve*, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6 [Moscow, 1966], p. 549).

to be copowerful with Yeshua who, through his servant Matthew, has to *request* (*prosit'*) that Woland take the Master and reward him by granting him peace and that he take Margarita as well (E, p. 349; R, p. 453).<sup>39</sup> In this novel, the power that wills forever evil and does forever good—the ultimate source of which is wisely left unspecified—takes the form of or is represented by totalitarian dictatorial power (symbolized here by the reigns of Tiberius and Stalin) which attempts to oppress people and enslave them to itself or to whatever ideology it happens to be based on, regardless of the moral problems it causes people in doing so.<sup>40</sup> That this power actually causes people to save (or doom) themselves by forcing them to recognize their ultimate moral responsibility and to make a choice between Good and Evil rather than remain passive in a state of *unbedingte Ruh*,<sup>41</sup> as they might have done without this catalyst, is, of course, the paradox that lies at the heart of both *The Master and Margarita* and Goethe's *Faust*.

Thus, if totalitarian power in this novel represents the power “which wills forever evil and does forever good,” then the secret police of the totalitarian state, of which Afranius is obviously the central symbol, is “*the part* of that power which wills forever evil and does forever good” (italics mine, R.P.), inasmuch as it is called into being by that power and necessary for its defense. Evil begets evil even though the offspring may, like the broom of the sorcerer's apprentice, turn out to be beyond the control of the parent power. Applying this line of reasoning to the Judean chapters, it is the action of Afranius (whether following Pilate's orders or not) in murdering Judas, as a product of Tiberius's totalitarian dictatorship, that ensures the survival of Yeshua's teachings, because

39. That this significant detail was fully intended by Bulgakov can be seen from a comparison of this passage in its finished form to the form it had in the third redaction of the novel, completed in October 1934, where Bulgakov used the verb “to order” (*velet'*) instead of “to request”: “Tak vot mne [Woland] bylo veleno . . . —Razve vam mogut velet'? [asks the Master]—O, da. Veleno unesti vas . . .” (M. Chudakova, “Tvorcheskaia istoriia,” p. 240). Edythe C. Haber, in her excellent article “The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*” (although I am in complete agreement with much of what she says—a rare thing among Bulgakov scholars), is wrong, I believe, when she writes: “The end of the novel also indicates that in the divine hierarchy Satan occupies a lesser position than Jesus. For Matthu Levi brings an order from Yeshua, which the devil is to obey” (p. 406).

It is difficult to guess what O. J. Hunns means when he writes that “Yeshua is the biblical Jesus and their identification is completed when Yeshua demonstrates his control over human destiny by securing for the Master . . . an ‘eternal refuge’ after death” (“A Soviet acceptance of biblical Jesus Christ?,” *Times* (London), March 1, 1975, p. 14. Perhaps this will be clearer in his forthcoming monograph.

40. In a sense the real culprit (as in Solzhenitsyn's works) is dogmatic ideology which obscures Man's freedom of choice between Good and Evil, inducing him to act against his conscience and to justify such acts by resorting to the authority of the system, be that a Caesar, a Stalin, the Grand Inquisitor, or Zamiatin's Great Welldoer. Ideology closes people's minds, as in the cases of Misha Berlioz and Pilate (“Your trouble is,” Yeshua tells Pilate, “that your mind is too closed . . .” [E, p. 27; R, p. 35]), encouraging them not to recognize a wrong choice and repent (only repentance saves wrongdoers in the novel, for example, Frieda, Pilate, and Bezdomnyi), and ideology demands conformity to itself, ultimately leading to deification of the state that is based on it and leading away from the absolute standards of Truth and Justice which transcend ideology but which are obscured by it.

41. See E. Stenbock-Fermor, “Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Goethe's *Faust*,” p. 321.

the murder is slated to give rise to a "major scandal," which promises to bring grief to the established religion and order in Judea and ultimately even in Rome itself, thereby making room for Yeshua's new teaching. A scandal will only serve to popularize the recent martyr. If the Roman state had been doing what was really in its best interest, it would have seen to it that Yeshua was not martyred by one of its own high officials. Had Pilate pardoned Yeshua instead of Bar-Abba, oblivion would most probably have been Yeshua's future lot.<sup>42</sup> As it was, however, Caesar knew nothing about all this and neither his procurator nor his secret police chief were acting in a way that would further the interests of his evil rule. Both were, therefore, in a sense, doing good.

Transferring this argument to the part of the novel set in the Stalinist thirties, with its prison camps such as the one in which the Master was broken<sup>43</sup> and its omnipresent fear-denunciation-interrogation-arrest-concentration camp syndrome so carefully worked in throughout this part of the novel and so carefully obscured by the censor of the *Moskva* edition, the Stalinist dictatorship with its system of material rewards (dachas, apartments, privileges, and so forth), and its most malevolent arm, the secret police, can be considered to be the power and the part of "that power which wills forever evil and does forever good." They function together like a tempter devil or Mephistopheles, winnowing souls by stimulating men to accept or resist. Evil actively (for example, to denounce or not to denounce; to write truthfully or to write dishonestly; to compromise and be rewarded or not to compromise and be scourged), thereby separating the chaff from the grain.<sup>44</sup> Those who complacently live with the evil willed by this

42. In this context, the ending of Roger Caillois's novel, *Pontius Pilate*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 1963), is particularly interesting. Unexpectedly, "from the rostrum above the surging mob, Pilate declared Jesus guiltless, set him free and pledged his protection by the legionaries as long as might be necessary" (p. 109). "The Messiah carried on his preaching successfully and died at a great age. He enjoyed a great reputation for sanctity and for a long time pilgrimages were made to his grave. All the same, because of a man who despite every hindrance succeeded in being brave, there was no Christianity. Except for Pilate's exile and suicide, none of the events predicted by Mardouk came to pass and history, save on this one point, took another course" (p. 111).

For an enthralling speculative meditation on Jesus' own understanding of the essentiality of his crucifixion, see Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot: New Light on the History of Jesus* (New York, 1965).

43. Speaking of the Master, Woland says "they have really done a job on him" (*ego khorosho otdelali*; E, p. 280 [translation altered]; R, p. 361), and the Master himself confesses to Margarita, "They have broken me" (*menia slomali*; E, p. 286 [translation altered from Glenn's "I'm finished," which completely obscures the point]; R, p. 369). The "they" in both cases clearly seems to refer to interrogators in some prison camp in which the Master apparently was a prisoner and which we saw in Margarita's dream near the beginning of Book 2 (E, p. 215; R, p. 278). Though three months is a disturbingly short stint, the fact that he was in prison is corroborated by the overcoat with the buttons torn off, which, as J. Delaney points out is "the telltale sign of a sojourn in prison" (*The Master and Margarita: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp*, p. 97). The two quotations from the text and the most obvious part of the dream were, not surprisingly, censored in the *Moskva* edition. The existence of the camps, incidentally, is mentioned as early as chapter 1 when Ivan says Kant ought to be sent to Solovki for three years (E, p. 15; R, p. 19).

I see no reason to suppose, as does L. Rzhnevsky, "Pilate's Sin: Cryptography in Bulgakov's Novel, *The Master and Margarita*," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 13, no. 1 (1971): 6, that "Stravinsky's psychiatric clinic represents a forced labor camp."

44. There is, of course, a good deal of chaff in the Moscow chapters. Edythe C. Haber

power—even though they should know better—like Misha Berlioz, or who inform for the secret police for personal gain, like Baron Maigel, are justly doomed to destruction and the void;<sup>45</sup> those who acquiesce to this evil in small ways, compromising themselves and succumbing to its temptations, like Stepa Likhodeev, Rimskii, Varenuška, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, George Bengalskii, or Chuma-Annushka, are chastened by Woland's gang, who here represent instruments of ineluctable retribution, and rightly given another chance; and those who are stimulated by the power and/or its secret police to reject Evil and to strive for truth and justice are justly saved from the void and given rewards commensurate with their resistance to the evil (for example, the Master who, though he gives up in life, symbolically burning his novel, did strive for the truth and earned his sought-after repose in that strange limbo to which he and Margarita are consigned.<sup>46</sup> Ivan Bezdomnyi, who at the end of the novel is a new Ivan, Professor Ivan Nikolaich Ponirev, and no longer "Homeless," and who is now presumably living out his life in an exemplary manner, honestly and without ever compromising his integrity, will doubtless be taken unto Yeshua in the Kingdom of Light when he dies, just like that other reformed sinner Matthew the Levite.

The novel as a whole, in an almost Dantesque manner, posits a Kingdom of Light (Heaven), a void (*nebytie*; Hell), and a grey area of intermediate fates in between (the circles of Hell, Limbo, Purgatory), where the many who do not merit the Kingdom of Light—which is assigned with an Old Testament-like rigor only to the absolutely righteous and unbending like Matthew the Levite—and yet do not deserve to be eternally cast into the void can receive their just deserts according to the way in which they lived out their lives. Apparently, sincere repentance and the desire to do better if given a second chance can save those who, like Pilate, would otherwise deserve the void. Inherent in the novel is the idea that there is an absolute transcendent morality and that Truth and Justice exist as absolutes outside of and above any ideology, with no rational proof of this necessary, the Berliozes of the world notwithstanding, as Woland so eloquently demonstrated. Truth and Justice will prevail and wrongdoers will, in the final plan, meet their appropriate fates no matter how hard it may be

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points out that if Berlioz is typical of his time and place, then even before Woland arrives in Moscow Mephistopheles has apparently already conquered it and reduced it to "the state of ideal mental torpor which Mephistopheles envisioned for mankind . . ." ("The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," p. 387).

45. Though we do not see Aloysius Mogarych justly punished in the "Epilogue," it is clear from the logic of the novel, as well as the obvious parallels to Judas (strengthened in the *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* text, pp. 560–61) and Baron Maigel, that he is doomed. By the same token, most of the writers are doomed like Berlioz (the exceptions being the Master, Ivan, and perhaps Riukhin). It seems that the more socially influential and responsible one is, the more serious the compromise with evil, which is why the writers' establishment is satirized so harshly in the novel.

46. Unlike Faust, the Master ceased striving in life and, therefore, did not earn the Kingdom of Light. It should be noted, however, that Bulgakov is a sterner moralist than Goethe, whose Faust would also not have earned Yeshua's Kingdom of Light. In Bulgakov's scheme, ceaseless striving alone is not enough. One must make the right choices, and only repentance can keep those who seriously err, as did Faust, from the void.



to see this at any particular moment in time. In the master plan even the power that wills forever evil does good in the last analysis, and Woland and Margarita are right: "All will be as it should" (E, pp. 370 and 383; R, pp. 480 and 498).

In conclusion, it seems we should disagree with the critics who feel that the novel is somehow unfinished and that Bulgakov "failed to place the keystone on his philosophical construct,"<sup>47</sup> and agree with the critics, such as Bolen and Proffer, who feel that the novel is complete in itself.<sup>48</sup> The fact that all the answers to the questions raised are not *directly* provided does not in this case indicate any incompleteness or falling short. It is, paradoxically, in his very refusal to provide obvious answers and in his insistence on ambiguity, plurisignificance, and analogy that Bulgakov has forced the reader to engage himself in searching philosophical debate as to the very meaning of Evil in life, here *symbolized* by totalitarian power and its necessary corollaries, in turn symbolized by Afranius, chief of the fifth procurator of Judea's secret service. Ambiguity, then, like parallel structure, is one of the main keys to this tidiest of novels.

47. M. Glenny, "Michael Bulgakov," *Survey*, no. 65 (October 1967), p. 13. In addition to Bolen's list of such critics, which is comprised of Glenny, Vulis, and Lakshin (V. Bolen, "Theme and Coherence in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," p. 435, n. 2), we could add: G. Struve ("The Re-Emergence of Mikhail Bulgakov," p. 343); K. Simonov, who, though he admits Bulgakov wrote his novel right to the end and completed it, nonetheless feels that Bulgakov would have continued polishing the novel and correcting its "imperfections" had he lived ("O trekh romanakh Mikhaila Bulgakova," pp. 9–10, or see his "Pre-dislovie" to the *Moskva* version of the novel, *Moskva*, 11 [1966]: 7); Joan Delaney ("*The Master and Margarita*: The Reach Exceeds the Grasp," pp. 89–100), whose title, opening pages, and last line indicate that she adheres to this view, though the rest of her interesting article seems to contribute to the argument against this view; and Ewa Thompson ("The Artistic World of Michael Bulgakov," pp. 61 and 63), who feels that Bulgakov "leaves the problem of petty evil unsolved," abandoning it "without really coming to terms with it" (p. 61).

48. V. Bolen, "Theme and Coherence in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*," pp. 427–37 *passim*; and E. Proffer, "On *The Master and Margarita*," p. 535. V. Kaverin, in his article "Bulgakov" (first published in 1965), where he courageously called for the publication of the novel, wrote that "*po svoeobychnosti* one would scarcely find its equal in all world literature" (V. Kaverin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, p. 544).