

**Mikhail  
Bulgakov**

# **The Master and Margarita**

**Translated from the Russian by  
Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor**



**ARDIS**

## Copyright

This edition published in 2011 by  
The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers

141 Wooster Street  
New York, NY 10012  
[www.overlookpress.com](http://www.overlookpress.com)

For bulk and special sales, please contact [sales@overlookny.com](mailto:sales@overlookny.com)

*Translation copyright © 1995 by Ardis Publishers*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system now known or to be invented without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

ISBN 978-1-59020-694-2

# Contents

Copyright

Translators' Note

## PART ONE

I Never Talk to Strangers

II Pontius Pilate

III The Seventh Proof

IV The Chase

V The Incident at Griboyedov

VI Schizophrenia, as Predicted

VII The Evil Apartment

VIII The Duel Between the Professor and the Poet

IX Korovyov's Tricks

X News from Yalta

XI Ivan Is Split in Two

XII Black Magic and Its Exposé

XIII Enter the Hero

XIV Praise Be to the Rooster

XV Nikanor Ivanovich's Dream

XVI The Execution

XVII An Upsetting Day

XVIII Unlucky Visitors

## PART TWO

XIX *Margarita*

XX *Azazello's Cream*

XXI *Flight*

XXII *By Candlelight*

XXIII *Satan's Grand Ball*

XXIV *The Liberation of the Master*

XXV *How the Procurator Tried to Save Judas of Kerioth*

XXVI *The Burial*

XXVII *The End of Apartment No. 50*

XXVIII *The Final Adventures of Korovyov and Behemoth*

XXIX *The Fate of the Master and Margarita Is Decided*

XXX *Time to Go! Time to Go!*

XXXI *On Sparrow Hills*

XXXII *Absolution and Eternal Refuge*

*Epilogue*

*A Note on the Text*

*Commentary*

*Afterword*

*Biographical Note*

*About the Author*

## Translators' Note

ALL aspects of the work on this translation were done equally by the two of us, and the order of our names is purely alphabetical. We would like to thank Marina Khazanov of Boston University for the assistance she provided as a first speaker of Russian in clarifying certain difficult and obscure words and phrases.

In realizing this translation, we strove, first of all, to produce what has been lacking so far: a translation of the complete text of Bulgakov's masterpiece into contemporary standard American English. At the same time, our translation aims to be as literal a rendering of the original Russian as possible. Challenged by the third of Goethe's well-known ideas on translation (as articulated in his notes to the *West-Ostlicher Divan*), we have "associated ourselves closely with our original." We have made every effort to retain the rhythm, syntactic structure, and verbal texture of Bulgakov's prose. We have often eschewed synonyms in favor of repeating the words that Bulgakov repeats, and we have tried, as far as possible without sacrificing clarity, not to break up Bulgakov's long sentences and to adhere to his word order. In sum, we strove for an accurate, readable American English translation of *The Master and Margarita* that would convey the specifically Bulgakovian flavor of the original Russian text.

—DIANA BURGIN AND KATHERINE O'CONNOR

## P<sub>ART</sub> O<sub>NE</sub>

*... and so who are  
you, after all?*

*—I am part of the power  
which forever wills evil  
and forever works good.*

GOETHE'S *Faust*

# I

## *Never Talk to Strangers*

ONE hot spring evening, just as the sun was going down, two men appeared at Patriarch's Ponds. One of them—fortyish, wearing a gray summer suit—was short, dark-haired, bald on top, paunchy, and held his proper fedora in his hand; black hornrimmed glasses of supernatural proportions adorned his well-shaven face. The other one—a broad-shouldered, reddish-haired, shaggy young man with a checked cap cocked on the back of his head—was wearing a cowboy shirt, crumpled white trousers, and black sneakers.

The first man was none other than Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, editor of a literary magazine and chairman of the board of one of Moscow's largest literary associations, known by its acronym, MASSOLIT, and his young companion was the poet Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyryov, who wrote under the pen name Bezdomny.

After reaching the shade of the newly budding linden trees, the writers made a beeline for the colorfully painted refreshment stand bearing the sign: BEER AND COLD DRINKS.

And here it is worth noting the first strange thing about that terrible May evening. Absolutely no one was to be seen, not only by the refreshment stand, but all along the tree-lined path that ran parallel to Malaya Bronnaya Street. At a time when no one, it seemed, had the strength to breathe, when the sun had left Moscow scorched to a crisp and was collapsing in a dry haze somewhere behind the Sadovoye Ring, no one came out to walk under the lindens, or to sit down on a bench, and the path was deserted.

"Give me some Narzan water," said Berlioz.

"There isn't any," replied the woman at the refreshment stand, taking umbrage for some reason.

"Got any beer?" inquired Bezdomny in a hoarse voice.

"The beer will be delivered later," the woman answered.

“So what have you got?” asked Berloz.

“Apricot juice, only it’s warm,” said the woman.

“Well, give us that then! ...”

The apricot juice generated an abundance of yellow foam, and the air started smelling like a barbershop. The writers drank it down and immediately began hiccuping, paid their money, and went over and sat down on a bench facing the pond, with their backs to Bronnaya Street.

Here the second strange thing happened, which affected Berlioz alone. He suddenly stopped hiccuping, his heart pounded and stopped beating for a second, then started up again, but with a blunt needle lodged inside it. Besides that, Berlioz was seized with a groundless fear so intense that he wanted to run away from Patriarch’s Ponds that very minute without looking back.

Berlioz looked around miserably, not knowing what had frightened him. He turned pale, wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, and thought, “What’s wrong with me? This has never happened before ... my heart’s playing tricks on me ... I’m overtired. Maybe it’s time to throw everything to the devil and go off to Kislovodsk ...”

And then the hot air congealed in front of him, and out of it materialized a transparent man of most bizarre appearance. A small head with a jockey cap, a skimpy little checked jacket that was made out of air ... The man was seven feet tall, but very narrow in the shoulders, incredibly thin, and his face, please note, had a jeering look about it.

Berlioz’s life was so arranged that he was unaccustomed to unusual happenings. He turned even paler, opened his eyes wide, and in a state of confusion thought, “This can’t be! ...”

But, alas, it was, and the tall transparent man swayed from left to right in front of him, without touching the ground.

At this point Berlioz was so overcome with terror that he shut his eyes. And when he opened them, he saw that it was all over, the mirage had evaporated, the man in checks had vanished, and the blunt needle had dislodged itself from his heart.

“What the devil!” exclaimed the editor. “You know, Ivan, I think I almost had a sunstroke just then! Maybe even something like a hallucination.” He tried to smile, but alarm still flickered in his eyes and his hands were shaking. Gradually, however, he calmed down, fanned himself

with his handkerchief, managed a fairly cheerful “Well then ...,” and resumed the conversation that had been interrupted by the apricot juice.

This conversation, as was learned subsequently, was about Jesus Christ. The fact is that the editor had commissioned the poet to write a long antireligious poem for the next issue of his journal. Ivan Nikolayevich had composed the poem, and in a very short period of time at that, but unfortunately it had not met with the editor’s approval. Bezdomny had painted the central character of his poem, that is, Jesus, in very dark colors, and yet, in the editor’s opinion, the whole poem had to be rewritten. And so now the editor was giving the poet a kind of lecture on Jesus in order to point out to him his basic error.

It is hard to say what had ultimately led Ivan Nikolayevich astray—the descriptive power of his pen, or his complete ignorance of his subject matter, but the Jesus whom he portrayed emerged as a, well, totally lifelike figure, a Jesus who had once existed, although, admittedly, a Jesus provided with all sorts of negative traits.

Thus Berlioz wanted to prove to the poet that the important thing was not what kind of man Jesus was, good or bad, but, rather, that Jesus, as an individual, had never existed on earth at all and that all the stories about him were mere fabrications, myths of the most standard kind.

It should be noted that the editor was a well-read man and in his speech he made very clever allusions to ancient historians such as the famous Philo of Alexandria, and the brilliantly educated Flavius Josephus, neither of whom had said a word about the existence of Jesus. With a display of solid erudition, Mikhail Alexandrovich also informed the poet, in passing, that the passage in Book 15, Chapter 44 of Tacitus’s famous *Annals*, where mention is made of Jesus’s execution, is nothing but a later, fraudulent interpolation.

The poet, for whom everything the editor said was a novelty, stared at Mikhail Alexandrovich with his sharp green eyes and listened to him attentively, hiccuping only occasionally and cursing the apricot juice under his breath.

“There is not a single Eastern religion,” Berlioz was saying, “where an immaculate virgin does not, as a matter of course, bring forth a god into the world. And the Christians, displaying no originality whatsoever, followed the same pattern when they created their Jesus, who, in fact, never existed at all. That’s where you have to put your main emphasis ...”

Berlioz's high tenor resounded along the deserted path, and as Mikhail Alexandrovich ventured into that maze, which only a highly educated man can explore without risking his neck, the poet learned more and more interesting and useful things about the Egyptian Osiris, the kind god and son of Heaven and Earth, and about the Phoenician god Tammuz, and about Marduk, and even about the lesser known terrible god Uitzilopochtli who had once been venerated by the Aztecs in Mexico.

And just as Mikhail Alexandrovich was telling the poet how the Aztecs had modeled figures of Uitzilopochtli out of dough, the first man appeared on the pathway.

Afterward, when, frankly speaking, it was already too late, various agencies filed reports describing this man. If one compares them, one cannot help but be astonished. For example, one says that he was short, had gold teeth, and was lame in his right foot. Another says that he was hugely tall, had platinum crowns and was lame in his left foot. Yet a third notes laconically that he had no distinguishing characteristics whatsoever.

We should add that all of the reports were worthless.

To begin with, the subject was lame in neither foot, and he was neither short, nor hugely tall, but simply tall. As for his teeth, the left ones had platinum crowns, the right—gold. He was dressed in an expensive gray suit and wore foreign-made shoes of the same color. A gray beret was cocked rakishly over his ear, and under his arm he carried a walking stick with a black knob shaped like a poodle's head. He looked to be a little over forty. Slightly crooked mouth. Smooth-shaven. Dark brown hair. Right eye black, left—for some reason, green. Black eyebrows, but one was higher than the other. In a word—a foreigner.

As he passed the bench where the editor and poet were sitting, the foreigner looked at them out of the corner of his eye, stopped, and suddenly sat down on a neighboring bench two feet away.

“A German,” thought Berlioz.

“An Englishman,” thought Bezdomny, “I bet he's hot with those gloves on.”

The foreigner looked around at the tall buildings that formed a square border around the pond, thus making it obvious that he was seeing the place for the first time and that it interested him.

He rested his gaze on the upper stories of the buildings and on the windowpanes' blinding reflection of the broken sun that was departing from