

## THE PROBLEM OF MORAL CHOICE IN M.A. BULGAKOV'S NOVEL "THE MASTER AND MARGARITA"

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### Abstract

This article examines the actual problem of moral choice and the theme of mercy raised by M.A. Bulgakov in the novel "The Master and Margarita". Various vices and virtues of the novel's characters are revealed.

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The novel "The Master and Margarita" is truly a treasure trove of Russian classical literature, where the past and the future, mysticism and reality, religion and atheism are intertwined. The author has been working on this work for over twelve years. The primary version of the novel had such titles as: "Here I am", "He appeared", "The Black Theologian" and "The Horseshoe of a Foreigner" [1; 186], where most of the key characters were missing and another narrative theme was not preserved, it was burned by the author himself.

Soon Bulgakov becomes convinced that what he wrote cannot be banished from memory, so with the help of some remaining notes, the author, after a while, presented us with a unique work full of colors, attracting a variety of characters, themes and problems, and which will be relevant in many years.

With the novel "The Master and Margarita", M. Bulgakov seems to prove the saying of his character Woland - "Manuscripts do not burn", borrowed from the Latin proverb: "Verba Volant, scripta manent", and translated as - "Words fly away, what is written remains". It is no coincidence that this phrase was often used by M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, one of Bulgakov's favorite authors. [2; 237]

One of the key problems of the novel is the problem of moral choice, when each person himself must decide on which path to take – good or evil. This topic is revealed from the very first pages of the novel. In addition to the title, the author leaves for his readers an epigraph referring to their "Faust" by I.V. Goethe "... so who are you, finally? // — I am part of that force that eternally wants evil and eternally does good...".

The omniscient and strict Woland, together with his retinue, mercilessly reveals human vices, but is in no hurry to correct them. The burden of this burden falls on the person himself, in whose soul good and evil, fear and compassion, cruelty and mercy are always fighting inextricably linked with each other.

Mikhail Afanasievich in his novel wanted to show that a good person does not always do the right thing, in other words, he does not even suspect that he is doing evil, and those people who are

considered bad are capable of doing good deeds. It was as if he gave his characters the opportunity to decide their own fate. They can leave everything as it is, or vice versa - to change their lives for the better in a coordinated way.[3]

Throughout the novel, the characters have to sort out their moral values, make decisions that ultimately turn out to be true in their own way.

So, even at the very beginning of the novel, the unshakable procurator of Judea Pontius Pilate ponders: to acquit an innocent wandering philosopher or still succumb to the persuasions of the high priest of Kaifa and approve the death sentence. "After talking to Yeshua, Pontius Pilate realized that he was not facing a criminal, but a very intelligent man. He tries to save Yeshua by suggesting answers to his own questions with his intonation, but Yeshua rejects this help. Pontius Pilate could not resist his decision to defend the freedom and life of Yeshua, because ... he was not free inwardly, he was a slave to his position." [7; 379]

Margarita must decide whether to stay in prosperity with an unloved, but rich husband or link her fate with a poor lover. In chapter 23 of the novel - at Satan's ball, when Voland's retinue introduces Margarita to famous villains in order to increase her pangs of conscience - murderers, pimps, libertines, executioners, etc. march in front of her. Russian literary critic Boris Sokolov, interpreting this episode, claims that "... the main character subconsciously suffers because of treason to her husband, and puts her act on a par with the greatest criminals of the past; and a large number of poisoners, as if showing the reader Margarita's thoughts about suicide together with the Master with the help of poison." [2; 244]

Bulgakov overturns the idea that good always wins over evil. In his novel, these two complete opposites have absolute equality. This inseparable unity is fully revealed in the dialogue between Woland and the messenger of Light - Levi Matvey: "What would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if all shadows disappeared from it?" [5; 434].

A similar idea is stated in his treatise "The Garden of Epicurus" by the French writer Anatole France: "Evil is necessary. If it did not exist, there would be no good. Evil is the only reason for the existence of good. Without death there would be no courage, without suffering there would be no compassion... is it possible to understand virtue without knowing vice, love and beauty, without knowing hatred and envy... Therefore, do not complain about the devil." In Bulgakov's novel, good and evil are ultimately created by the hands of the people themselves.

The master is a collective image of a man who has a thirst for knowledge of the eternal laws of morality, which serves as the idea for his novel about Pilate, which will soon be a complete collapse on the part of critics. The master is faced with a choice: to abandon his own novel for the sake of criticism, the society of that time and destroy it, and thereby betray himself, his creative individuality. He is unable to resist criticism and submits to circumstances, retreats, does not fight to the end, attempts to burn the manuscript. However, his beloved Margarita prevents him from finishing what he started and saves her. The master is overcome with despair. This unsolvability of the situation eventually pushes him to madness.

Thus, we see that almost all the characters of the work find themselves in a position of moral choice. The heroes will have to choose:

- a) greed or preservation of dignity (a number with disguises in the theater at a black magic session);
- b) decency or meanness (everyone wants to own the apartment of the late Berlioz, not disdaining all possible ways to achieve the goal);
- c) his own well-being or justice: when Pilate's greatness and career advancement were at stake, he still neglected his conscience, which tormented him for the rest of his life;
- d) Cruelty or mercy: taking revenge on the culprit of her torments and spiritual torments of the Master,

Margarita, smashing the apartment of the critic Brussky and breaking windows on the entire floor, saw a frightened boy and only this makes her stop. Even transformed into a witch, she does not take the path of cruelty;

- e) Revenge or forgiveness: before his execution, Yeshua forgives his executioners, and his devoted disciple Levi Matthew, taking him down from the cross to bury him, thinks to kill Judas of Cariath, avenging the death of his teacher, crucified according to Judas' false report.

Here the question arises: is this choice always correct? Often the fate of other people depends on the moral choice. When a master fails the test of moral choice, he condemns himself and his beloved woman to suffering. While an innocent man is dying a terrible death through the fault of Pontius Pilate, Bulgakov makes it clear to us what we can come to with such an understanding of public relations. [6; 432]

Further, when the Master goes to eternity with Margarita, he leaves his novel to the whole future generation as a reminder that only people themselves can solve their problems of moral choice. The Prince of Darkness and his retinue only reveal the advantages and disadvantages that people have: at the Variety Theater at the "black magic session", the crowd of spectators was negatively disposed and somewhat cruel towards the entertainer - Georges Bengalsky. Only the necessary evil (i.e., the deprivation of the head), causes the feelings of the guests to be replaced by a manifestation of kindness, pity and mercy towards him.

The novel about Pontius Pilate is the creation of a master, whom Margarita values very much, she also had to make a choice: she agrees to become the hostess of the ball in order to see her Master again. But at the ball itself, she learns about Frida, who once killed her son and now a handkerchief is brought to her every day, reminding her of her sin. When she is told that she has the right to demand any one wish... at this moment, she sees in front of her the annoying eyes of Frida, to whom she had the imprudence to give hope for intercession before Woland. For some reason, she feels sorry for her, and she is faced with a choice: to save her love or to help a completely strange girl. Someone else's grief turned out to be unbearable for her than her own.

Thus, M. Bulgakov in his immortal novel, revealing the characteristic features of the characters, their values, moral foundations and principles, shows the importance of the eternal question of moral choice.

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