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Margarita on the Wall

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Sasha Senderovich
“Margarita on the Wall”
Moscow, Russia
“She turned from Tverskaya street onto a side road, and then turned around. You know Tverskaya street, right? Thousands of people were walking along Tverskaya, but I guarantee you that she noticed only me and looked not so much worrisome, but as if even somewhat painfully. And I was struck not so much by her beauty, as by the extraordinary, incomparable loneliness in her eyes!”

Mikhail Bulgakov

“Master and Margarita”

In Mikhail Bulgakov’s masterpiece Master and Margarita, Woland - the Devil himself - visits 1930s Moscow. Woland is akin to Goethe’s Mephistopheles who is “part of the force that always wills evil and always does good” by making people see their own stupidity and corruptness.

One cannot visit Moscow today without noticing that the books which are most widely sold...
in an abundance of different editions, are
Bulgakov’s. His apartment – a space that is used
for exhibitions and poetry readings of young artists
and writers – and four flights of stairs leading to it,
are a cult place for Moscow’s youth. There, in
writings scribbled all over walls, doors and
ceilings, the deep conflict between Russia’s past,
present and future is evident. “Woland, please
come back to Moscow! We need you very much!”
“Why chase after something which is already
over?” And, most simple, yet profound, “The main
thing is to understand.”

Why does a writer who died in 1940, and
whose cruel world ended along with collapse of
the Soviet Union in 1991, seemingly in no further
need of satirizing due to its non-existence, became
such a powerful symbol for so many of Moscow’s
young who visit his apartment? Perhaps, they
realize that contemporary mythmaking about a
“happy and glorious” Soviet past tends to
conveniently forget terror, breadlines and
brainwashing. Perhaps, Russia’s transition to a
new social order creates a sense of difficulty,
makes things uncertain, does not readily offer
everyone an appropriate niche. Or, perhaps, the new generation that is emerging at the uneasy crossroads of Russian-style democracy, rapid Westernization and nostalgia for the recent past, so wants Bulgakov’s Devil to return and teach it how to keep the march of those, who wish to reverse the course of time, from turning into another unending parade.

And only Margarita looks on from the wall of apartment house at the Patriarch’s pond. Margarita. Writer’s muse. Adulteress. Witch. Savior, who is willing to bargain away her soul. Queen Margot, the hostess of Satan’s ball. Margarita, an eternal woman in whose silent gaze are the yellow flowers – the first ones that appear in gray Moscow at winter’s end to foreshadow the coming of another spring.