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Eternal Dialogue: Socratic Subtext in the Yershalaim Chapters of M. Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*

Although Bulgakov's Master and Margarita has been the focus of substantial textological, philosophical and literary research, it still poses many questions. In this paper I concentrate on the early drafts of the Yershalaim chapters, which shed light on a possible subtext of Bulgakov's depiction of Ieshua's interrogation. I will present a new nuance in the reading of the text by demonstrating that some of the peculiarity of Bulgakov's representation of the gospel scenes can be explained by the author's conscious transplantation of several motifs from Plato's dialogues devoted to Socrates trial and death. Bulgakov, who studied Greek in school and whose close friend, M. Popov, translated several of Plato's dialogues into Russian, was, without doubt, familiar with Plato. I will try to prove that Ieshua's words bear a number of striking similarities with those of Socrates in Euthyphro, the Apology, Crito, and Phaedo. First, Ieshua's concern with Pilate's headache suggests Socrates' idea that the only real remedy for a headache is wisdom. Notably, poison hemlock, or curare, which is supposed to have been the poison that Socrates took, is known in Russia as boligolov (ache-head), which Bulgakov must have been familiar with due to his medical education. The motif of writing as a dangerous activity as it appears in the scenes with Ieshua is also common to these Socratic dialogues. With these and other pieces of evidence I hope to prove that the connection between Ieshua and Socrates is not merely typological and that Bulgakov consciously enhanced his narration with Socratic subtext in order both to further enrich the characterization of Ieshua and Pilate and to underscore the problem of unfair judgment.