

# An Analysis on the Images of the Devils in the Works of Geothe, Bulgakov and Thomas Mann<sup>1</sup>

Jie CHANG<sup>2</sup>

---

## ARTICLE INFO

Available Online September 2013

Key words:

the devils;

Satan;

Goethe;

Bulgakov and Thomas Mann.

## ABSTRACT

Starting from the analysis on the devils in the Bible stories, the writer of this article makes an analysis on Mephistopheles in *Faust* by Johann Eolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) Woland in *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhaíl Afanasyevich Bulgakov (1891-1940), and a Mephistopheles figure in *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann (1875-1955). The origin, characteristics and changes of the images of these devils shall be discussed in this article.

---

## I. The Origin of the Devils

It is well known that the Hebrew Bible and Greek & Roman Mythology are always taken as the two major sources of Western literature. We can find the characters of devils in many modern western literal works origin from the Bible stories. Therefore, in order to make a better analysis of the devils, it is necessary to begin our study from the Bible stories.

Three categories of devil images can be found in the Bible stories, namely, the fallen angle Lucifer; the devil Satan; and the dragon, or the serpent of old. The fallen angle Lucifer is the devil with an evil heart, but disguised by a splendid outward appearance. Isaiah 14:12-14 says "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ' I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' " We can see that the fallen angle Lucifer is associated with the morning star, or Venus. He must be handsome young man with a genial smile, looking charming and friendly. This fine appearance is his best disguise. In fact Lucifer is so ambitious that he fights to get equal or even higher status of the God. That is why he says, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Besides, Lucifer is corrupt and vain because of his beauty. Ezekiel 28:17 says "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you."

---

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment: this is one of research results of "Beijing College Teachers Training Program" sponsored by Beijing Teachers Training Center for Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology

The other devil image in the Bible is of course Satan, who is known as accuser or adversary. He possesses demonic God-like qualities and rules over the fallen world. Satan uses at least five tricks to lure humans to fall, deteriorate and seduce people into ways of sin.

The first trick that Satan uses is to "deceive". Revelation 12:9 says "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

His second trick is to "tempt". Mark 1:13 says "And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him."

The third trick is to "perform signs". Revelation 16:14 says "For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

The fourth trick that Satan uses is to "accuse". Revelation 12:10 says "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'"

His final trick is to "lie". John 8:44 says "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*; for he is a liar and the father of it."

The third devil image in the Bible story is of course the snake, or the serpent of old that tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Then, how do the images of the devils change in the history of western literature. What are the similarities and differences between the devil images in the Bible stories and in the works of Goethe, Bulgakov and Thomas Mann. Mephistopheles in *Faust* by Goethe, Woland in *The Master and Margarita* by Bulgakov, and a Mephistopheles figure in *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann are the three characters shall be roughly discussed in this article.

## **II. Mephistopheles in *Faust***

Faust is a well-known legendary character in Germany. He is the protagonist in many German ballads, dramas, and even puppet-plays. People also believe that there is such a real person in German history. The stories of Faust become the favorites of many great writers throughout Europe. For instance, Christopher Marlowe, a famous English dramatist published *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* in the year 1588. Two centuries later, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe reworked on the story of Faust and published the first part of his masterpiece of *Faust* in 1808.

Goethe is a giant of literature in late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a politician and a writer, Goethe spent 60 years on the reworking of the Faust story. That is to say, it takes him more than half of his life time on this drama, which was only published entirely after his death. In this drama, the character of the devil Mephistopheles is so impressive that it is still shining the sky of literature even today.

We can find similarities as well as differences between the devils in the Bible stories and Mephistopheles in *Faust*. In the beginning chapter of the drama, Mephistopheles makes a bet with the Lord about whether he can successfully make Faust surrenders his moral integrity to achieve power and success in his life. Mephistopheles tries every way out to seduce Faust into ways of sin. Faust, a very successful scholar finally makes a pact with the Devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures, because he is fed up with his boring life.

Like the devil images in the Bible stories, Mephistopheles uses many tricks to “lie”, “deceive”, “perform signs”, “lure” and “tempt” Faust. The devil provides Faust with unlimited his knowledge, power, and enjoyment of life. The devil transforms Faust from old to young. The devil leads Faust to culminate in a lustful relationship with Gretchen, an innocent young woman. The devil helps Faust to manipulate the world of politics. The devil makes Faust meet with Helen of Troy, the personification of beauty. Throughout this drama, Mephistopheles serves Faust in every possible means until the moment he attains the zenith of human happiness. For after the moment of happiness, Mephistopheles will be able to take the soul of Faust, and thus win over the Lord. However, at the end of the ends, Faust's soul is carried to heaven in the presence of God as a reward of his unending striving and persistent quest for the true essence of life.

Different from the devil images in the Bible stories, Mephistopheles does not completely represent a negative power. He is in some way considered a positive force. He stimulates Faust from an adverse angle. When Faust first meets Mephistopheles in his study, he asks, “Who then art thou!” Mephistopheles answers, “Part of that power which still. Produce the good, whilst ever scheming ill.” So Mephistopheles represents the negative force of sin, destruction and evil. But at the same time, he also “produces the good”. Maybe that also explains why in this drama, the animal image of the devil is a poodle, not a snake or the serpent of old.

### **III. Woland in *The Master and Margarita***

*The Master and Margarita* is one of the masterpieces written by Bulgakov, a well-know Russian writer and playwright in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bulgakov began his writing of the book in 1928 and finished the book 12 years later. The book was published after his death by his widow in 1966. Bulgakov died when he was 49 years old, which means that the writing of this book occupies almost a quarter of his life time. In fact, Bulgakov modified his manuscript 8 times during 12 years. Undoubtedly, this book is a great achievement of his painstaking efforts.

The story begins in 1930s when Woland, a mysterious foreigner and professor comes to visit Moscow. He first joins a conversation between a critic and a poet debating the existence of the Devil and the Lord. Then, Woland and his demonic retinue, which includes witches, vampires, and a gigantic talking cat, help to rescue Margarita's lover, the master, and punish those Whistleblowers and literary group members who has sent the master into mental hospital. Pontius Pilate, governor of Yerushalaim (Jerusalem) sentences Yeshua Ha-Notsri or Jesus Christ to death two thousand years ago. He can't forgive himself and has lived in hell ever since then. Guided by the demon Woland, the master relieves Pilate from endless self-accusation and helps him to find peace in heart finally.

The story has strong links with Goethe's *Faust*. There is a quotation from *Faust* at the beginning of the novel and Woland's name is also the name of a demon who appears in *Faust*: the knight Voland or Faland. Woland is a mysterious, strange, powerful character, but not as horrifying or evil as Satan or Mephistopheles. In this story, Woland and his demonic retinue play many black magic tricks. The most impressive one is the black magic show in the theatre. The ladies in the theatre are free of charge to purchase luxury clothes and jewelry. They get a possibility to satisfy to the whole extend their desires when ten-rouble bills whirl down on the audience leading to chaotic and hilarious scenes.

Why, then, Woland is so different a character from Satan or Mephistopheles? In the first place, as a terrific 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian writer, Bulgakov inherits Russian literal tradition of fantasy and illusion in 19<sup>th</sup> century. He carries forward some ideas of Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol-Yanovski (1809-1852) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). The images of Woland and his demonic retinue are associated with the dirty forces, witches, demon and water sprites in Russian folk stories. In fact, Gogol creates a demon of flying pig in his early work *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, which gives Bulgakov plenty of food for thought. Margarita is also a name of a wicked woman in Russian folk stories.

In addition, the differentiation between good and evil in Russian literature is not as absolute as it is in traditional European literature. There is always a grey area between black and white in Russian culture. Baba Yaga, for instance, is a well-known double-faced witch in Russian Folk stories. She has the habit of eating little babies. But at the same time, she can transform herself to be a friendly grandma helping children to realize their dreams from time to time. Woland is just a figure like Yaga. He believes that if the evil does not exist in the world, the good will be of uselessness.

Last but not the least, Bulgakov is influenced by Orthodox Christian monotheism, but at the same time, this Russian writer doesn't abandon his belief in the ancient Russian pantheon. Woland, therefore, is an example of the mixture of his beliefs.

#### **IV. Mephistopheles figure in *Doctor Faustus***

*Doctor Faustus*, published in 1947, is a great work written by Thomas Mann, a Nobel Prize winner during his exile to USA. The protagonist Adrian Leverkühn is a talented composer who dreams to be a successful musician. So he forges a deal with a Mephistophelean character who grants him 24 years of brilliance and success as a composer. With the help of the devil, Leverkühn produces works of increasing beauty to universal acclaim. However, he fails to keep his promise of not loving anyone. Continuous frustrations and tragedies in his life corrupt his body. In 1940, Leverkühn comes back to his hometown and dies of madness and syphilis.

Unlike Goethe's Faust and Bulgakov's Woland, Mann's Mephistopheles figure is so special in his character and appearance. Mann's Mephistopheles figure is an "inner demon" that is associated with people's instincts, desires and impulses, leading Adrian to combat moral and ethic principles. In the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter, the Mephistopheles figure mentions that he has met Adrian four years before. That implies that the devil disguises himself to be a hooker and intentionally seduces Adrian, who gets contracted venereal disease from this brothel visit. Ever since then, Adrian has deteriorated both mentally and physically until his body collapses completely in 1940. The exterior of the Mephistopheles figure is not vividly described in this book, but we can still sense the powerful force of the devil. The devil says to Adrian, "you can only see me because you are mad, does not mean that I do not really exist." The devil controls the brilliant composer's spiritual world, and therefore, is more evil and horrifying.

In conclusion, Hebrew Bible is the origin of western literature. The Bible stories help to create many devil characters in Western literal works. Without exceptions, Mephistopheles in *Faust* by Goethe, Woland in *The Master and Margarita* by Bulgakov, and a Mephistopheles figure in *Doctor Faustus* by Mann, are all able to "lie", "deceive", "perform signs", "lure" and "tempt", just like what Satan does in the Bible stories. However, these devils have their own characteristics and specialties. Mephistopheles in *Faust* can be taken as a positive force that stimulates Faust from an adverse angle. Woland and his demonic retinue are characters representing the heritage of the Russian folk stories and Russian pantheon. Mann's Mephistopheles figure is an "inner demon" that links to instincts, desires, impulses and many other weaknesses of human beings. Although we have made efforts to analyze the devil images, the depth and range of the research are still in need of improvement. The opportunities for researchers to contribute to this issue are many.

#### **Reference**

*Goethe's Plays*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translated into English with Introductions by Charles E. Passage, Publisher Bann Limited 1980 ISBN 0510000878/9780510000875/0-510-00087-8

<http://www.masterandmargarita.eu/en/02themas/inleiding.html>

<http://www.o-bible.com/gb/>

Mann, Thomas; translation by Lowe-Porter, H.T. (Helen Tracy). Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German  
Composer Adrian Leverkühn, as Told by a Friend. Alfred A. Knopf, 1948. ISBN 0-679-60042-6.