

**The Confessional Identity in *Saint Joan* and *The Master and Margarita*:  
The Discourse of Joan and Yeshua**

Anastassiya Andrianova

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Thesis Director: Professor Joshua Wilner

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## Introduction

In Act III of George Bernard Shaw's play *Man and Superman*, Dona Ana, who hardly fits the epitome of prudent femininity, cannot stop confessing. Throughout her life, she invents endless sins to exchange for endless mercy in the confessional. Then, however, she is strangely surprised to find herself in hell. "But I have sincerely repented; I have confessed—," she insists, and to "[m]ore sins than I really committed. *I loved confession.*" The Shavian Don Juan replies, "Ah, that is perhaps as bad as confessing too little" (Shaw, 602).

Shaw is clearly poking fun at the potential extremities of confession, but he does have a point. We have become a confessional culture: we confess to anything and everything. Confession is no longer confined to the privacy of a confessional or to the proceedings of a legal courtroom; it has become a major theme in literature and the arts; in a word, it has grown into an obsession. As Michel Foucault observes in his history of sexuality, "Western man has become *une bête d'aveu*, a confessing animal" (59). Foucault traces this development in the West from the establishment of confession as the main ritual for producing truth, which came out of the annual confessional requirement imposed by the IV Lateran Council, in 1215:

For a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. (*History*, 58-9)

Although it has innumerable overtones, confession is intrinsically related to and, in effect, defines the "self." Writing about confession in literature and the law, Peter Brooks in some ways agrees with Foucault, and he notes, "along with the introspection and self-examination it implies, confession both creates and is created by a new sense of selfhood":

Without a sense of the self and its narrative, there could be no confession; and without the requirement of confession [imposed by Lateran IV], internally or externally mandated, there would be no exploration of this selfhood. (97)

In other words, through the act of confessing or externalizing our psyche, we are, and have been for the last several centuries, creating our identities—first, predominantly in relation to God, "as the self made in the image of God, an *imago dei* that is the same for all humans," and then primarily in relation to oneself, a well-demarcated person in the true sense of "individuality" (96-

7). Brooks builds his argument on Foucault's insight "that the practice of confession creates the metaphors of innerness that it claims to explore": the two are inseparable (111).

Literature, in particular, has fashioned itself to satisfy the desire to speak about or give an account of the self: "the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage" (Foucault, *History*, 59). Perhaps more effectively than any other medium, literature is capable of presenting the potential conflicts that a confessant might experience. Through writing in the modern tradition, even more than through the externalized visuals of the cinema, one tries "to open up interiority, depth: identity as experienced from within" (Brooks, 108). Still, in defining the self, does one rely on others, Foucault's "ties to the commonweal," or instead entirely demarcate oneself from external authority and depend solely on introspection and self-knowledge? Historically, there appears to have been a shift from a kind of "communal self," defined through one's structural role in a community, to a more modern, self-authenticated identity. Yet, it seems that even in today's concept of the self there still are traces of one's relations alongside a deliberate and more formal demarcation. What is clear in both situations is that discourse somehow shapes or "produces" the self and is, in turn, shaped by it. The declaration of identity through confessional discourse is, therefore, quite telling because of its linguistic dynamics, and it invites one to examine confession comprehensively as a performance, an extended discourse between the confessor and the confessant, or even as an interrogation, and, finally, as a process that is intrinsically intermingled with power (speaking from a dominant or subservient position).

Act V of Shaw's play *Saint Joan* (1923) and the Yershalaim (Jerusalem) chapters in Mikhail A. Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* (1928-1940) stage the scene of confession, and lend themselves to an analysis of some of the dynamics of the confessor/confessant relationship. Both works are contemporary, twentieth-century renderings of major trials: one focuses on the 1431 trial of Joan of Arc by the French religious and English political authorities, and the other dramatizes the interrogation of Yeshua (Jesus) by the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate. Yet, neither is confined to jurisprudence, and instead allows the character's identity to unfold through the discourse of "the self." Confession is, in a way, the focal point of both works, because it contributes to the creation of the protagonists, and at the

same time, these protagonists, Joan and Yeshua, define themselves through this very discourse of confession, which then places them at odds with religious and political forces.

The interesting problem posed by Joan and Yeshua's cases is their *incriminating innocence*: they see themselves as innocent, but the other characters, for the most part, do not. Unlike the farcical Dona Ana, they have no internal urge to incriminate themselves with fabricated sins in exchange for mercy. Rather, at least at the onset of their interrogations, they are ignorant of the fact that their beliefs, and the implications of such beliefs, constitute crimes. Until the interference of an external force, the threat of torture for Joan and the actual beatings for Yeshua, they insist on their beliefs by stubbornly proclaiming them. Nor do they suspect the serious repercussions of such self-proclamation. Their naïveté, simplicity, or the plain ignorance of having committed a crime complicates the confession/interrogation scene, and also raises questions about the justification of their punishments. Even more importantly, both works raise the question of exactly how *aware* these two protagonists are of *themselves* and of their actions: Does either of them possess, or create through discourse, the kind of “innerness” or “inwardness” that characterizes the “proto-modern” sense of self? If so, can we discover the origins of an autonomous self within this interplay of the trial dynamics? Does Joan “pro-duce” or “re-duce” her selfhood through her testimony, and how are we to reconcile her admission to heresy with the subsequent reinstatement of her original beliefs? In turn, how does Yeshua's personhood emerge from or become more and more illusory through his discourse with Pilate, and what are we to make of his apparent submission to Pilate's authority? Finally, in a broader comparison, how and why have Bulgakov and Shaw chosen to dramatize these conflicting dualities, and can meaningful parallels be made between the two?

### **The Historicity of the Two Trials: Actuality Reinterpreted**

The confessional narratives of Christ and Joan have historically become so imbued with cultural interpretations and, to a large extent, mythologized that it might be difficult to distinguish between canonical accounts and their subsequent interpretations. Indeed, the interpretations are part of their respective canons: we see the historical bodies of Joan and Jesus as well as the various interpretations, or bodies of interpretation, constructed upon them. Through writing, both Bulgakov and Shaw are able to “converse” with these literary canons as well as their historical foundations. What is more, they are able to continue and simultaneously reshape the history of

confession in general; to state it differently, they are themselves confessing to the reader by presenting accounts that purport to be “true” and, in turn, by imploring the reader to serve as the confessor, judge, or Foucault’s (virtual) “interlocutor” in accepting these accounts as “authentic.” The questions of historicity and historical “truth” are, therefore, relevant.

A great deal has been written about the historical accuracy of both *Saint Joan* and the Jerusalem chapters in *The Master and Margarita* in order to understand the authors’ interpretive choices. Anthony S. Abbott, for example, begins his chapter on “Saint Joan” by addressing the question of Shaw’s “fidelity to history,” and he points out that one of Shaw’s peculiar acts was to claim repeatedly that his play “was a completely accurate rendering of the life of Joan of Arc”: “I have told the story exactly as it happened,” Shaw commented at the opening of a London production of *Saint Joan*; “It is the easiest play I have ever had to write. All I’ve done is to put down the facts, to arrange Joan for the stage”(157). In his Preface to the play, Shaw does not list the sources of his account (or “recount”) of Joan’s story; he does, however, extensively criticize the literary misconceptions presented by numerous “inauthentic” accounts—from “the Shakespearean, or pseudo-Shakespearean [*sic*] trilogy of Henry VI” to a later interpretation by Schiller, whose Joan (Die Jungfrau von Orleans) “has not a single point of contact with the real Joan” (767-8). Still, Shaw’s acknowledgment of the reports of Joan’s trial and rehabilitation, published by Quicherat in 1841, as “entirely realistic documents” and his overall attention to detail suggest that he most likely studied those original manuscripts (769). He also admits to having made a few changes in the story to adapt it to the theater (“The Stage Limits of Historical Representation,” 792-3), and that further attests to his preoccupation with historical accuracy.

Nonetheless, following the first performance of *Saint Joan*, Shaw came under attack by the critics who pointed out that his depiction of Joan was not accurate. Abbott, in this case, correctly concludes that “Shaw was not a historian; he was an artist-philosopher interested in the past only insofar as it could serve the needs of the present” (158). In a way echoing Foucault’s comment about his interest in “writing the history of the present” by “writing a history of the past in terms of the present” (*Discipline*, 31), Shaw writes in “The Sanity of Art”:

I deal with all periods; but I never study any period but the present, which I have not yet mastered and never shall; and as a dramatist I have no clue to any historical or other personage save that part of him which is also myself, ...but which, anyhow, is all that can ever come within my knowledge of his soul.

(*Major Critical Essays*, qtd. in Abbott, 159).

Shaw's more modernist perspective in this passage is entirely in tact with his emphasis on historical accuracy, although the two might at first seem to contradict one another. The very attempt to retrieve and reenact the historical actuality implies interpretation on the part of the historian, critic, or author, and despite his intellectual snobbery, Shaw was not immune to this "limitation." If anything, he probably found his temporal and cultural distance enlightening, because it allowed him to see through what he might call "lies" (or we might think of as different "regimes of truth") that blinded Joan's contemporaries, in the same way as any contemporary history might be inaccessible, or at least limited, to the critics who are immersed in it.

Bulgakov's sources have also generated much criticism, and for him, the question of historicity is similarly, if not more, crucial: Jesus' trial dates back two thousand years, survives as a biblical account that is fraught with contradictions and enigmas, and is, arguably, the most culturally potent "legend" of the West. According to Andrew Barratt, while the "final text of the novel itself attests to [Bulgakov's] almost cinematographic attention to all manner of detail," which in turn reveals his concern with uncovering the true identity of the historical Jesus, his dramatization is a historically-minded but ultimately "pseudo-historical solution" (189-93):

In absolute contrast to the gospels, Bulgakov's story of Ieshua's interrogation and sentencing displays a logic and consistency... For the historically minded reader the most impressive feature of these [Jerusalem] chapters is the deceptive facility with which Bulgakov supplies answers to all major puzzles. (194-5)

Bulgakov's two noteworthy innovations were to transform Yeshua's crucifixion into a mercy killing and to establish a rapport between Yeshua and Pilate that would explain the proceedings of the interrogation in a more logical fashion. But his overall "solution had to *appear* to be historical, rather than novelistic," Barratt explains (193), and this may be the main feature that sets these four chapters apart from the rest of the narrative, or the second world of this "double-novel," which revolves around the mysterious and, of course, entirely fictional visit of Woland (the Devil) and his suite to contemporary Moscow.<sup>1</sup> Even so, in the Epilogue to the novel, the main characters are brought together and the two "worlds" blended, pointing not only toward the transience of their respective worlds but also to a kind of "transcendence" of their histories (or of history *itself*?). As a result, the strict boundary between history and fiction is challenged, and as

in Shaw's case, this is not a limitation of the modern perspective, but is, rather, the reality implicit in writing as a discourse between the (more known) present and the (less known) past.

It is not necessary, therefore, to single out all the "pseudo-solutions" or fictional details that Bulgakov supplied to the Jerusalem chapters; nor is it relevant to list all the liberties taken by Shaw in depicting Joan. While it is important that both works are intended *as history*, they are also intentionally "produced" by and transmitted through a literary lens, and this adds another level of discourse to the one employed by the protagonists themselves. The authors give more or less "enlightened" treatments of the trials, both of which are full of inconsistencies due to the paucity of historical data, and thus they shed a modern light wherever the actual facts are obscured—or need to be obscured. When it comes to the characters, however, both Shaw and Bulgakov allow for more irrationality, for the workings of a higher force, God or the Imagination. The "historical" approach that the two authors take on a broader scale appears to break down on the level of Joan and Yeshua's discourse: the words they speak are to a great extent, if not entirely, their authors' creations. What is crucial here is exactly how the two characters speak—self-referentially—for themselves. We should, in other words, consider their discourse "in its own terms—precisely as a confession—as true to the self in ways that other discourses never can be" (Brooks, 110-1). Admittedly, the "selves" Joan and Yeshua create through Shaw and Bulgakov's language are not and *cannot* be "authentic." Yet, it is exactly this "limitation" that adds complexity to both narratives—as narratives of the canonical past through the living present.

### **Joan's Discourse: "...[s]he who tells too much truth is sure to be hanged"**

In Carl Dreyer's silent film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), Peter Cauchon (Bishop of Beauvais and the leading French religious authority) and his suite lead Jeanne (played by Maria Falconetti) into the torture chamber, where she comes face to face with the machines of torture. The camera then cuts from a long shot of the wheels, relentlessly turning rows of spikes, to a close-up of Jeanne's terrified face, showing her eyes gaping open with fear. This spectacle is meant to demonstrate the power of the Church and force her to denounce her "heretical" visions: the "first degree of torture was the sight of the instruments," Foucault notes (*Discipline*, 40),

One confesses—or *is forced* to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat... Since the Middle Ages, torture has accompanied it like a shadow, and

supported it when it could go no further: the dark twins. (*History*, 59)

The ultimate test of faith is, in this context, the sight of the execution. As soon as the power of the Church transforms into physical force and turns to torture, Jeanne's vulnerability becomes evident. We see real, immediate physical terror. It is precisely this moment that forces her to recant her beliefs by signing a formal abjuration.<sup>2</sup>

The unforgettable image of the torture apparatus is absent from Shaw's play, and the power relations between the Church and Joan are established through discourse alone. The focus on the trial and the private interrogation in the courtroom (as opposed to the scaffold) makes Shaw's interpretation a rather modern one. In reference to his authorial choice to focus on discourse rather than on physical imagery, Abbott comments, "Instead of concentrating on action and spectacle, Shaw deliberately plays down some of the major events in Joan's career...and focuses all his attention on one event, the trial" (161). Perhaps due to the limitations of the genre, Shaw does not stage the execution with as much pomp as Dreyer does in his film, where the shot of Joan tied to the stake and choking from the smoke is the longest and by far the most compelling; like the torture chamber, the stake in Shaw's play is a subject of discussion rather than a visual monstrosity or spectacle intended to instill fear in the masses. Shaw is primarily interested in the dialogue and power relations that develop during the trial interrogation. (Shavian plays can be generally described as "plays of ideas," as intellectual rather than visual conceits, where violence is held back so that no pathos or excessive emotionality can distract the audience from the substance of Shaw's messages.) Such treatment lends itself to the conception of modern torture given by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*: "Now the scandal and the light are to be distributed differently; it is the conviction itself that marks the offender with the unequivocally negative sign: the publicity has shifted to the sentence..." (9). In other words, it is not the spectacle that matters, but the interplay of convictions and the power dynamics which lead up to the sentence.

Since Joan's confession occurs in a legal context, it becomes a creation of and is inseparable from her interrogation; both are vehicles for arriving at—or *creating*—"the truth." As Foucault explains, the legal confession was historically "the act by which the accused accepted the charge and recognized its truth," or more precisely, "it transformed an investigation carried out without [the criminal] into a voluntary affirmation":

Through the confession, the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing



penal truth. As medieval law put it, the confession ‘renders the thing notorious and manifest’. (*Discipline*, 38)

Regardless of whether the confession is genuinely “true,” it assumes the value of “truth” through the act of confessing. But Shaw (and Foucault might agree) is suspicious of the kind of “truth” that Joan was forced to produce for the prosecution, as well as of the subsequent “regimes of truth” which her narrative assumed. In the play, Shaw gives us several different “truths” produced by Joan and her judges. (In most cases, what is “true” is defined contextually; yet, unlike post-modern thinkers, Shaw still believes that there is a single absolute truth, that which is dictated to Joan by her “saintly” voices.)

In Scene VI, which takes place at Rouen, on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1431, in a great castle hall arranged for a trial, the charges against Joan are introduced: she must “confess to the sin of sedition, to the sin of idolatry, to the sin of disobedience, to the sin of pride, and to the sin of heresy” (Shaw, *Saint*, 887-8). She is then compelled to accept and mark those as “the truth” (“notorious and manifest”). This is the first and indeed historically valid “regime” that Joan must confront through her discourse with the prosecution in order to discard it later by the force of her own convictions, in favor of a more *valid* truth.

To this “regime” of historical charges, Shaw adds another. In an earlier scene, from which Joan is absent, he stages one part of the investigation that is meant to draw up the above charges. What this investigation produces is, however, something different: Joan is accused of being a “Protestant,” a Modernist, a “Nationalist,” and a Feminist. In a conversation imagined by Shaw, Cauchon tells the Earl of Warwick, the leading English prosecutor, that Joan is a threat to the whole establishment of the Catholic Church:

She acts as if she herself were The Church. She brings the message of God to Charles; and The Church must stand aside. She will crown him in the cathedral of Rheims: s h e, not the Church!...Has she ever in all her utterances said one word of The Church? Never. It is always God and herself. (846-7)

Warwick stresses this point further when he claims that the threat posed by her ideas “goes deep...[and] is the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God”; “I should call it Protestantism if I had to find a name for it,” he asserts (851). Shaw’s characterization of Joan as a “Protéstant” (Shaw puts the accent on the second syllable) places her in the tradition that celebrates the direct relationship with God and

emphasizes the role of the individual as his or her own priest. She is a “visionary” who is at least a century ahead of her time, and it is understandable for her actions to be opposed by the Church: “To understand Joan’s history it is not enough to understand her character: you must understand her environment as well” (Preface, 771-2). When the Church “was calling on [Joan] to accept its interpretation of God’s will, and to sacrifice her own, she flatly refused, and made it clear that her notion of a Catholic Church was one in which the Pope was Pope Joan” (774). Thus stated, this charge alone amounted to arch-heresy. Yet, whether this is “true” to Joan is another question. It is a “truth” agreeable to the persecution (or Shaw’s vision of it) but not to Joan herself. The same applies to her alleged threat to the aristocracy. “Her idea is that the kings should give their realms to God, and then reign as God’s bailiffs,” and that “is a cunning device to supercede the aristocracy, and make the king the sole and absolute autocrat”(849). Also, the English Chaplain accuses Joan of “rebel[ling] against Nature by wearing man’s clothes, and fighting”(852). Added to this list, is her proto-modern Nationalism, neatly described and labeled by Cauchon:

When she threatens to drive the English from the soil of France she is undoubtedly thinking of the whole extent of country in which French is spoken. To her the French-speaking people are what the Holy Scriptures describe as a nation. Call this side of her heresy Nationalism if you will: I can find you no better name for it.

(851)

The above charges do not exactly fit into the categories of “sedition,” “idolatry,” “disobedience,” or “heresy”; and yet, Joan’s prosecutors in the play cannot formulate them other than as “heresy,” since the law of their time has no appropriate machinery to condemn her on the basis of such “avant-garde” crimes. (Although Shaw takes liberties in characterization, he keeps his version mostly historically accurate.) There is no available terminology: the charges brought up against Joan point to things that must have existed as “temporary aberrations,” to use Foucault’s term (*History*, 43), but it was not until much later that these came to signify, through discourse, a certain kind of identity.<sup>3</sup> Shaw introduces a kind of “double fabric”: a modern intuition articulated through older, medieval discourse, which is another layer of “truth” that Joan must confront, challenge, and dismiss, indirectly or explicitly, to define and create her identity.

Moreover, these alleged “crimes” have to be presented by others because Joan herself is reluctant to accept that her ideas, which come to her from God by way of her imagination, are in any way heretical or dangerous. She lacks not only the proto-modern “verbal technology,” which

her judges invent in her absence, but also the awareness of such “aberrations”: her drives are unconscious. Or, perhaps, she is ignorant of their ambiguity: to her, the “truth” is inspired by God and therefore genuine; to her prosecutors, this “truth” is a falsehood coming from the Devil.

JOAN. All the things that you call my crimes have come to me by the command of God.

I say that I have done them by the order of God: it is impossible for me to say anything else...(Shaw, *Saint*, 881)

Indeed, Joan “is betrayed by one flaw—innocence”; and since “in her innocence [she] has no conception of what she represents, the State [Warwick] and the Church [Cauchon] must do her job for her,” and so we find Warwick and Cauchon with “powers of intuition and philosophical speculation far transcending those which the historical characters actually possessed” (Abbott, 163-4). It would be inconsistent to claim that Joan is aware of her “criminal” identity, that of a Protestant and Nationalist, because she does not possess the discourse to articulate it, and, more generally, the very idea of a Protestant or Nationalist community is not yet in place. Instead, she plainly professes her beliefs, whether they are inspired by saints or her imagination (Shaw thinks it is the latter<sup>4</sup>), but nowhere in her conscious mind is there any hint at wrongdoing. “The enormity of Joan’s pretension [to be “Pope Joan”] was proved by her own unconsciousness of it, which we call her innocence, and her friends call her simplicity,” Shaw comments. “She was in a state of invincible ignorance as to the Church’s view...”(Preface, 775). Joan’s lack of guilt is not problematic to the prosecution, but her ignorance of her alleged crimes is threatening.

Then again, while she may not possess the discourse at the onset of the interrogation, Joan does soon learn that what she says places her at odds with her judges. This adds another layer or “regime” of truth, which is, in turn, left unspoken and mainly implied. “I have said again and again that I will tell you all that concerns the trial,” Joan declares to her prosecutors,

But I cannot tell you the whole truth: God does not allow the whole truth to be told. You do not understand it when I tell it. It is an old saying that he who tells too much truth is sure to be hanged...I have sworn as much as I will swear; and I will swear no more. (*Saint*, 878)

The beliefs she does *not* utter are precisely those in which she strongly believes; to express them would necessarily doctor their purity, and “swear[ing]” carries this polluting quality. What Joan’s interrogation suggests is that most of her self-vindication takes place outside of the courtroom. It is the silence that is, accordingly, the most deviant: but while it is deviant to the

authorities, it is true to herself. “You can create nothing but yourself,” states another Shavian character (in *Back to Methuselah*); Joan becomes conscious of that as well, and so she chooses carefully between what should be spoken and what must remain silent.

Even when Joan’s prosecutors, dissatisfied with her bold reply, threaten her with torture (The Inquisitor asks whether “she [has] been shewn the instruments”; The Executioner confirms [878-9]) in order to extort “the truth”—*their* truth, Joan remains “obdurate” in her convictions.

If you tear me limb from limb until you separate my soul from my body you will get nothing out of me beyond what I have told you. What more is there to tell that you could understand? Besides, I cannot bear to be hurt; and if you hurt me I will say anything you like to stop the pain. But I will take it all back afterwards; so what is the use of it? (879)

When she says that she “cannot bear to be hurt,” and that if she is tortured, she “will say anything [the judges] like,” Joan is implying that anything she says during the interrogation, in response to the judges’ questions, is essentially unstable. The substance of her ideas is known before the trial, from her actions and letters to the newly crowned King Charles. Whatever is produced by the interrogation is, on the other hand, problematic not only because it is spoken under the threat of pain but also because it has an ambiguous quality. To the English, her death is “a political necessity” and her interrogation a formality, Warwick explains to Cauchon, who is troubled by the possible implication of the Church in carrying out the punishment (869). Cauchon, unlike the English “secular arm,” initially intends to save Joan’s soul: “I cannot burn her,” he insists, “The Church cannot take life. And my first duty is to seek this girl’s salvation” (844). (Brooks observes that, in “the religious and legal models of confession in fact intersect in the question of heresy, where confession—obtained by exhortation or by torture—is so considered to be both ‘medicinal’ (necessary to the salvation of the heretic’s soul) and judicial (the basis of punishment)” [96].) For the English prosecution, her testimony serves to justify the punishment; for Cauchon, her confession is a means to absolution. However, contrary to both Warwick and Cauchon, the purpose of confession for Joan is neither strictly judicial nor “medicinal”: the discourse is a necessary part of who she is—that is, the confession which her voices, not the Court, compel her to say. Thus, whatever is exhorted from Joan during the trial constitutes yet another layer, call it the “trial confession.” She (though not the Court) can, in effect, dismiss this “trial confession,” because neither the situation nor the relationship is appropriate to the

confessional, which to pious Joan would undeniably be the superior model: in other words, the religious model for her takes precedence over the legal.<sup>5</sup> Joan does not come to the Court on her own, nor does she say anything in the courtroom beyond what she has already made clear through her actions and letters to Charles; Shaw chooses not to include these in the play, leaving the more meaningful discourse dramatically implied.

However, it is the discourse spoken in the remaining sections of the play that first absolves and then—most dramatically—incriminates Joan. As The Inquisitor aptly observes, “Unless you put a gag in her mouth you cannot prevent her from convicting herself ten times over every time she opens it” (Shaw, *Saint*, 869). Again, we witness how the religious and legal traditions “intersect” (Brooks), revealing the potentially problematic nature of confession: it exculpates at the same time as it incriminates. When, terrified by the fiery execution, Joan is compelled to abjure by proclaiming her voices heretical, she exonerates herself before the Church (that is, accepts the charges presented by the prosecution), and at the same time, confesses to a “falsehood” in the face of God. That is the first overturning of “regimes” which makes it uncertain which “truth” is dominant, and leaves us wondering why Joan takes the following step:

JOAN [*despairing*] Oh, it is true: it is true: my voices have deceived me. I have been mocked by devils: my faith is broken. I have dared and dared; but only a fool will walk into a fire: God, who gave me my commonsense, cannot will me to do that. (886)

Her formal abjuration may be analyzed in light of J. L. Austin’s description of a “performative utterance,” which, he explains, “looks like a statement and grammatically... would be classed as a statement, which is not nonsensical, and yet is not true or false.” Hence, “if a person makes an utterance of this kind we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely saying something.” Given the “appropriate circumstances,” when I am “saying what I do, I actually perform that action” (222). Following up on Austin’s distinction, Brooks suggests that confession in the religious context is a “performative” action that is meant to be taken as the *act* of confessing; that is, by *saying* “I confess” I am *doing* the actual confessing, giving up my sins. Accordingly, Joan’s utterance may be an example of the ritual by which a sinner who says, “I confess to having committed heresy,” is absolved by the confessor’s statement, “I forgive you your sins.” An abjuration that is appropriate to the circumstances, regardless of whether it is sincere, serves the “medicinal” purpose. (The fact that she is performing this action *insincerely*,

that is, without any intention to fulfill the “promise” of recanting, is “something wrong certainly, but it is not like a misfire”—as long as the circumstances are right [Austin, 226].)

When Joan subsequently places her mark on the formal “confession,” written by the prosecution and read by Ladvenu (886), she is extending her symbolic/performative act:

LADVENU [From the formal “confession”] “I Joan, commonly called The Maid, a miserable sinner, do confess that I have most grievously sinned in the following articles... All of which sins I now renounce and abjure and depart from, humbly thanking you Doctors and Masters who have brought me back to the truth and into the grace of our Lord. And I will never return to my errors, but will remain in communion with our Holy church and in obedience to our Holy Father the Pope of Rome. All this I swear by God Almighty and the Holy Gospels, in witness whereto I sign my name to this recantation.” (Shaw, *Saint*, 888)

At the same time, contrary to Austin’s description, that a “performative utterance” does not correspond to any internal change, the fear of the stake *does* force Joan to undergo some change, and she appears to *intend* the surrender of her voices at that point. It makes sense; at least that is what Shaw would have us believe. In the Preface to the play, he explains that Joan sustained faith in her voices so long as “her expectation of a rescue was reasonable”; however, as soon as she discovered that she had “miscalculated: when she was led to the stake... she threw over Saint Catherine at once, and recanted. Nothing could be more sane and practical” (762). She is, in other words, led to produce a different “truth” through confession, meant to negate her former discourse as well as, quite sensibly, to save her soul. Throughout, she seems unconsciously aware of the creative force of her testimony (perhaps to a greater extent than her judges), as she shapes and reshapes her identity through the interrogation.

But, shortly after, this temporary “truth” is overturned, all by virtue of Joan’s speech, as she takes back her recantation:

JOAN. Give me that writing. [*She rushes to the table; snatches up the paper; and tears it into fragments*] Light your fire: do you think I dread it as much as the life of a rat in a hole? (*Saint*, 889)

We witness a second clash of “truths.” As soon as her sentence is read, committing her to perpetual imprisonment, Joan realizes that the Church, which has promised to save her, is in fact “of the Devil”; so, she immediately recants: what her formal confession designates as going

“back to the truth” (888) she transforms into a falsehood, and what is meant by her “errors” she turns into the present truth. Her false promise “never [to] return to [these] errors” is set straight.

Then again, one might propose that since her mark on the formal confession has only purported or acted *as* “the truth,” does not her second recantation, when she recants and reinstates her earlier beliefs, become similarly ambiguous? Does she *really* accept and internalize this “heretical identity” either by incorporating it into her speech act or through the subsequent signing of the written document? It would remain ambiguous if Joan were not given a chance to solidify this final regime of truth through her final self-definitional, self-vindicating narrative.

At the end of Act V, Joan produces a narrative that carries all the meaning of a modern confession, one that serves as a vindication of her identity without the interrogative and ambiguous aspects interwoven in her previous statements:

JOAN. My voices were right... Yes: they told me you were fools, and that I was not to listen to your fine words nor trust to your charity. You promised me my life; but you lied. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more?... But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep from me everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me and leave me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times. I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God. (889: stage instructions omitted)

This is the last speech Joan has in the play proper (she also appears as a spirit in the Epilogue), and she clearly defines herself as a Militant Maid, as a Feminist, and as a Protestant. But, of course, she does not use these terms because, unlike her adversaries, Joan neither possesses nor

tries to invent such “proto-modern” discourse. At the same time, there is a hint of her Protestant inclinations: in her direct reliance on God, via her voices, rather than on the machinery of the Church. Although she does not manifest her “innerness” or “inwardness,” to use Brooks’ terminology, she still implies it: her voices are a metaphor for her self- or God-created personhood. Within the course of this brief narrative, there is a development from an other-directed self, a self defined by the judges (“*You* promised me my life”) and qualified similarly by the other-imposed voices (“*they* told me you were fools...”) to a self defined more boldly and distinctly by the first-person pronoun: “I cannot live” and “I know,” accompanied by an appropriation (or internalization) of the voices into her first-person discourse/personhood. What is more, there is a shift from the conditional (“I could”) to the more assertive indicative (“I can”), which suggests, though to a limited extent, the growth of her self-consciousness as well as self-knowledge, as the knowledge of her abilities.

In this second reinstatement of “truth” and personhood, Shaw’s interpretation is quite applicable. “It was not until she discovered that she had gained nothing by her recantation but close imprisonment for life that she withdrew it, and deliberately and explicitly chose burning instead,” Shaw explains. Her decision “shewed not only the extraordinary decision of her character, but also a Rationalism carried to its ultimate human test of suicide” (Preface, 762). Joan’s confessional *self* appears to be different from her wavering and changing confessional “truths,” which she first denounces and then validates; her self-image as God’s Messenger and, indeed, her identity remain unaltered even when her voices are overthrown and reinstated. “Yet even in this the illusion persisted; and she announced her relapse as dictated to her by the voices” (762). While Shaw refers to her identity as an “illusion,” he differs from Foucault, who regards “the self” as a social construct, a metaphor created through discourse and inseparable from it, without a distinct reality of its own. Shaw’s notion is, however, more traditional and religious, one that allows the identity—the soul—to survive even when discourse and life itself break down. It is also this identity that requires an absolute truth, one that surpasses all others.

### **Yeshua’s Discourse: “Not much is written down, but enough is written to hang you.”**

There are two major scenes in the Jerusalem chapters of Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, the interrogation and the execution, which are somewhat parallel to the scenes of Joan’s abjuration and her subsequent reinstatement of faith. In both, there is a clash and then



overturning of (opposing) “regimes of truth.” Yeshua’s confession is, likewise, staged in an interrogational setting, and his identity is thus defined and shaped by the discourse he has with Pontius Pilate. The first interrogation scene at the Herod’s castle, like the torture chamber in Dreyer’s *Passion*, highlights the physicality of the protagonist: Yeshua is beaten by Centurion Rat-Killer (*Mark Krysoyov*), and these beatings are meant to instill in him the fear of authority comparable to that forced upon Jeanne, when she is exposed to the instruments of torture. Although the massive spectacle of torture machinery is dramatically reduced as it focuses in on a single lash, the effect is nonetheless grave:

Bringing the prisoner from the colonnade into the garden, Rat-Killer took a lash from the hands of the legionary standing at the foot of a bronze statue. Swinging lightly, he struck the prisoner across the shoulders. The centurion’s movement was careless and easy, but the bound man instantly crashed to the ground as though someone had cut him down; he gasped for air, the color drained from his face, and his eyes became expressionless... “The Procurator must be addressed as Hegemon. Speak no other words... Do you understand me, or shall I hit you again?” (Bulgakov, 19)

Barratt points out that contrary to the biblical account, Bulgakov chooses to supply the “physical details” of the beatings, and they “emphasize precisely what is glossed over in the New Testament narratives—the physical vulnerability of Yeshua and the sheer indignity of this violent abuse of [his] person” (180). Hence, the “careless and easy” movement of the centurion is violently juxtaposed with the prisoner’s “instan[t] cras[h] to the ground” and his ensuing faintness. And it is not just the detailed bodily imagery that is striking. The “bronze statue” does not appear to be merely accidental to the setting: it symbolizes an unnamed power, political or religious, whose status is implicitly colossal, since the legionary is said to be “standing at [its] foot” rather than next to it. This power seems to allow the “violent abuse” to happen, and perhaps even justifies as well as makes the disciplining official. Together, the statue and the lash help to create this public spectacle in order to solidify the power of the Hegemon.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Yeshua’s independent personhood is challenged; his body, like the statue, becomes the vehicle for increasing the Hegemon’s or even Caesar’s power (on whose behalf Pilate is operating). The emphasis on the spectacle, which precedes the modern shift toward psychological manipulation, is one of Bulgakov’s historical features consistent with Foucault’s history of punishment.

“Torture,” as it seems to be used in this case, “is a technique; it is not an extreme expression of lawless rage”; it is also a demonstration of “the principle that in criminal matters the establishment of truth was the absolute right and the exclusive power of the sovereign and his judges” (Foucault, *Discipline*, 33-5). The “truth” and the very identity of Yeshua are defined by the power of Pilate: the discourse is, quite plainly, beaten out of the criminal.

In addition to seeing the spectacle as an attack on Yeshua’s body, this notion may also be extended to his philosophy. The violence is, after all, meant to produce—or, rather, *induce*—discourse. As Barratt aptly remarks, Pilate and Yeshua “face each other...not only as judge and accused in a political trial, but also as participants in an intellectual debate” (202). In other words, the Procurator’s calculating irony and condescension confront the prisoner’s idealism and categorical compassion. In the context of this “debate,” the latter is forced to address and thus, symbolically, to revere his interlocutor as “Hegemon” not as a “good person,” which is his habitual way of addressing people as well as the cornerstone of his philosophy. (Bulgakov substitutes the “good man” philosophy for Jesus’ traditional citing of the Scriptures.) Although his compliance with the centurion’s forceful order does not technically amount to the denial of Yeshua’s beliefs, one might still be led—and Barratt is—into seeing this compliance as “nothing less than a moral capitulation” (181). This could amount to a “capitulation,” if Yeshua’s original “innate capacity for good and his rejection of all forms of power” constitute a kind of “philosophical anarchism” (221), an “anarchism” which is subsequently surrendered to the hegemonic authority. But it is unclear whether this admission is voluntary. Bulgakov’s description implies the opposite, that Yeshua, like Joan, is forced to accept an adverse claim (or “truth”) that only *performs* the function of denouncing his former faith (or his “original truth”).

Pilate spoke in Greek: “So you intended to destroy the Temple and called upon people to do it?” The prisoner became animated again and his eyes lost their expression of fear. He answered in Greek: “No, goo...” terror flashed in his eyes because he had almost made a slip. “No, Hegemon, I have never in my life intended to destroy the Temple...”(Bulgakov, 21)

The lack of consent in Yeshua’s speech act is suggested by the fact that forgetting the beatings, he begins his customary greeting, but then checks himself and produces the appropriate utterance. However brief, this instance demonstrates the creative—but, at the same time, *destructive*—verbal force that shapes—or *disassembles*—his identity.

Indeed, the way Yeshua corrects himself suggests that he is acting out a perfectly acceptable “performative” speech, to use Austin’s terminology, by which he accepts the Hegemon’s authority. So, when he says, “Hegemon” and means, “*I accept your authority,*” Yeshua thus assumes, at least symbolically, the dominating or hegemonic “regime of truth.” Whether or not he *really* relinquishes his beliefs is, however, a separate and disputable issue. (His apparent “capitulation” can be seen as a forced abjuration of the “good-person” philosophy, and the phrase “he had almost made a slip” may very well point to an unconscious or habitual “slip,” which Yeshua is unable to control due to his weakened state.) Besides, no clear distinction between a voluntary and an involuntary confession can be made: as Foucault states, “One confesses—or is forced to confess” (*History*, 59), and the focus is, rather, on “the discursive act” (11) that unravels in a relationship of power. In this sense, whether or not Yeshua is sincere in his capitulation, his confessional act makes his identity entirely context-based, what Foucault would reduce to a metaphor that only “seems” to communicate some truth from within but is in fact only a social construct.<sup>7</sup> Austin would probably agree, since he argues that in the case of a “performative utterance,” we should not suppose that the words correspond to “the performance of some internal spiritual act” (233).

One difficulty with such an interpretation is that even as a strictly “performative utterance,” Yeshua’s discourse somehow carries a double quality. In saying, “No, Hegemon, I have never in my life intended to destroy the Temple,” he is both “capitulating,” that is, accepting the dominant authority (in the first half of the sentence), and reinstating his own authority by exonerating himself of the alleged crime (in the second half of the sentence). The confessional act combines both, and the dynamic of Yeshua’s speech places him both into a position of cowardly submission and into that of self-asserted innocence. As a result, it is difficult to define his identity: it is, on the one hand, contextual in relation to the discursive situation and his bond with the Procurator; on the other hand, it is self-defined, as a categorical claim to innocence.

This notion of a dual or confused identity is developed through the bond between the prisoner and the Procurator, a bond that unfolds through two seemingly opposing modes of discourse. The first is strictly judicial, and the second is more psychological, spiritual, and even religious. Although both are spoken in Greek, the language understood by the two main interlocutors as well as the secretary who records their exchange, the latter is spoken by Pilate in “an undertone” and is, due to its psychological rather than legal content, written down only

partially. Here, similar to *Saint Joan*, the two models of confession “intersect” (Brooks), and even though Yeshua’s charges are never stated as “heresy,” his confession assumes both the judicial and the “medicinal” purpose. More precisely, the first discursive layer allows Pilate and Yeshua to dramatize a judicial ritual for the others to observe as well as to be recorded in the official scroll. The Procurator presents the first charge, the intention “to destroy the Temple and [urge] other people to do it,” and the prisoner readily answers in the negative (21). Then, the latter tries extensively to justify himself as having been misrepresented by his follower, Matthu Levi: “I am beginning to fear that this confusion will continue for a very long time. And all because he writes things down incorrectly.”<sup>8</sup> To this, the cruel Procurator replies, “Not much is written down, but enough is written to hang you” (21). Yeshua’s version of “the truth” (that is, his innocence) therefore clashes with Pilate’s “regime,” and the latter prevails. (Also, the fact that Yeshua is most often referred to in the text as “the bound man” or “prisoner,” rather than by his proper name, places him into a position subservient to his judge, “the Procurator”; their titles seem to imply this dynamic.) And within this legal context, whatever the prisoner produces, through either speech or writing, has further incriminating power. Even when Yeshua tries to justify himself (“I said, Hegemon, that the Temple of the old faith would fall and that a new temple of truth would arise...”[23]) and insists on his innocence, he still incriminates himself (as well as his disciple). His self-vindication “perverse[ly]” confirms the sentence: as Brooks explains, “the model of the *inquisitio*,...in the situation of the criminal suspect before the law, leads to a somewhat perverse result: conviction rather than absolution” (96). Discourse that has the creative power of asserting Yeshua’s identity turns against him.

As the Roman Procurator, Pilate is ultimately compelled to confirm the order of Caiaphas (*Kaiyapha*), the High Priest, and condemn Yeshua to death. Even before the sentence is issued, Pilate somehow foreknows that the conviction is inevitable, and so Yeshua’s Procurator/Inquisitor becomes also his “confessor”: he tries to extract from the prisoner testimony that might not only exonerate but also absolve him. Thus, this “public” mode of *inquisitio* becomes interwoven with a private exchange between Pilate and Yeshua, one that, by virtue of its intimacy and secretive power, places Yeshua’s confession into a framework resembling that of a religious confessional. Like the legal model, it relies on the bond between the confessor and the confessant. In the Pilate/Yeshua bond, however, these roles are constantly reinterpreted. First, Pilate begins to act, in many ways, as Yeshua’s confessor who has the power to absolve him

through their ceremonial confessional act.<sup>9</sup> The shift toward this confessional model is present early on in the official interrogation:

[Pilate] looked at the prisoner with bleary eyes and sat in silence for a time, painfully trying to remember why this prisoner with a face maimed and bruised by blows was standing before him under the pitiless sun of Yershalayim, and what unnecessary questions he still had to ask the man. (Bulgakov, 23)

The model then demands that Pilate break away from the traditional format of the interrogation in order to inquire about more abstract, spiritual notions, which are basically irrelevant to the conviction but important to a more spiritual rapport, such as the nature of truth: "...What is truth?" the Procurator asks the prisoner, and is struck with the thought, "Oh gods! I am asking him questions about things that have nothing to do with the trial...my mind does not serve me anymore...(23).

The notion of the Procurator as a confessor is further evident in the encounter on the balcony, especially once Pilate orders the secretary to stop writing down the record; notably, having stopped on several occasions already, the secretary by that time "was no longer writing down anything" (27), and is dismissed shortly after that. During the ensuing one-on-one encounter, Pilate decides that there is "no connection whatsoever between Yeshua's actions and the disorders which had recently occurred in Yershalayim," and convincing himself that Yeshua is "mentally deranged," he wishes not to confirm the death sentence but instead to sentence the prisoner to confinement in Strato-Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea—which is, appropriately enough, "where the Procurator had his residence" (28). Unlike the biblical Pilate, Bulgakov's Hegemon wishes to save Christ by somehow reforming him or simply preserving him under his authority. Some critics speculate that the Procurator falls under the philosopher's influence, and the rather condescending portrayal of Matthu (Matthew) Levi, who is Yeshua's only disciple in Bulgakov's account, suggests that Pilate is actually the more faithful disciple: he, not Matthu, receives the true account of the prisoner's view.

Pilate serves officially as Yeshua's judge, since his express purpose is "to decide whether the death sentence passed on the prisoner by the Sanhedrin priests should be confirmed" (Barratt, 196). But he also serves as a kind of symbolic judge within the unfolding "confessional" setting, where Yeshua acts as confessant and Pilate as confessor, and this setting allows a greater truth to be exchanged (and more spiritual questions to be addressed) than that which a testimony,

produced by the extortion of the judicial system, can arguably purport. The religious setting also enables the Procurator to act “medicinally” as a priest and to try to save Yeshua’s soul, if not his life. (Once this plan fails, and the Hegemon is compelled to uphold the conviction on the basis of Yeshua’s cardinal political crime, the assault of Caesar’s authority, he is then implicated in—or even responsible for—the murder plot against Yehudah [Judas].<sup>10</sup>)

Then, moreover, their roles are reversed, and Yeshua takes on the (dominating) role and, in a way, psychoanalyzes his interlocutor. Claiming that he is not a physician, he nonetheless accurately identifies Pilate’s tormenting symptoms. His power of divination also turns him, however “involuntarily,” into Pilate’s “torturer”:

“The truth is, first of all, that your head aches and aches so badly that you are giving yourself over to cowardly thoughts of death. It is not only more than you can bear to talk to me, but it is even difficult for you to look at me. And at this moment I am involuntarily your torturer, which grieves me. You cannot even think of anything, and you are dreaming only of being with your dog, which is evidently the only creature you are attached to...(23-4)

Thus, acting as an all-seeing psychoanalyst, Yeshua prompts Pilate to speak:

“The trouble,” continued the bound prisoner..., “is that you keep to yourself too much and have lost all faith in men. After all, you must agree, a man cannot place all his affection in a dog...(24)<sup>11</sup>

The religious context, in which Pilate is the confessor, is transformed into a psychoanalytical context where he is the analysand. The idea of confessing an unconscious or carefully repressed “truth” is implied by this model, suited to the latter part of the exchange on Pilate’s balcony. Bulgakov underscores this by using omniscient narration to give a far better picture of Pilate’s interiority and, in turn, by leaving Yeshua mysteriously “unanalyzed,” at an objective distance comparable to that of an analyst and physician. Having probed into Pilate’s psyche, Yeshua then goes on to accuse him of cowardice (“cowardly thoughts of death”), thus acting as a (moral) procurator himself. As in the earlier dynamic, the opposing confessional models are brought together as the two interlocutors weave their discourse and navigate through them. It is precisely due to the multiplicity of contexts (the legal, the religious, and the psychoanalytical) in which the discourse unfolds, as well as due to the changing roles of the interlocutors, that Yeshua’s identity becomes more ambiguous, and it is no longer clear which model (or “regime”) can be trusted.

What is more, Yeshua's discourse and, by extension, the metaphor of the self he has shaped thus far begin to break down. In the absence of the secretary, the Procurator in effect "erases" his prisoner's discourse, leaving no official record (other than Bulgakov's own account). This secrecy assumes enormous power: that which remains unwritten becomes the most meaningful. Following a brief but dramatic moment of elucidation, when Yeshua realizes that he is about to be executed and helplessly begs the Procurator to release him ("Why don't you let me go, Hegemon," the prisoner asked suddenly, and his voice became anxious. "I see they want to kill me" [32]), he is urged into partial silence: the Procurator warns him that everything he says carries intrinsically incriminating power: "You shall have to speak [the truth]. But as you do, weigh every word if you want to avoid not only an inevitable, but an agonizing death" (29). Yet, for Yeshua, "It is easy and pleasant to speak the truth," and this is in part why the Procurator has to silence him completely:

"Silence!" cried Pilate and with a furious glance followed the swallow which had again darted into the balcony. "Here!" he shouted.

And when the secretary and the convoy returned to their places, Pilate declared that he confirmed the death sentence passed by the Small Sanhedrin upon the criminal Ha-Nozri. The secretary wrote down Pilate's words. (32)

Foucault states, "Silence itself, the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse...than an element that functions alongside the things said" (*History*, 27).

Having disposed of the secretary's written record, Bulgakov "strips" Yeshua's body of its mythologized and even scriptural interpretations, and he offers his own reading. Yet, when the secretary resumes his place, and the conviction is read, the author's fictional reality intersects (and overlaps) with that of the Scriptures, only to depart from the canonical account once again. The narrative moves from the objectified body of the initially unnamed "bound man" in the scene with the beatings, through the interrogation scene, where the portrait of Yeshua, "the criminal," is mostly subsumed by Pilate's interiority, to another physical exposure of his body, which is now nearly devoid of speech, in the final execution scene. This silence on Yeshua's part cannot be taken solely as a sign of his complete surrender to Pilate, since the latter is given a multiplicity of roles which have allowed him not only to control but also to direct (and at times, help create) the prisoner's discourse. Pilate is first an interrogator and then a confessor prompting answers, but

still later he becomes an increasingly silencing authority (“weigh every word”/ “Silence!”); he also moves from the position of judge to that of the prosecutor and then, perhaps, even assumes the role of a Promoter of Faith. Since in all these roles he is the necessary interlocutor, there is an implication that the whole “truth” is too portentous to be revealed to anyone aside from the Hegemon himself, whom Yeshua trusts to be “a very intelligent man” (“I should be glad to share [my thoughts] with you, especially since you impress me as a very intelligent person” [24])—in contrast to Joan, who will not speak more because she knows that she will be misunderstood (“I cannot tell you the whole truth: God does not allow the whole truth to be told. You do not understand it when I tell it” [Shaw, *Saint*, 878]). If the Hegemon is indeed the only disciple and the only interlocutor, there can be no spoken discourse on Yeshua’s part at the culminating scene of the execution, from which the Hegemon is absent.

The execution scene is dramatized with the same, if not more careful, attention to physical detail as the earlier scene, where Yeshua is introduced to the Procurator and beaten by the centurion. The discourse is second to the physicality. Here, the “bound man” is already hanging on the crossbar and is offered a water-soaked sponge. It is not the portentous crucifixion of the Scriptures but a regular hanging.<sup>12</sup> Yeshua’s reformatory spirit has been almost entirely extinguished. He is now displayed as merely one of the three criminals, and is indistinguishable, with the only exception that he suffers from blackouts more than they; but since he is nearly unconscious, he is also “the most fortunate of the three” not to be aware of the spectacle:

The flies had...covered his entire face, so that the face had disappeared under the black, stirring mask. Fat gadflies sat on his groin, his belly, and his underarms and sucked the yellow naked body...The executioner passed the tip of the spear across the belly. Then Yeshua raised his head, the flies rose, buzzing, and the hanged man’s face was exposed to view. It was bloated from the bites, with swollen eyelids, unrecognizable... (193)

It is difficult to imagine a ghastlier account, or an account that would destroy one’s personhood so vehemently. At first, rendered faceless with the “mask” of flies and then made completely “unrecognizable” as the result of these bites, he is reduced, putting it crudely, to a lump of flesh.

This closing scene has very few spoken words. “What do you want? Why did you come to me?” Yeshua implores the executioner, and then falls into silence that is only interrupted by his final word, echoing the executioner’s command, “Praise the merciful Hegemon!” —



Yeshua quivered and whispered:

“Hegemon...”

Blood ran down his belly, his lower jaw shook convulsively, and his head dropped. (194)

The verbal paucity seems to have led Barratt to notice a gradual dissolution of Yeshua’s personality into “the embodiment of an absolute idealism”: “To read the Jerusalem narrative,” he explains earlier, “is to submit to a process of increasing separation from the personality of Yeshua,” from an “active participant” to “only a passive presence” and then “even more indirectly as a passive influence” (221; 199). Still, the enigmatic quality of these chapters allows one, or even requires one, to see Yeshua as both a philosophical presence and as a dramatically realistic character until the end. His symbolic silence may indeed mark passivity, but it can also be read as a confession of a special kind: it is the words left unuttered which carry the meaning. Yeshua does not call on God for help, contrary to Matthew’s gospel, which states, that “about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ... ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’” (27:46). Bulgakov’s move here is unconventional, and it leaves Yeshua’s narrative open-ended: at the moment when Bulgakov’s Christ can appeal to God and thus define himself in His image (*imago dei*), he does not speak at all. His self is no longer clearly definable in relation or opposition to the hegemonic authority, but remains introverted in enigmatic suspense.

### **Closing Remarks: The Spirituality of Torturous Confessions**

“If only she would keep quiet, or go home!” Charles, the newly crowned king, exclaims at the end of *Saint Joan*. However, Joan cannot “keep quiet.” Believing herself utterly innocent, she cannot help producing her incriminating confessions—even though they get her deeper into trouble. Through Shaw’s compelling interpretation, Joan’s selfhood becomes evident, and Shaw implies that she in fact demarcates herself as a true “individual”: “But without these things I cannot live,” she insists, “and by your wanting to take them away from me, ... I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God” (889). It is true that her identity has come down through history as an identity in relation to and bound up with the religious and political forces which opposed her. At the same time, due to her clear conception of herself, as a God-appointed warrior, and also due to her reluctance to assume the heretical identity prescribed by the Church, Joan is, in Shaw’s version, a “modern person.” Here, Caroline Walker Bynum’s distinction

seems appropriate—that it is not the “individual” who is born around the time of Lateran IV, since the “medieval humanity has little sense of the individual as a well-demarcated person,” but it is nonetheless the birth of “*homo interior* or *seipsum* as the self made in the image of God, an *imago dei* that is the same for all humans” (qtd. in Brooks, 96-7). Joan’s testimony and her reliance on saintly voices show that she has fashioned her own self “in the image of God,” and her identity must be defined in terms of this direct relationship.

Like Shaw, Bulgakov uses the setting of the interrogation to stage the act of confession, and so Yeshua similarly comes to define himself through this act, though to a more limited degree than Joan. When he is given a chance to speak, his language is rhetorically dramatic but often more enigmatic. At times when he is silent, we are led to envision him as the traditional statue-like figure of Christ—a figure historically imbued with numerous interpretations, as well as one through whom others (Pilate and Matthu in Bulgakov’s version) speak more than he does himself. The silence he “displays” can be very suggestive, and it compels us to wonder what it is that Yeshua refuses to voice, why he leaves that space open, and how the setting of Pilate’s interrogation determines his discursive choices. Silence is “less the absolute limit of discourse...than an element that functions alongside the things said” (Foucault, *History*, 27).

However dramatic, silence prevents Yeshua from developing a sense of personhood and from asserting his individuality in a traditional sense, since his identity is defined in opposition to, or as a denial of, the authorities. Considering Yeshua an “anarchist” (Barratt’s suggestion) is not too helpful: eliminating the force he opposes would also eliminate his “oppositional” self, and the result would still be the gradual loss of his identity. Perhaps that is why his passivity at the end of the Jerusalem chapters, coupled with his solely physical presence, may lead us into seeing him as but one of the many (rebels); and as Barratt notes in another context, it is only our Christian piety that prevents us from actually doing so. The principal obstacle to analyzing the personhood of Yeshua is the apparent lack of “*homo interior*”—the virtual absence of any insights into his psychology; instead, it is Pilate who is “psychoanalyzed,” and his thoughts are the focus of the omniscient narrator. There is, furthermore, no commentary left by Bulgakov to help us in the way that Shaw’s Preface helps to explain Joan’s psyche (or what Shaw claims must have occurred in her psyche). Yeshua is more of an enigma. He has no urge to confess, and yet it is only through confession that he can hope to be exonerated. Although his freedom from this urge places him outside of modern culture, which has become so bound up with confession, the

emphasis on the trial and the extended dialogue between Pilate and Yeshua, a dialogue that sometimes resembles the confessional model, is an interesting twist on Bulgakov's part.

Neither Joan nor Yeshua speak out of guilt or shame, which makes both confessions fascinating as well as troubling. Still, they revolt against earthly authority—the Church for Joan, and Caesar for Yeshua—and in favor of higher, divine power; in both cases, this revolt “goes deep,” to use the words of Shaw's *Warwick*, as “the protest of the individual soul” (851). Joan was burned at the stake for such a “protest,” and the crucifixion killed Yeshua. And yet, despite—or precisely due to—their tragic outcomes, both Joan and Christ continue to feed literature with myriads of imaginative and diverse self-portraits. To think of them today is to think of the pluralities of discourses accumulated through history.

We can add Shaw's version and Bulgakov's peculiar interpretation to these pluralities. Shaw's decision to write about Saint Joan is not limited to setting her history straight, but it also serves to communicate his own “religion” of Creative Evolutionism, the idea that “there are forces at work which use individuals for purposes far transcending the purpose of keeping these individuals alive...and safe and happy in the middle station in life” and that, in effect, these individuals “will, in the pursuit of knowledge and of social readjustments...face poverty, infamy, exile, imprisonment, dreadful hardship, and death” (Preface, 758). Shaw openly admits that Joan is driven by such a Life Force or *élan vital*, and explains her voices as a case of extraordinarily “vivid imagination” (755). Similarly, the Jerusalem narrative has a metaphysical basis underneath the historically conscious setting, although this is mostly a matter of speculation by Bulgakov's critics. Barratt argues that the novel is “best described as a *post*-Symbolist work,” and he suggests that the author might have been a disciple of the Russian Symbolists, who saw human existence in terms of philosophical dualism, “often refer[red] to as *dvoyemiriye*” [“two-world-ness”] (318).<sup>13</sup> Yeshua overlaps the two worlds (his silence is spiritual, his body is worldly), and in the end, it is his story that enables the other characters to transcend into a higher reality. Whatever his other motivations might have been, Bulgakov undoubtedly wrote in opposition to the scientific rationalist and materialist views of his time, and so did Shaw, who harangued Charles Darwin for throwing spirituality out of the universe; both authors were unorthodox thinkers but by no means atheists. These factors must have contributed to their decisions to look toward the past and focus on religion and the sacred ritual of the confession in an attempt to *revive* or *re-live* the upsurge of spirituality that both Joan and Yeshua's martyrdom

set into motion. Still, while Shaw and Bulgakov were affected by similar social forces and were writing during the same period (the first half of the twentieth century), they came up with very different “reactions”: Shaw’s Joan is the triumphant individual who cannot stop confessing; Bugakov’s Christ is an enigmatic philosopher who speaks predominantly through silence.

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<sup>1</sup> Barratt summarizes the research (mainly done by Chudakova) of Bulgakov’s multiple redactions of the novel, of which there were eight and might have been more if the author had not died prematurely in 1940. One interesting fact is that during the early years of work on the first manuscript (1928-9), Bulgakov would refer to this “as his ‘novel about the devil’” (49); during the third redaction, he played with various titles: *The Great Chancellor*; *Satan*; *I’m here too*; *The Hat with a Feather*; *The Black Theologian*; ...*The Coming*; *The Black Magician*; and others (58). Bulgakov’s fascination with the figure of the Devil, in the tradition of Goethe and Gogol, is particularly relevant to the Jerusalem narrative since, at least early on, the author entitled it “The Gospel of Woland” and “The Gospel according to the D[evil]” (47).

<sup>2</sup> Joan was most likely illiterate; the fact that her signature (“Jehane”) survives in the trial manuscripts suggests that someone led her hand in signing. In Shaw’s version, it is Ladvenu who guides Joan’s hand after reading her formal confession (888).

<sup>3</sup> Unlike Foucault, Shaw would not see either the discourse or the individual who produces this discourse as a creative force; rather, he would see a powerful creative Life Force (or *élan vital*) working through both these manifestations.

<sup>4</sup> “There are people in the world whose *imagination is so vivid* that when they have an idea it comes to them as an audible voice, sometimes uttered by a visible figure.” And a little later, “That the voices and visions were illusory, and their wisdom *all Joan’s own*, is shewn by the occasions on which they failed her, notably during her trial, when they assured her that she would be rescued...” (Shaw, Preface 755; 761: *italics* added for emphasis).

<sup>5</sup> Picking up on the difficulty of confessing in a legal context, Dreyer shows Joan begging to be confessed to a priest.

<sup>6</sup> The prominent image of the bronze statue also offers another interpretation. We are not told specifically what it signifies in the same way as we are not told, at least at that point, what the identity of the “bound man” is. This ambiguity makes it possible to picture the prisoner, sculpture-like with his “expressionless” visage, *objectified* as the statue, and his unnamed power, like that of the statue, as mysterious and yet colossal.

<sup>7</sup> “The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface...” (*History*, 60).

<sup>8</sup> This is one of Bulgakov’s iconoclastic moves that challenges the veracity of the scriptural accounts, and through this re-count, he tries to dissolve “this confusion” which has “continue[d] for a very long time”—or, he himself continues “this confusion.”

<sup>9</sup> Joan’s testimony can be viewed in a similar light: she “capitulates” by agreeing to denounce her faith and by submitting to the Church, through her speech act, so as to avoid pain and death; at the same time, she protests and

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professes her faith knowing, perhaps subconsciously, that the ritual would be observed and accepted by the earthly authorities but dismissed by God on the grounds that it is *only* a ritual.

<sup>10</sup> The momentous charge against Yeshua is that of denouncing Caesar (of professing “that every form of authority means coercion over men, and that a time will come when there shall be neither Caesars, nor any other rules...[but] a kingdom of truth and justice” [30]); it becomes bitterly ironic in this light, for it is the authority of Pilate, the “ruler” over Yeshua’s destiny, that ultimately convicts him.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is merely incidental, but in his description of Matthu Levi earlier, Yeshua admits that he, Levi, “first treated [him] with enmity and even insulted [him]...by calling [him] *a dog*” (22). The subsequent transference of the Procurator’s affection toward his dog, Banga, to Yeshua somehow reinforces this parallel.

<sup>12</sup> Abbott cites a parallel passage, Shaw’s interpretation of Christ’s crucifixion in his controversial allegorical play, *The Black Girl, the Dean, and the Nun*. There, an “innocent and untutored” Black Girl ventures out in search of God, with a Bible in one hand and a knobkerry (a club to destroy false idols) in another, and she meets Jesus, among others, who is posing for an artist on a big cross:

I am so utterly rejected of men that my only means of livelihood is to sit as a model to this compassionate artist who pays me sixpence an hour for stretching myself on this cross all day. He himself lives by selling images of me in this ridiculous position... When he has laid in a sufficient stock of images, and I have saved sufficient number of sixpences, I take a holiday and go about giving people good advice and telling them wholesome truths. If they would only listen to me thy would be ever so much happier and better. But they refuse to believe me unless I do conjuring trick for them... (Shaw, as qtd. in Abbott, 80-2)

<sup>13</sup> One of the earlier theoretical approaches was to read *The Master and Margarita* as an autobiographical narrative, seeing the eponymous character, The Master, who has written a book about Yeshua’s trial, as “a concealed self-portrait” of the author; there are also parallels between Bulgakov and Pilate, particularly in the feelings of “cowardice, moral capitulation and guilt” which was Bulgakov’s “abiding obsession” during his later years under Stalin’s regime (Barratt, 77; 84-5).

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