

**“*I ona byla chelovekom*” (For the Dog was Once a Human Being):
The Moral Obligation in Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog***

Andrea McDowell

From on Top of the Doghouse

As both tsarist and Soviet leadership carried out agendas of silencing and oppression, writers often turned to animals, particularly dogs, to explore the power of voice and the freedom to communicate. In the nineteenth century, Ivan Turgenev’s “Mumu” (1852) describes the impotence and suffering of a mute peasant and his dog, both unable to express themselves and therefore unable to influence their own destinies. Their shared voicelessness represents the serf population’s silent suffering, an injustice Turgenev assails throughout his fiction. Later, in the twentieth century, Georgii Vladimov portrays the horrors of Soviet GULags through the cynomorphic perspective of a prison guard dog in *Faithful Ruslan* (*Vernyi Ruslan* 1975). Many writers under Stalin shared not only the helplessness and victimization of non-human animals, but also their voicelessness: some battled endlessly with censors over the right to express themselves freely, while others abandoned their craft for fear of imprisonment and even execution. This code of silence extended far beyond the creative arena, as words and language became dangerous for all citizens, expected to converse in forms of sanctioned discourse only. Mikhail Bulgakov’s novella *Heart of a Dog* (*Sobach'e serdce* 1925) predated Stalin’s reign of power yet proved alarmingly

prescient with regard to the silencing techniques that characterized Stalinist Russia and the debasing influence of this enforced muteness. And at the heart of his story, he gives voice to a simple mutt. Bulgakov's lifelong esteem for animals must not be overlooked; it mandates that the reader consider Sharik not merely as a symbolic prop, nor as a talking animal from a fairy tale, but as an individual creature with his own right to life. Bulgakov thus structures the narrative with fluid shifts in and out of the non-human animal's *credible* point of view, thereby placing the tale within the literary traditions of the philosophical dog and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). The myriad allegorical readings¹ of this tale of humankind's morality (vis-à-vis a dog's) against the backdrop of violent, chaotic post-Revolutionary Russia certainly remain valid; yet the unique *cynomorphic* perspective further underscores Bulgakov's condemnation of humanity's hubris and haste in exploiting others to advance personal and societal goals.

In *Heart of a Dog*, Professor Preobrazhenskii (from the Russian *preobrazit'*, 'transform') conducts medical experiments transplanting ape organs into people seeking sexual rejuvenation. Purportedly hoping to better understand the function of the pituitary gland, Preobrazhenskii obtains the corpse of a drunken thief (Klim Chugunkin) and transplants his testes and pituitary gland into a street mutt named Sharik. Preobrazhenskii is assisted by his protégé, Dr. Bormenthal, whose detailed medical notes become part of the narration. In principle, the scientific experiment

¹ Peter Doyle effectively summarizes these interpretations: "Contemptuously allegorized as a bloody operation on a dog's testicles, the Bolshevik Revolution has been an experimental and violent attempt to bring about enforced evolution, whose consequences were not fully appreciated" (1978, 479). Bulgakov's "The Fatal Eggs" ("*Rokovye iaitsa*" 1924) also offers a science fiction treatment of this theme of artificial attempts to accelerate social progress.

succeeds: the dog ‘evolves’² into the mostly-human proletarian “Poligraf Poligrafovich Sharikov.” In actuality, the foul-mouthed Sharikov falls in with the Bolshevik housing committee, denounces the Professor (who maintains servants and a multi-room apartment) as a White sympathizer,³ and exhibits such erratic, anti-social behavior that the Professor and Bormenthal reverse the operation and return the creature to its fully canine state. The novel ends with Sharik watching the Professor as he continues with mysterious experiments.

The power of this final gaze, combined with a fluctuating narrative voice, imbues the dog with greater significance than his human protagonist counterparts; yet few scholars have examined the role of Sharik *as a dog* in the novella.⁴ One must examine the presence of a real canine (albeit endowed with some extraordinary skills) to fully understand the author’s moral philosophy; not by chance does Bulgakov select as his observant mouthpiece the animal with the richest cultural history of human-animal relations, particularly in Russia. Henrietta Mondry explains that

² The ‘evolution as ladder’ metaphor (a widespread teleological conception that in actuality represents neither Darwin’s nor modern theories of evolution) fails to represent the simultaneous development and regression (biological and social) occurring throughout the story.

³ That is, those who supported the monarchy (in opposition to Lenin’s ‘Reds’) and represented the intelligentsia—scientists, doctors, painters, authors, lawyers, etc. The Bolsheviks derided such individuals as ‘bourgeois,’ particularly for interests in non-utilitarian endeavors such as fine arts and music. Thus, Preobrazhenskii’s love of opera also marks him as out of line with the Revolutionary order.

⁴ Yvonne Howell’s “Eugenics, Rejuvenation, and Bulgakov’s Journey into the Heart of Dogness” (2006) discusses the dog character only briefly in the context of biology. And despite the title of Erica Fudge’s “At the Heart of the Home: An Animal Reading of Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*,” in which she claims to return the dog to the center of the narrative, she instead mentions human-animal relations to focus almost exclusively on the construction of the concept of the “human” and offers a reading of the story as “human struggles to define themselves” (2009, 13). Henrietta Mondry’s recent *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture* (2015) analyzes the dog in the story as the subject of metaphysical/scientific transformation, not as a character/creature in its own right (although she does offer excellent discussions elsewhere in the book regarding contemporary understandings of animal rights and human–animal relations).

despite the common association of the bear with Russian identity (which she claims represents a Western viewpoint), in actuality, “the dog is modern Russian culture’s most representative and most political animal” (2015, 1). Mondry examines Bulgakov’s choice within the context of Russian folk belief.⁵ She draws on Boris Uspenskii’s study of Russian phraseology, which demonstrates an interrelation between humans and dogs in Russian culture, and determines that the “interchangeability of human and dog nature lies at the basis of folk beliefs in parallelisms between humans and dogs” (1996, 3). Similarly, Susanne Fusso refers to the role of the dog in Russian figurative language by quoting the proverb: *Ne bej sobaku, i ona byla chelovekom* [Do not beat a dog, for it was once a human being] (1989, 391).⁶ Indeed, a mere glance through any collection of Russian proverbs and sayings reveals innumerable dog references, positive and negative.⁷ Finally, despite Bulgakov’s light treatment of the scientific aspect,⁸ submitting a dog to physical alteration was already a common practice among dog breeders, as Harriet Ritvo indicates: “Even the dog’s body proclaimed its profound subservience to human will. It was the most physically malleable of animals, the one whose shape and size

⁵ Mondry notes that while Preobrazhenskii used ape ovaries for a sexual rejuvenation operation, he selects a dog for the transformation process. From this, she concludes that Preobrazhenskii considered dog material “more closely related to humans than ape material” (1996, 3).

⁶ Fusso also cites Vladimir Dal’s note to the proverb: “*obrashchena v psa za prozhorlivost*” [changed into a dog/mutt for gluttony] (1989, 391).

⁷ For example: One dog is more faithful to its master than two servants; Dog does not eat dog; A barking dog rarely bites; A greedy dog needs much; He who sleeps with dogs gets up with fleas.

⁸ Although a medical doctor, Bulgakov deliberately avoided detailed scientific rationale in the text. In fact, with regard to the science behind Sharik’s transformation, Ellendea Proffer states, “Bulgakov did not intend the scientific side of the story to be taken seriously. Here he ascribes to the pituitary gland functions he knew it did not have” (1984, 603n9). Howell, however, sees Preobrazhenskii’s interest in eugenics as an extension of Bulgakov’s awareness of contemporary research in the field, and calls the Professor an “exaggerated portrait of his nonfictional contemporaries in the scientific world, for whom the research agenda of broadening our understanding of heredity and the philosophical goal of bettering humanity through science were not at all opposed” (2006, 559).

changed most readily in response to the whims of breeders” (1987, 21). Of course, this statement begs the question whether the dog truly proves the most physically malleable, or whether humans have concentrated their efforts of domestication primarily on the dog.⁹

The question “Why a dog?” thus seems clear; however, in addressing the further query “To what end?” most scholars support a comedic rationale, which proves less satisfying. In her consideration of point of view in *Heart of a Dog*, Helena Goscilo suggests the animal presence, which defies the usual human–animal boundaries, contributes a “rich vein of humorous possibilities” and identifies the “fundamental incongruity of a dog who is cogently articulate and, moreover, given to philosophical rumination” (1978, 282). Fusso justifies this incongruity by reaching the “inevitable conclusion” that the opening narration actually reflects only one voice: the “*imitation* of a dog’s-eye view—a kind of ventriloquism” (1989, 390). Claiming that the narrator imperfectly transforms himself into a dog, Fusso further states, “This is not a dog’s narration but a dog-like narration.”

In contextualizing Bulgakov’s canine narrator within the nearly two thousand-year-old literary genre of the philosophical dog, Ziolkowski aligns Sharik with a more contemporary watchful—and comedic—commentator: “it is no accident that Schulz chose a dog [Snoopy], rather than a cat, for the outside observer who lies on top of his doghouse making cynical observations on the foibles of human nature; that

⁹ Despite opposition from animal rights activists, as well as legal challenges, these practices often continue, for example, in the cutting and reshaping of a dog’s ears (‘cropping’) or tail (‘docking’) according to breeders’ specifications (particularly with Boxers and Doberman Pinschers). In fact, citing ear cropping as medically unnecessary, several European countries, as well as Australia, New Zealand, and a few others, have banned the practice (Canadian Federation of Humane Societies n.d., para 4). In the United States, limited regulations exist state by state, but only a few require a licensed veterinarian to perform these so-called “elective” procedures (American Veterinary Medical Association 2014).

has been the dog's role since Plato" (1983, 114). Ziolkowski notes the multiple transformations of the motif in the twentieth century, and calls *Heart of a Dog* an "exuberant inversion of the genre:"

His novella gives every appearance, for the first three or four pages, of belonging to the conventional genre of picaresque narratives recounted by a dog; our expectations lead us to believe that another dog will appear to pick up the conversation. No other dog shows up, however. Instead, the doctor performs an operation that enables the dog literally to talk, thus providing an ironic modern twist to the conventional justification of speech A second inversion is evident in the fact that the dog, who begins as a cynical critic of human society, following his operation degenerates into the worst specimen of human being. His behavior causes the professor and his assistant to make cynical observations on the nature of dogs—a total reversal of the normal convention of the genre (1983, 116).

Furthermore, Ziolkowski maintains that because Bulgakov must have been aware of the convention of the dogs' colloquy, *Heart of a Dog* thus represents not merely a genre reversal but a parody. In this parodic aspect, Bulgakov goes beyond Nikolai Gogol's talking canines in "Diary of a Madman" ("*Zapiski sumasshedshevo*" 1835), where the dogs retain their form but speak only of mundane issues such as food and romance. Bulgakov 'elevates' (a term used with great irony) Sharik to the mostly human Sharikov, who uses his newfound voice to spout lewd wisecracks and Soviet propaganda—the 'correct' use of language. As such, his character contradicts any belief that the power of human language inherently results in acquiring and sharing valuable knowledge.¹⁰ In Sharikov's case, human colloquy represents the most debased and vacuous speech of all, whereas the dog, Sharik, alternates between mundane and profound observations.

¹⁰ Eric Laursen offers a compelling analysis of the failure of language to advance Sharikov's position—either through the efforts of Comrade Sharikov to instill the new "human" with egalitarian language or the efforts of Professor Preobrazhenskii to elevate him through the cultured speech of the bourgeoisie (2007).

Such readings give due credit to Bulgakov's cleverness and wit, but remain limited in that they ignore his deliberate stylistic narrative choices and thereby eclipse the message of individual suffering. Obviously on the literal level, the narration merely simulates a dog's point of view (unless Bulgakov possessed a truly remarkable skill *à la* the fictional Dr. Dolittle). But within the fictive universe of the story, the reader *must* acknowledge and accept the non-human animal voice as independent and valid; otherwise, only the anthropomorphic perspective dominates, thereby diminishing the transgressive nature of Preobrazhenskii's actions. With the same goal of establishing intimacy with the reader, Lev Tolstoi hands over the narrative voice to a broken-down horse in "Kholstomer" (1885), which represents a plea for humane treatment of all creatures—human and non-human. Because a human narrator could not have conveyed adequately the horse's sense of shame and violation at being gelded, Tolstoi attempted to set aside human consciousness and assume the perspective of the hapless animal.¹¹ Similarly, in *Heart of a Dog*, if the canine element functions primarily as a *comedic* device, a reader maintains greater detachment from the protagonist and fails to acknowledge the full atrocity of his victimization.

In discussing the problem of animal history, Erica Fudge argues that scholars must move beyond viewing animals as only representational, where "the actual animal doesn't seem to matter very much; it's a symbol; not real" (2002, 9). Tolstoi and Bulgakov adopt the voices of non-human animals not merely symbolically or allegorically, but indeed as "real"—so that a reader's compassion and guilt weigh

¹¹ In Tolstoi's company and amazed by his speculation on the thoughts of a decrepit gelding in a field, fellow author Ivan Turgenev commented, "Listen, Lev Nikolaevich, you must have been a horse once yourself" (Eikhenbaum 1982, 101). Critics frequently dismiss "Kholstomer" as a didactic animal fable due to the animal narration and moral lessons, but the deliberate simulation of the horse's perspective serves to intensify Tolstoi's metaphysical concerns (McDowell 2007).

more heavily in witnessing the mistreatment. Sharik's canine voice must rise in accusation above the human one as when he condemns Preobrazhenskii for violating his rights as a fellow living being. As Fudge notes elsewhere, "an allegorical reading that interprets the dog as always symbolizing something else silences the presence of that dog as the suffering center of the story" (2009, 13). Thus, when these animals ask, "What have you done to me? Why do you do this to us?" they speak not as symbols but as fellow beings addressing human animals, whose human *status* inherently implicates them in these fictional transgressions.

For example, after Preobrazhenskii brings Sharik home and prepares to treat his injured side (burned when a cook poured scalding water on him), the dog fails to understand their intent and asks, "Brothers, knackers why are you doing this to me?" (Bulgakov 2002, 231).¹² Some translators have omitted the slang term knackers,¹³ but preserved the sense through "Brothers, murderers" (Ginsburg 1968, 15; Pyman 1998, 9). Other translators altered this line more significantly: "My dog-killing chums" (Aplin 2005, 17) and "You butchers" (Glenny 1968, 19). But these latter examples, while accusatory, fail to connote the sense of *equality*—and indeed fratricide—that Sharik senses in that moment of perceived injustice (although at this point, the professor's intentions remain wholly beneficent).

In "Diary of a Madman," Gogol employs a common frame of justification for animal communication: the dogs' correspondence reflects the delusions of a madman. In contrast, Bulgakov provides no external explanation for Sharik's power of narration (as later Vladimov gives narratorial independence to the dog Ruslan). Eric Laursen analyzes the shifts between first- and third-person narration throughout the

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹³ The word *zhivodery* refers to those who dispose of animal corpses not fit for human consumption, such as old horses rendered into glue or other by-products.

tale, and argues that while the dog's perspective tends to be retained, the first-person narration is "lost completely when the dog enters the apartment" (2007, 497). But scholars consistently fail to note the important literary device Bulgakov uses to empower the canine voice *after* the first-person opening. A favorite technique of nineteenth-century realist authors, free indirect discourse (FID) is a narrative style in which third person limited narration takes on features of first person speech.¹⁴ Monika Fludernik defines FID "by means of the conjunction of an interpretative intervention on the part of the textual recipient, who posits a discourse of alterity (that is, a notional discourse SELF different from that of the reportative SELF of the current narrator-speaker), with a minimal set of syntactic features, which constitute a sort of necessary condition, a mold that has to be fitted" (1995, 95). By including emotive punctuation (such as exclamation points and question marks), tonal shifts, and value-laden adjectives—yet *omitting* quotation marks to denote direct speech or the verb-plus-complement clause structure (*She said that* or *He claimed that*) of attributed indirect speech, FID often creates ambiguity in the narrative voice whereby one cannot always distinguish between the emotions and opinions of the narrator and those of other characters. Even when a clear delineation exists, however, FID seamlessly blends both the distancing effect of the third person and the intimacy of the first person *without* marking the latter as such, thus drawing the reader closer to a character at pivotal moments with less obvious subjectivity than a shift to direct

¹⁴ Vast scholarship exists on free indirect discourse (also termed free indirect style) in general, and in relation to the literature of specific countries, as well as authors (e.g. Pascal 1977; Bakhtin 1982; Fludernik 2014).

speech. In *Heart of a Dog*, FID serves to elevate Sharik's voice/perspective above that of the humans.¹⁵

Certain English translations of the novella omit narrative tags and conventional direct-speech punctuation to *generate* FID in critical passages, such as in Ginsburg's acclaimed 1968 version:¹⁶

Then his legs dropped off, and he slid somewhere sideways. Thank you, it's all over, he thought dreamily, dropping right on the sharp splinters. Goodbye Moscow! Never again will I see Chichkin's and proletarians and Cracow sausage. I'm off to paradise for my long patience in this dog's life. Brothers, murderers, why are you doing it to me? (15)

In the above translation, no quotation marks divide the third-person narration ending with the word "somewhere sideways" with the first-person voice initiating with "Thank you." While these renderings enhance the immediacy and first-person connection of FID, they invert Bulgakov's Russian text, which places the last four sentences (Sharikov's statement) into direct quotes:

“Спасибо, конечно, - мечтательно подумал он, валясь прямо на острые стекла. - Прощай, Москва! Не видать мне больше Чичкина и пролетариев и краковской колбасы. Иду в рай за собачье долготерпение. Братцы, живодеры, за что ж вы меня?” (Bulgakov 2002, 231).

“Thank you, it's finished – he thought dreamily, collapsing directly onto the sharp glass shards – Farewell, Moscow! I'll no longer see Chichkin's and proletarians and Krakow sausages. I'm going to that paradise for long-suffering dogs. Brothers, knackers why are you doing this to me?”

¹⁵ FID functions similarly in Tolstoi's "Kholstomer" and Vladimov's *Faithful Ruslan*, thereby providing a further connection with *Heart of a Dog*'s animal voice.

¹⁶ See also translations by Avril Pyman (1988) and Michael Glenny (1968). Hugh Aplin (2005), however, follows Bulgakov's original punctuation.

In contrast, Bulgakov uses FID throughout the opening two chapters, in which the dog takes center stage as introductory protagonist: these chapters create an immediate connection to Sharik by shifting frequently between the voices of the third person narrator and 'the dog.' Bulgakov then uses traditional third-person narration with direct speech for all characters, including Sharik, until Bormenthal's medical notes provide a first-person account of the transformation of the canine Sharik to the ill-bred Bolshevik Sharikov. Subsequently, a return to the third-person limited narrator again provides predominantly direct speech for the thoughts and emotions of Preobrazhenskii and Bormenthal, with the occasional indicator of "he thought" or "he felt." Bulgakov provides no such internal access for the *human* Sharikov, and instead, portrays him from an exclusively external perspective. In the epilogue, however, when the man-dog is restored to his original canine form, FID again emerges in the narrative.

Some scholars have suggested that Bulgakov does not preference any one voice throughout *Heart of a Dog*. Alexander Zholkovsky even calls the tale "polyphonic" and states that, "On balance, no voice, not even the Professor's authoritative basso, has the final word, which sounds an overture rather than closure to a dialogue" (1994, para. 21). However, as part of that uncertainty in the ending, one voice indeed rises above the others—that of the non-human animal. In the last paragraphs of the epilogue, 'the dog's' direct speech mulls over his lucky fate in a wealthy home. (He remembers neither the accident nor his time as Sharikov.) Then the FID resumes, but in an ambiguous form: "The dog saw terrible things [*strashnye dela*]. Hands in slippery gloves, the important man plunged them into jars containing brains. A stubborn man, persistent, always striving for something, cutting, scrutinizing, ..." (Bulgakov 2002, 330). Who deems these things "terrible" and Preobrazhenskii "stubborn" and "persistent"? The narrator? The dog? As in the early

chapters, the two voices here alternate fluidly, at times seeming almost as one. Hence, the calculated narrative shifts throughout the story, including the use of FID, ensure that the reader remains firmly sympathetic to the mutt, *Sharik*, who—together with the more distant narrative voice—passes judgment upon Preobrazhenskii, the transgressor.

Of Arrogance and Atavism

Scholars disagree as to whether the text ultimately casts the Professor as hero, villain, or something in between. Comparing Preobrazhenskii to his literary predecessor, the title character of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*,¹⁷ offers one framework for assessing his character; when we add another interpretive layer by legitimizing the animal subject as an autonomous being with individual rights, our perspective deepens further. Many statements in the novel attest to Bulgakov's abhorrence of all violence, as when Preobrazhenskii vehemently claims: "No one should ever be flogged Remember that, once and for all! Man and animal can be influenced only by suggestion!" (Bulgakov 2002, 255). Preobrazhenskii plainly unites humans and animals in deserving kind treatment. Earlier when relating how he calmed Sharik, he explains: "With kindness. The only method that's possible in dealing with living creatures. With terror you cannot do anything with an animal, no matter what step of development it stands on *They* are wrong thinking that terror will help them. No sir, no sir, it won't help, whether white, red, or even brown!" (ibid., 232; added emphasis). We must note Preobrazhenskii's abrupt reference to "they" (a separate word present in the original Russian, where verbs often denote subjects without a

¹⁷ Wells maintained enormous popularity in Russia at the turn of the century, and numerous scholars have traced the influence of his works on such writers as Bulgakov, Evgenii Zamiatin, and Aleksander Kuprin. Additionally, Richard C. Borden (1992) examines how Wells' legacy translated into a theme of "lost paradise" for writers such as Iurii Olesha, Valentin Kataev, and Vladimir Nabokov.

pronoun): “*Oni naprasno dumaiut, chto terror im pomozhet*” (ibid.; added emphasis). Clearly by “they” he does not mean only those who deal with animals. He also refers to Bolshevik methods of threatening and intimidating citizens; the violent nature of the uneducated, amoral proletariat; and anyone (even the ‘Whites’) who use violence to ensure submission. However, Preobrazhenskii’s attitude toward violence arises from a genteel, almost elitist disdain for coarse/brutal methods, combined with his arrogant attitude of inherent superiority toward those in subordinate positions: animal subjects, human-animal creatures generated by experiments, or the lesser proletarians.

In Wells’ novel, Moreau conducts grisly and painful operations on animals to reshape them into human form. His god-like qualities extend beyond the initial physical transformation: Moreau establishes strict behavioral codes and threatens pain and retribution for those who fail to comply. (Similarly, Preobrazhenskii’s assistant, Bormenthal, beats Sharikov when he misbehaves or attempts to assert his independence.) But Moreau’s coercive, artificial development—enforced by fear-based domination—fails, and chaos ensues. Unlike Preobrazhenskii’s deliberate decision to restore the dog Sharik, the unplanned reversion to animal form in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* occurs as a result of Moreau’s death, after which the narrator Prendick eliminates the creatures.¹⁸

Also justifying his experiments in the name of science, Preobrazhenskii manifests not only Moreau’s beliefs, but those of his Bolshevik opponents: that a lesser being (whether dog or common citizen) may be transformed according to the

¹⁸ Another variation of the *Moreau* tale occurs when Bormenthal mistakenly attributes Sharikov’s offensive language and base conduct to his dog’s background, and begins to “look at oncoming dogs with secret horror” when he walks in the street (Bulgakov 2002, 275). Bormenthal’s reaction reverses Prendick’s persisting terror after the experience on Moreau’s island: “My trouble took the strangest form. I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that ...” (Wells 1996, 204).

designs of its 'elevated,' enlightened leaders. Because Preobrazhenskii later realizes this particular mistake and restores Sharik to his original form, several scholars award him status as a sympathetic, even positive character (Graham 1977; Burgin 1978; Rydel 1978). One analysis suggests Preobrazhenskii understands the full implications of his actions and consequently undergoes a fundamental change in attitude. Goscilo asserts that the Professor "passed honorably the stringent moral test of acknowledging his colossal blunder" and therefore has "exonerated himself" before the reader who "deplores man's gratuitous tampering with the processes of nature" (1978, 290). Christine Rydel goes even further, calling *Heart of a Dog* a "complete reversal" of Wells' novel (1978, 306). She summarizes Wells' novel as a "story of cruelty and sadism, all embodied in Dr. Moreau himself" and maintains that unlike Moreau, Preobrazhenskii—"unusually kind" and "never cruel"—does not deserve to die. Lastly, Yvonne Howell sees the tale's significance lying in its "exploration of the conundrum of where nature meets nurture in efforts to enhance humankind" (2006, 545). She deems the Professor a eugenicist who, like Bulgakov's Woland in *Master and Margarita*, "in his extreme elitism seems to will evil (through his impatience with all forms of human weakness and with the schemes to improve them) but eternally works good (raises the bar of the arts and sciences, creates new frontiers of knowledge)" (561). While Howell accurately resists simplistic binary categorizations of Preobrazhenskii as either a sinister, mad scientist or a positive voice of the novella's anti-Soviet thrust, she does not address that this eternal greater "good" (scientific exploration and furthering knowledge) comes at the cost of the rights of others, such as non-human animals.

Other scholars hold Preobrazhenskii far more accountable for his actions. Carl and Ellendea Proffer indicate that Bulgakov's "scientific heroes" as seen in "The Fatal Eggs," *Adam and Eve*, and *Heart of a Dog* illustrate "the confident misuse of

knowledge which, while promising human good, leads only to injustice and inhumanity” (Bulgakov 1972, *xix*). In discussing the novel’s “underlying tragic significance,” Diana Burgin takes this position further and asserts that the “misuse of knowledge is not only confident, but supremely arrogant, and perhaps most important, ultimately tragic for the misuser” (1978, 496). Both Preobrazhenskii and Moreau operate from presumptuous, egotistical beliefs: first, that those in lesser positions—human or non-human—possess virtually no rights, even over their own existences, and second, that a being may be artificially altered to fulfill a different, supposedly higher role. As a result, they consider both the animal and man-animal as their own sub-human subjects to tamper with, control, and kill, if necessary.¹⁹ Such abuse of power remains Bulgakov’s overriding concern; therefore, any evaluation of Preobrazhenskii as a benign version of Moreau erroneously mitigates his culpability.

While Bulgakov may hold deep respect for scientists, he systematically undermines readings of the professor as benevolent. Fudge suggests that a consensual relationship in *Heart of a Dog* naturalizes “human dominion.” She points out Sharik’s relatively quick adjustment from life as a free-roaming stray to a collared pet, who internalizes a “hierarchical, anthropocentric” domestic order (2009, 15). She then notes that the Professor betrays the pet and master relationship. Yet Preobrazhenskii never truly engages with Sharik as a beloved, chosen pet, but only as a convenient necessity. He bribes him with food, offers him warm shelter, and treats him with kindness for one express purpose: to have a handy, healthy subject for experimentation. Preobrazhenskii does not even expect Sharik to survive after the

¹⁹ Rydel persuasively identifies basic philosophical differences between the two works in that whereas “Moreau feels that man is the pinnacle of creation ... Preobrazhensky decides that man is not God’s most desirable creature” (1978, 309). Moreau’s attitude differs from Wells’ own pessimism about the inherent cruelty and backward nature of humanity, masked by a façade of civilization. Bulgakov proves more optimistic about humanity’s ability to develop, but he cautions against revolutionary methods and the accelerated speed of unnatural transformation.

reversal surgery, commenting, “So, damn. Not dead! Well, he’ll die anyway. Ah, Dr. Bormenthal, I’m sorry for the mutt. He was affectionate, though sly” (Bulgakov 2002, 268). Nothing about Preobrazhenskii’s attitude toward Sharik indicates that he sees the dog—or for that matter his two female servants—as fulfilling any purpose other than servitude.

Bulgakov also creates divergent portraits of the Professor: model of genteel civility and intellectual advancement versus experimental scientist who snorts and snarls in a terrifying manner while performing the operation that turns Sharik into Sharikov. In fact, like the dog’s body, the Professor often demonstrates a similar level of mutability, which Mondry ascribes to the fluctuation between positive and demonic overtones: “He is a person whose face changes all the time, it becomes sinister at times, his fingers change from short and plump to long and elastic” (1996, 4). Additionally, his overall physical appearance alters significantly—becoming more stooped and grey in distress over Sharikov’s antics.

Suffering the consequences of his actions, the Professor experiences not only physical decline, but also psychological anguish—particularly when he realizes his experiment has created not an intellectually heightened but a debased individual. Discerning Sharikov’s true nature, the Professor questions the validity of his work: “And now I ask you—for what? So that one fine day I might transform the sweetest dog into such scum that it makes your hair stand on end” (Bulgakov 2002, 312). When Bormenthal refers to Sharikov as a “man with the heart of a dog,” Preobrazhenskii counters, “You, Doctor, are making a grave error. For God’s sake, don’t slander the dog.” He continues: “The whole horror lies in the fact that he no longer has a dog’s heart, but precisely a human one. And the most rotten one that exists in nature” (*ibid.*, 314).

Probably the best-known passage of the novella, this statement, paradoxically, tends to be the most superficially treated by scholars. Although they generally agree that Sharikov's degenerate behavior stems from his criminal *human* background rather than his canine genes, they nevertheless proceed to discuss the story using stereotypical, speciest language about "beastly" or "animal" behavior. In analyzing the reader's attitude toward Sharikov, Goscilo proposes that "the major reason for our dismayed withdrawal of sympathy is the paradoxical discovery that with his newly acquired human form, Sharikov becomes an *utter animal*." She then elaborates: "In other words, Sharik, his *animal nature notwithstanding*, was immeasurably more acute, tasteful, and honorable than the pseudo-human Sharikov" (1978, 287; added emphasis). Burgin expresses similar sentiments in discussing the Professor's acknowledgment of his mistake: "In this admission the Professor seems to recognize his inability to change (*preobrazit'*) and to transcend the low human and animal material with which he was working" (1978, 500). She further describes Sharikov as an "anti-creation composed of a soulless sexual 'blueprint' grafted onto an animal's body (surely a demonic inheritance!) [who] combines all the basest and most savage instincts of both the dog and the con-man, thief, and drunk" (501). Even after Goscilo and Burgin acknowledge the implications of Preobrazhenskii's statement concerning the nobility of a dog's heart, their discussion still suggests that while Sharik emerges superior to the criminal Chugunkin, his "animal nature" inherently renders him an inferior (perhaps even diabolical) being.

True, vestiges of his dog heritage lead Sharikov to snap at fleas with his teeth and jubilantly kill cats, but Bulgakov never implies that these instinctive canine traits somehow demean a dog, nor at any point does he depict Sharik as savage or predatory. Sharik exhibits fierce behavior only in self-defense, when he believes he will be tortured or abused. In fact, only the *human* facets of Sharikov's behavior pose

a threat to others, particularly when he writes a denunciation of the Professor and threatens Bormenthal with a revolver. Burgin contends Preobrazhenskii is “unable to breathe soul into Sharik’s animal body ...” (1978, 502). This claim completely disregards the opening narrative, in which Sharik exhibits as much soul, sentience, and sensibility as any other character. Sharik himself eloquently asserts in the opening: “I’ve experienced everything, and am reconciled with my fate; and if I’m crying now, it’s only from the physical pain and cold, because my spirit hasn’t yet failed ... A dog’s spirit is tenacious” (Bulgakov 2002, 2).

Lev Anninskii, in his analysis of Vladimov’s *Faithful Ruslan*, maintains that Bulgakov uses the metaphor “heart of a dog” to indicate humanity’s “general loutishness, our high-handedness, our blind lack of culture.” He suggests that “Vladimov, probably, went right against the grain of Bulgakov by making the heart of the dog the locus of honor, nobility, and undivided, open-hearted self-sacrifice—all directly opposed to loutishness” (1991, 57).²⁰ Vladimov himself also takes umbrage at Bulgakov’s canine portrayal:

... I will honestly confess that this piece [*Heart of a Dog*] grates on me. Why was the dog insulted? Why was its heart presented as a repository for our sins, vileness, and nastiness? It is said that Mikhail Afanas’ich respected cats, but he obviously knew

²⁰ Although Anninskii’s claim of honor and nobility for Ruslan and loutishness for Sharik proves entirely unfair to Bulgakov’s canine, one should note a key distinction between the two dogs. Sharik is a street mutt of indeterminate breeding with no apparent training. Ruslan, however, is a kennel-bred prison dog. Mondry indicates that during World War II, Soviets developed their own variant of the German shepherd—for a time renamed the East European sheepdog to distinguish between the Soviet animal and that of the Nazis. Seeking the pup with the greatest ferocity, handlers in police kennels would select only one dog out of a litter of five (and typically drown the rest). These ferocious dogs would then be trained to “hate the enemy and love and obey their masters” (Mondry 2015, 230). After the dismantling of a labor camp, Ruslan’s handler (unable to shoot him as directed), runs the dog off. Ruslan then begins to ‘guard’ a former inmate, but like the other surviving dogs, he cannot overcome his training and eventually dies a violent death.

nothing at all about dogs;²¹ they are whatever we want them to be (Anninskii 1991, 67).

Vladimov also seems to have missed the point about not “maligning the dog.” Interestingly, the original title of Bulgakov’s tale did not focus on the dog’s heart, but rather his happiness: *A Dog’s Happiness: A Monstrous Story (Sobach'e schast'e: Chudovishchnaia istoriia)*. This shift in focus emphasizes not only his right as a unique individual, but also the monstrosity of the violation in stripping him of happiness.

In the essay “Why Look at Animals?” John Berger writes, “The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary” (1980, 4). He identifies language as the primary differentiator that bridges the gap of understanding of a look between two humans and a look between human and animal. Bulgakov closes that gap and gives interpretive language to this watchful gaze of pre-operation Sharik, who observes the goings on in the apartment with a moral superiority free from ‘civilized’ human vices. When he begins to understand the nature of Preobrazhenskii’s rejuvenation services (helping clients regain their sexual drive), he experiences shame and considers the office offensive. After dinner, the scientist and his assistant begin to smoke, which Sharik also regards as foolish.²² Moreover, Sharik espouses clear hierarchies of behavior and morality, based on his canine experience. For example, of a cook who tosses meaty bones to hungry strays, Sharik says “Heavenly blessings to him for being a real character” (ibid., 219). But “of all the

²¹ Actually, Bulgakov and his family knew about and cared very much for dogs, as evident by their deep affection for their pet Bouton.

²² Prior to his victimization, Sharik’s denunciations prove fully comical and innocuous, particularly as they reverse the nature of dog attributes in Russian folk culture. As Mondry explains, “Dog culture was a marker of ungodly behaviour: excessive sexuality, deviousness and subversive talk” (2015, 13).

proletarians, janitors are the vilest rubbish. Human dregs, the lowest category.” That is, until Sharik encounters a doorman, whom he calls “many times more dangerous than a janitor. A completely hateful breed. Nastier than tomcats. A knacker in gold braid.” And the dog gleefully ponders biting the doorman’s “calloused proletarian leg” (*ibid.*, 220).

Although the dog invokes Soviet terminology such as “proletarians” in his typology of class structure, his hierarchies remain benign—based primarily on whether various individuals exhibit kindness or tolerance toward dogs. Not until after the operation does the canine host metamorphose into “loutishness,” reflecting the depraved character of the dead human criminal. Bulgakov’s regard for animals combined with his deliberate selection of a canine protagonist further justifies placing blame for the failed experiment not on any inherent inferiority of “dog material” but exclusively on flawed human material, as Mondry asserts (1996, 2). This conclusion further validates Sharik’s significance as a positive, non-human character; it also bears pessimistic overtones for Preobrazhenskii, who so casually sacrifices the life—and happiness—of an innocent Other for experimentation.

Before and after the main events of the story, Preobrazhenskii already supported himself by performing sexual rejuvenation operations, which not only altered natural processes but *killed other non-human animals* to obtain the required materials (such as apes’ ovaries). Therefore, the Professor had been “gratuitous[ly] tampering” (Goscilo 290) with these processes for some time before his experiment with Sharik. Only when his principal experiment went awry and threatened his own security did he *somewhat* repent of his error. More significantly, one cannot ignore the “disquieting last impression” (Proffer 1984, 130) created by the final lines of the novella, where Preobrazhenskii continues to experiment under Sharik’s watchful gaze.

Laursen concurs with this narrative lack of absolution for the Professor (2007). In discussing Preobrazhenskii's reacquisition of linguistic dominance, Laursen emphasizes: "It would seem that the professor has learned little from the experience. His power has returned, and with it the desire to change minds" (510). Moreover, in the epilogue, the Professor specifically works with *brains*—the organ responsible for thought, reasoning, communication, and directing the activity of the body. The brains of which species, or how they were acquired, the reader never learns; nevertheless, this detail reveals Preobrazhenskii intends to try the experiment again—this time with more 'suitable' material than the corpse of a criminal.

Discussing Moreau's downfall, D.B.D. Asker remarks that "in his egotistical belief that he can play the god-nature role Moreau is himself subject to the irony of his own beliefs; his power is all too human and all too limited" (1982, 28). Moreau pays for this egotism with his life. But Preobrazhenskii, though paying lip service to his fallibility, *continues to experiment*. Just as Moreau's attempt to 'civilize' the natural world results in anarchy, this same instability pervades Bulgakov's tale, thereby highlighting a subtheme of atavism. If Sharikov's baseness cannot be attributable to his canine (animal) origins, does it represent a throwback to the original ignoble nature of human animals? If so, then does his fate bear larger implications regarding the impotence of modern science, education, and 'social progress' to ennoble and elevate humankind in perpetuity?²³ These questions demonstrate how traditional human-animal hierarchies and categories destabilize "in times of revolutionary upheaval, social transformation, or disintegration" (Costlow

²³ This question provides the central argument behind several of Wells' works, and in particular, *The Time Machine* (1895), which provides the author's highly pessimistic answer. In the novel, a time traveler ventures to the future to find that humanity has degraded into two polarized castes: the feeble, fatuous Eloi and the brutal, savage Morlocks. Wells' text provides a warning that despite societal progression, humankind must recognize its inherent animal nature and perpetually guard against regression in the form of atavism.

and Nelson 2010, 7). And whereas some may view the destabilization as leading to positive outcomes, Bulgakov shared similar concerns as Wells, although the former retained a more positive view of humanity's potential.

A Moral Obligation

Who bears responsibility when a new 'species' (whether dog-man or Soviet man) lacks the abilities or inherent qualities to fulfill its new role? Sharikov's lawless tendencies may originate with the dead Chugunkin (the deceased criminal whose body parts were harvested for the experiment), but his failure to develop as a conscientious human lies with both Preobrazhenskii, who created him physically, and the Bolsheviks, who created him socially. In this capacity, even Bulgakov seems to award Sharikov some small amount of pity because dogs should not be made into men, and proletarians should not be made into leaders.

Bulgakov witnessed the cataclysmic events of the October Revolution of 1917, which profoundly transformed Russian society. While some writers greeted the Bolshevik Revolution enthusiastically and committed themselves to advocating for a bright, new future, Bulgakov watched the same societal reconstruction with increasing skepticism and trepidation, fearful that the speed of revolutionary transition would result in widespread ruin.²⁴ Many believed true change necessitated violent upheaval. Bulgakov believed revolutions produced a "moral vacuum in which values are destroyed, power is given to the ignorant and unworthy, and evil consequently

²⁴ Bulgakov ridicules Soviet propaganda when Sharik mangles the famous advertising slogan by the Futurist poet Vladimir Maiakovskii: "*Nigde krome kak v Mossel'prome*" ("Nowhere else but Mossel-prom" ~ a Soviet building that housed chocolate, tobacco, flour, and other factories). Instead, the dog caustically pronounces, "*Nigde krome takoi otravy ne poluchite, kak v Mossel'prome*" ("Nowhere will you get such poisons as at Mosselprom") (Bulgakov 2002, 224). Fusso points out that in *Heart of a Dog*, "Soviet products are shown to be contaminations, substitutions, or pure fictions..." (1989, 393), thus negating the transformative power that Maiakovskii's jingles often implied.

predominates, violently and bloodily” (Doyle 1978, 480). He saw in Soviet Russia the disintegration of the spiritual self and the lack of higher ideals as resulting from atheistic materialism (Haber 1985, 345). Furthermore, he viewed the new Soviet individual as falsely enlightened and unprepared for the demands of the new society.²⁵

To those Soviet leaders who arrogantly believed in their transformative powers (“*preobrazim mir*”—“we will transform the world”), Bulgakov answered with the failure of *Preobrazhenskii*: the transformation story exposes the myth of the *tabula rasa* by demonstrating Sharikov’s retention of both the criminal elements (Chugunkin) and common elements (Sharik), neither of which can be transformed into a *higher* being. Moreover, those who attempt to alter certain social/natural hierarchies will face dire consequences. Mondry reads the ending of the novella as bearing ominous forebodings for the unfortunate canine, and submits the following conjecture: “Sharik waits in the microcosm of Preobrazhensky’s apartment for a proper and true *preobrazhenie*, which is still to come” (1996, 2).

But can a “proper and true” transformation ever transpire? Could any Sharikov be an improvement over the original Sharik? And although the violation of the dog, Sharik, stands out in sharpest relief, the same principles of autonomy apply to the dog-man Sharikov as well. Bulgakov portrays Sharikov from such a negative perspective that the reversal process at the end appears justified; nevertheless, one must acknowledge that, likeable or not, Sharikov had in fact become an independent

²⁵ Owning a pet during Preobrazhenskii’s time denoted status—although mocked and condemned by the Bolshevik regime; and in present-day Russia, dog-ownership also confers on city dwellers a similar status: “Acquiring a pet is the easiest way of showing one’s elitist status because dogs are more affordable than Jeep Cherokees and Cartier watches” (Barker 1999, 270). However, many who purchase the dogs cannot afford their upkeep, resulting in packs of abandoned dogs roaming the city and a dire crisis for animal shelters (*ibid.*). Thus history continues to repeat itself when attempts to transform a country without the appropriate infrastructure or resources results in the suffering of many—both human and non-human animals.

being. Thus, does Preobrazhenskii possess the right to destroy this *new* creature because of a “failed” experiment?²⁶ In his seminal book *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), Tom Regan identifies one of the three tenets of the animal rights movement as the total abolition of the use of animals in science, together with an end to animal agriculture and hunting (2004). This goal remains unfulfilled, yet greater measures exist today to ensure some protections for animal subjects (although debate continues over the presumptuous use of other living beings incapable of giving consent).²⁷ And our awareness of and support for regulations regarding the ethical treatment of animals in science and medicine cannot help but inform our reader response to the character Sharik, thereby advancing his plight and awarding him increased status not necessarily congruent with the concerns of the author or his contemporaries.

A.C. Wright suggests that the conclusion we might draw from Bulgakov’s works as a whole is that human and non-human animals are clearly interrelated, and that “in some ways humans may differ very little from animals; in some ways they may be worse” (1991, 228). Locating the “mystical subtext” of the tale within Russian folk narratives, Mondry suggests that the novella’s end indicates a quest to

²⁶ Sharikov’s fate aligns somewhat with the guard dogs who became obsolete upon the closing of many Soviet prison camps. Trained for one purpose only, to guard the prisoners and keep them from escaping, the dogs were slaughtered by KGB dog handlers with machine guns (Kyncl 1987). A significant difference, of course, lies in the fact that the dog-man suffered execution because he could *not* be ‘appropriately’ trained. Later, after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, German authorities took a more humane approach by attempting to find homes for nearly 10,000 suddenly ‘useless’ border dogs (“Reforms” 1989, 14). But one police official questioned whether dogs who have “never learned anything except killing” could be domesticated (“Open Border” 1989, 1). From fiction to reality, these events underscore Mondry’s assertion that: “Nature against nurture, determinism against progress, hereditary [*sic*] and genetics against the environment—these themes are at the core of the problematics of human–animal encounters” (2015, 5).

²⁷ For example, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees approve and oversee most animal research experimentation in the United States, under policies developed by the National Institutes of Health Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW). In the UK, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986 (revised in 2013) mandates the principles of the “3Rs”—the “replacement, reduction, and refinement of the use of animals in research” (“Research and Testing Using Animals” 2016).

“return the dog and the man to the paradise from which they were both expelled when they were one” (1996, 9). But as a medical practitioner vested in scientific understanding, Bulgakov likely neither considered humans and animals to be metaphysically linked, nor did he consider animals to be unconditionally *superior* to humankind. Instead, in *Heart of a Dog*, Bulgakov constructs—to the best of his human ability—a canine voice that reminds humanity of its moral obligation to protect and care for those less powerful and more susceptible to victimization—be they human animals, dog-men, or actual (not merely symbolic) starving canines. To value all living beings reflects an awareness of one’s place in a larger hierarchy of life and exemplifies humane priorities. In contrast, when individuals follow a path of blind ambition, fall prey to apathy, or embrace the short-sighted teachings of morally suspect leaders (for Bulgakov, the Bolsheviks), they help create a dehumanizing world of suffering, fear, and isolation for everyone—human, animal or otherwise.

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