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***It's a Dog's Life: Dog Transformations in Two Examples of Modern Russian Literature***  
Alexandra Gass

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES AT TRINITY  
UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
GRADUATION WITH DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

DATE November 15, 2019

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*It's a Dog's Life: Dog Transformations in Two Examples of Modern Russian Literature*

Abstract

This paper focuses on the comparative analysis of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* and Vladimir Mayakovsky's "How I Became a Dog." After providing a brief historical and biographical context to these authors and their respective works, this thesis, while it explores the similarities, mainly focuses on the differences in themes and concepts in these two works and how they relate to the authors' differing views and interesting relationship as contemporaries. Additionally, this thesis looks in-depth at each work's use of transformation and dogs to convey views on Soviet Russia following the October Revolution. Ultimately, both works represent transformations involving dogs to and from humans and express the authors' opposite political views about the early Soviet period.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Bruce Holl and Professor Maria Holl, for their guidance, helpful feedback, dedication and ongoing commitment to my academic achievements. I would also like to thank Dr. James Shinkle for believing in me and helping me find my strengths and to pursue a degree in Slavic studies. I'm forever grateful to my grandparents who encouraged me to maintain and cherish my heritage and cultural roots.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Biographical Context

Mikhail Bulgakov and Vladimir Mayakovsky are two of the most famous Russian writers of the early 20th century, contemporaries of the early Soviet period in Russia. The works of both writers were drastically different, as were their personalities.<sup>1</sup> Bulgakov and Mayakovsky differed in their upbringing, political views, literary styles, and families' socio-economic status. Bulgakov was a member of the literary establishment, classically educated, trained to be a physician, and remained true to these traditional values, preserving the classics; while Mayakovsky was a futurist poet with no college degree who disavowed old norms in favor of radically new art.

Though Mayakovsky and Bulgakov were both born outside of Moscow, they were naturally attracted to the opportunities of city life. Driven by their different life circumstances, they moved to Moscow with their families and ironically belonged to the same literary circles and developed an interesting relationship (Yablokov 7). They met in person many times and even conversed, according to some of their contemporaries (Яновская). Bulgakov was reserved and quieter during their interactions whereas Mayakovsky did not conceal his dislike of Bulgakov, whom he perceived as anti-revolutionary. It is doubtful that intelligent and talented people like Mayakovsky and Bulgakov failed to see each other's literary talent (Caton 9). They were aware of each other's works and would make digs at and references to each other in their writing (Liberty 8-10). Bulgakov was later deeply perturbed by Mayakovsky's eventual suicide and wrote a response to his suicide note (Caton 9).

Vladimir Mayakovsky's name is inextricably linked to the image of the October

Revolution. Mayakovsky was called the singer of the revolution (Михайлов) for a reason. To the rhythm of his angry rhyme: “Ешь ананасы, рябчиков жуй / День твой последний приходит, буржуй.” (Ешь ананасы..., 1917 p. 234 line 1-2) [“Eat pineapples, chew hazel grouse / Your last day comes, bourgeois bourgeois]<sup>2</sup> soldiers, sailors and workers took the Winter Palace. When the old world was breaking down, Mayakovsky greeted the revolution with joy. “Принять или не принимать? Такого вопроса для меня (и для других москвичей-футуристов) не было. Моя революция....” (Mayakovsky’s “Я Сам” 1922, 1928 г) [“To accept or not to accept? This question for me (and for other Muscovite futurists) did not exist. It’s my revolution...”]. For this Russian poet, the theme of the October revolution became dominant in his work. At first, Mayakovsky embraced the revolution wholeheartedly and expressed his strong support for its ideals and the changes resulting from it. “Сегодня рушится тысячелетнее «Прежде». / Сегодня пересматривается миров основа. / Сегодня / до последней пуговицы в одежде / жизнь переделаем снова,” (Революция, 1917 p. 222 line 71-75) [“Today, the thousand-year-old “Past” collapses / Today the foundation of the worlds is being revised / Today / to the last button of clothing / we recast life anew.”] However, the consequences of the historical events were not as the poet had expected, and he expressed bitter regret in his later works, satirizing the ultimate unwanted results of the Soviet system in his play *The Bedbug*. It was very difficult for a poet-revolutionary to live with the feeling that the Revolution did not achieve the results he wanted. After the Soviet victory, Mayakovsky perceived a degradation of the revolutionary ideals at the hands of the bureaucracy. Most likely, Mayakovsky’s disillusionment with his core beliefs led to his eventual suicide.

M.A. Bulgakov had always remained true to himself in his work. All his works reflected his view of the revolution, political changes, and the new socialist system in Russia. Bulgakov’s



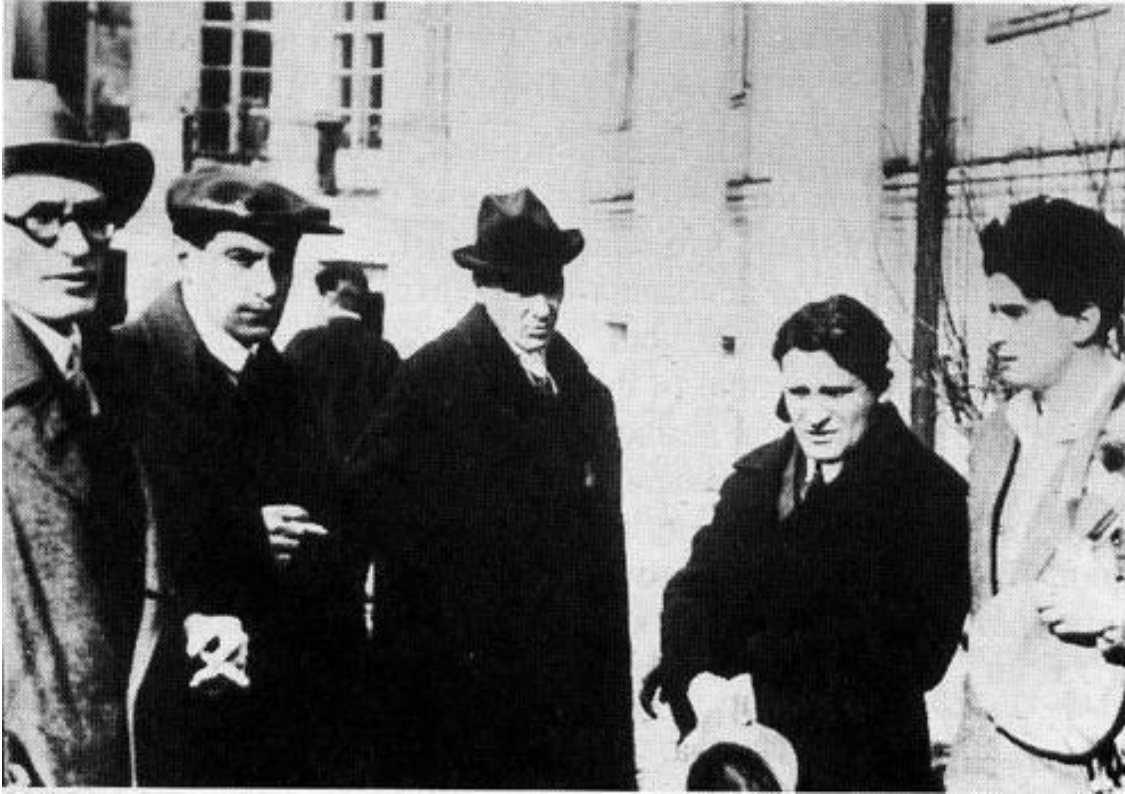
attitude towards the revolution was constant and quite different from that of Mayakovsky. In his novel, *Heart of a Dog*, the writer explained about the events that took place in Moscow in December 1924, and his disdain and pessimism for what would result from the revolution. He warned readers that it was impossible to change human nature and the moral foundations of society by physical force and within a relatively short period of time. As a physician and a well-educated scientist and writer, Bulgakov knew that the creation of a new being is a long evolutionary process shaped over time by many factors and environmental changes. Moreover, Bulgakov's storyline in *Heart of a Dog* underscored the impossibility and impracticality that a mere social reconstruction would create a new human while disregarding scientific-technological progress. He refused to compromise his ideas and ideals; interestingly, Bulgakov's frankness and openness earned him the trust of Stalin, a paranoid individual and brutal Soviet dictator. When Bulgakov wrote a letter to the Soviet government requesting financial help since most of his works were banned, Stalin agreed to give him a protected job working in a theater (Lakshin 15). Stalin advocated for Bulgakov's play *The Days of the Turbins* to be performed in the theater, attending the play no less than 15 times according to Moscow Art Theater records, and argued that it was good quality artistry despite being considered anti-revolutionary by many Soviet critics, including Mayakovsky himself (Lakshin 14). This unique relationship that Bulgakov had with Stalin allowed the writer to continue maintaining his views and survive as an artist even though most of his works were banned from publication during his life.

Despite belonging to opposite literary camps, Mayakovsky's literary fate in 1929 paralleled to that of Bulgakov's and both their works fell out of popularity. An individual exhibition of a decade of Mayakovsky's work was largely ignored, the poet's satire was no longer relevant. The poet for the first time felt the cooling of interest towards his work.

Moreover, Mayakovsky's play *The Bathhouse* written in 1929 was criticized by audiences and critics (Маяковский, 7: 378) as much as Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins* (Яблоков 40). On April 14, 1930, Mayakovsky shot himself.

In the eyes of Bulgakov, Mayakovsky was successful and talented and the poet's death shocked him (Caton 9). The death of Mayakovsky caused an unexpectedly strong resonance in the country and literary society. On April 17, 1930, the day of his funeral, Vorovsky Street in Moscow near the Writers' Union was filled with a seemingly endless stream of people (Яблоков 44). In the center of a photograph taken at the funeral (picture 1), one can see Bulgakov in attendance, saddened and standing in a circle of other grieving prominent writers of the time (Булгаков 225).

Mayakovsky did not live to see the consequences of Stalin's mass repression in the country. Mayakovsky also did not witness another critical step of the Communist Party – to set Socialist realism as the only accepted creative theme for all Soviet literature and art. Socialist realism was chosen as the realism of the “proletarian,” “tendentious,” “monumental,” “heroic,” “romantic,” “social,” “revolutionary,” and so forth. This full control excluded all other methods of creating literary works including Mayakovsky's futurism. The fates of both writers were formed in such a way that each of them was given twenty years of literary creativity. Having started his literary activity ten years later than Mayakovsky, Bulgakov outlived him for just a decade and died from kidney disease in 1940 at the age of 48.



Picture 1. Bulgakov and other writers attending Mayakovsky's funeral from left to right: *M. Fainzilberg, V. Kataev, M. Bulgakov, Yu. Olesha, I. Utkin. At the funeral of Mayakovsky, April 17, 1930. Photo by I. Ilf*

Familiarity with the work of Mayakovsky helps readers to understand how some bright minds in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century believed in communist ideas and how they were ultimately deceived by ideology. Through the changing themes in Mayakovsky's work, readers can sense that the poet first embraced the new ideals and then later felt deceived and disappointed by the social and political changes occurring in his country. Bulgakov foresaw the bloody path that the revolutionary transformation of the country would take and in his satirical and masterly written works indicated to readers what could happen as a result of these unnatural revolutionary transformations. Unlike Mayakovsky, Bulgakov did not experience changes of

opinion regarding the Soviet society, his view of the events and understanding of the vices of the new system remained consistent and he openly expressed this opinion through his works.

Mayakovsky started writing in 1909 and reached his heyday around the year 1915 (Тарасенков 7-10). Though he was expelled from school, Mayakovsky was multitalented and his career was successful in many ways. He was very creative not only in writing but also in acting and art. He created numerous artworks<sup>3</sup> and posters and participated in art exhibits (Brown 47). Interesting to note, that in his public statements, Mayakovsky emphasized the analogous qualities between poetry and painting, and he frequently added to his posters his own rhymes and slogans, including his own book cover<sup>4</sup> (Маяковский 8:257-265). He was very prolific in 1915 and published 19 poems, including two of his most famous ones, “Облако в штанах” [“Cloud in Trousers”] and “Флейта-позвоночник,” [“Backbone Flute”] (*Собрание сочинений в восьми томах*). In February 1915, Mayakovsky was working for the journal *Новый Сатирикон* [*New Satiricon*] which would publish most of his works; by August 1915 Mayakovsky was drafted into the military. Most of the futurist movement intended to evoke strong emotions and even scandal, something that is very typical of Mayakovsky’s personality. Though driven by common ideals, Mayakovsky disliked his contemporaries, including other “proletarian” poets, as well as Bulgakov (Brown 311). In addition to alienating himself from his contemporaries, Mayakovsky also felt alienated from his intended audience. The early success of his poetry failed him; he was mocked by his audiences towards the end of his career. “How I Became a Dog” was written in 1915 and in this poem Mayakovsky expressed how he is alienated from the surroundings of the pre-Revolutionary period. He described how the narrator in the poem was ostracized by those around him, so he used fang, claw, tail, and angry bark in response to the crowd’s abuse (Brown 123). Aspects of who he was as a person at that time permeates this

poem.

By 1925, Bulgakov had also become relatively established as a writer, though he became a writer later in life, having moved from a career in medicine to journalism and prose writing. He decided to dedicate his career to writing in 1921, when he began working as a journalist. By 1925, he had already published *Дьяволиада* [*The Diaboliada*], a collection of short stories, and *Роковые Яйца* [*The Fatal Eggs*], his first science fiction work, in the *Nedra* almanac. Bulgakov wrote *Heart of a Dog*, his second science-fiction work, between January and March 1925; however, it was published posthumously many years later in the 1960s. The events of the novel take place at the end of December 1924 and beginning of January 1925. This novel was written as a response to the new revolutionary changes in Soviet Russia and their greatest champion, Vladimir Mayakovsky. Reflecting on the events in the country, the entire story portrays the process of *преображение*, read as “preobrazhenie”, or transfiguration or transformation; interestingly, one of the main characters Professor Philip Philippovich Preobrazhensky is wittingly named by the writer after the process of transformation to most likely underscore the forced and unnatural changes of a creature in parallel to those changes happening in the Soviet Russia. Notably, *преображение* also refers to the religious feast of the Transfiguration and the corresponding passage in the New Testament. Bulgakov refers to Biblical themes not only in *Heart of a Dog* but also in *The Master and Margarita*.

In March 1925 Bulgakov read his novel at a literary gathering to an audience of 45 people (Milne 60). The theatricality of the story and its on-the-nose contemporary setting created a story of high comedy, presenting caricatures of the intelligentsia and the proletariat in the form of Preobrazhensky and Sharikov, respectively. Though unpublished at that time, the novel created much controversy and interest and was read to a wide variety of audiences (Яблоков 30).

In March 1926, the Moscow Art Theatre signed a contract with Bulgakov for a stage adaptation of the novel, indicating that its political aspects were not immediately perceived as breaking taboos (Milne 61). Nikolai Semenovich Klestov (Angarsky), a prominent Bolshevik who had published two of Bulgakov's previous works in his almanac, the *Nedra*, requested a copy of *Heart of a Dog* in late spring 1926 as a 'temporary loan,' but never returned it; perhaps Angarsky wished to preserve a permanent record for posterity. For in May 1926, Bulgakov's flat was raided, and his typescript and diaries were all confiscated (Milne 60). The raid and removal of the manuscript were all later referenced in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

## Chapter 2

Canine Transformation in *Heart of a Dog* and “How I Became a Dog”

Despite coming from very different backgrounds and possessing different and nearly opposite personalities, Bulgakov and Mayakovsky were contemporary literary figures, members of the same Moscow literary circle and legacies of whose works went on to outlive them. The works of both authors reflect on the events and societal changes in their country. Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* and Mayakovsky's “How I Became a Dog” both discuss dogs and transformation of characters, but to very different ends. As contemporaries and later acquaintances, Bulgakov and Mayakovsky influenced each other to some degree, and some dialogue between the two over issues they disagreed on are apparent in several of their works, including the aforementioned two. In these works, about transformation to and from dogs, Mayakovsky and Bulgakov clearly show distinctions in their personalities and writing styles, as well as, and not surprisingly so, their interpretations of the political events. Whereas *Heart of a Dog* by Bulgakov and “How I Became a Dog” by Mayakovsky are similar, as both represent transformations of dogs to and from humans, they also reveal the opposite political views that Mayakovsky and Bulgakov held about the early Soviet period, expressed through literary techniques.

The transformations in both works are parallel, yet different: in Bulgakov, a savvy stray through a medical intervention becomes a degenerate man who then later is surgically transformed back into a dog; in Mayakovsky, a polite man becomes a savage dog. Bulgakov's Sharik, the stray dog, is incredibly intelligent for an animal. He provides commentary on Soviet society (Bulgakov 120) and even learns how to read on his own (Bulgakov 125-126). After Sharik comes to live with Professor Preobrazhensky, he at first admires him for his anti-socialist monologues (Bulgakov 143). This is in sharp contrast with Sharikov, who Sharik becomes after

receiving a pituitary gland and testes from Klim, a common proletarian scum. Sharikov is sexual, self-centered, violent and unresponsive to attempts to educate him on how to be “civil.” Sharikov exudes poor manners at the dinner table, drinking excessively and being generally rude. He has no concept of fashion or civility, as he wears a garish tie, curses and swears, and bites the hand that feeds him literally and figuratively by reporting Preobrazhensky and his colleague Bormenthal to authorities to get rid of them. Sharikov is primarily focused on himself and demands increasingly more “rights” and privileges without compromising with his creators. He attempts to rape the doctors’ assistant Zina and with his lies tries to force Vasnetsova, the young typist who had pity on Sharik and whom he admired when he was a dog, into marriage. He demonstrates primitive violence by threatening to use Bormenthal’s gun against him and getting a job exterminating stray cats. Likewise, the narrator’s transformation in “How I Became a Dog” is fueled and catalyzed by anger, a strong primitive emotion: “Весь как есть искусан злобой. / Злюсь не так, как могли бы вы: / как собака лицо луны гололобой - / взял бы / и все обвыл,” (Маяковский lines 2-6) [“Whole body bitten all over by malice. / Enraged not like what you may feel: / like a dog with his face turned to the bare forehead of the moon - / I would just / howl at everything and everyone,”] The negative emotions and anger are specifically expressed in both characters; however, it is the anger that partially makes Mayakovsky’s narrator a dog and it takes a medical intervention and physiological changes to transform Bulgakov’s character into a dog and back again.

Notably, language is also used as a means of highlighting the primitiveness of the characters that resulted from their transformations. While Sharikov gains the ability to talk, Preobrazhensky concludes that he does not have anything intelligent to say. Most of his first words while transforming into a human are vulgarities (Булгаков 162). Bulgakov’s depiction of



the vulgar language in the speech of a newly created human being emphasizes the conflict of cultures created through political reform in the early 1920s in Russia (Laursen 492-493). With this language transformation of his character, Bulgakov responds to the mistaken common belief at that time that one could change a person's mind by just changing his or her words (Laursen 494). When Preobrazhensky and Bormenthal abort the experiment and turn Sharikov back into a dog, Preobrazhensky comments to the crowd investigating what happened to Comrade Sharikov that the ability to speak doesn't make one human: "То-есть [Шариков] говорил? [...] это ещё не значит быть человеком," (Булгаков 206) [So [Sharikov] spoke? [...] that doesn't make one human]. At the beginning of the narrator's transformation in Mayakovsky's poem, one of the first things the narrator loses is his ability to communicate "like a human being": "Какая-то прокричала про добрый вечер. / Надо ответить: / она - знакомая. / Хочу. / Чувствую - / не могу по-человечьи," (Маяковский lines 11-16) ["Someone shouted good evening / I need to reply: / She's - an acquaintance. / I want to. / I feel - / I can't [do it] like a human being"]. The final and most significant blow to the narrator's humanity is also the effect on his ability to communicate with the mob surrounding him at the end of the poem. The loss of communication is what makes him more dog-like than human-like (Lahti 159). He responds the only way he can in an animal form, barking reactively at the mob, but with only sound and no meaning: "И когда, ошестинив в лицо усища-веники, / толпа навалилась, / огромная, / злая, / я стал на четвереньки / и залаял: / Гав! гав! гав!" (Маяковский lines 43-48) ["And when, my face bristled with fur and whiskers / the mob seized upon me, / huge, / mean, / I stood on all fours / and barked: / Arf! arf! arf!"]. The acquisition and loss of language as a prime communication method is a common theme in these two works; however, Bulgakov underscores through his characters' behaviors and words that the ability to speak does not determine one's ability to be

human.

The authors' respective views and representation of dogs in their works rely heavily on the cultural association of dogs with the devil in traditional Russian culture. It was widely thought in old Russian beliefs that the devil, or *чёрт*, could take on the forms of various animals, including the dog, and using the dog had implications to the afterlife (Mondry 333). Sharikov's transformation appears to have demonic origins. The professor is first compared to a priest and deity in the operating room which is filled with bright light reminiscent of the biblical transformation (*preobrazhenie*) (Булгаков 155). However, towards the end of the surgery and during the reversal surgery that light is artificial, and the professor is compared to a vampire during the operation of creating an antichrist (Булгаков 158, 205). Even Preobrazhensky himself declares his creation to be something unknown, and something only the Devil knows: “Это чёрт знает что такое!” (Булгаков 179) [“Devil knows what that is!”]. While Bulgakov also based some of the material in *Heart of a Dog* on contemporary scientific and medical discoveries about hormones and the effects of the endocrine system, and pituitary gland specifically, on organisms (Mondry 339), the transplant of testes in the experimental surgery could be interpreted to have sexual, sinful, and unchaste connotations. Ultimately Sharikov is evil and a subpar human being which is shown through his unacceptable behavior and Preobrazhensky's attempts to civilize him are in vain because the materials used to create him were unholy and inferior: an otherwise decent dog tainted with a proletarian scum's pituitary gland and testes. Though not so explicitly as Bulgakov, Mayakovsky is also referencing the demonic nature of the dog by describing his character's werewolf-like transformation in the full moon phase mentioning the “лицо луны гололобой” (Маяковский lines 4) [“the bare forehead of the moon”]. Bulgakov, is, however, pointing out that even as a human creature Sharikov is still possessing demonic characteristics,

describes Sharikov appearance as being unattractive (Булгаков 161, 169). While both, Bulgakov and Mayakovsky's dogs somewhat reference the devil-like appearance of the animals, Sharikov still possesses that evil look even in his human phase of transformation.

Bulgakov in the novel *Heart of a Dog* creates a magnificent parody of the paradoxical situation in Soviet Russia of the 1920s, with humor and sarcasm describing in his novel an experiment on turning a dog into a human being. Bulgakov illustrates a broader political argument: it is futile to create the ideal Soviet man from the inadequate and unintelligent material of the Russian working class. The professor explains to Dr. Bormenthal that there is no need to artificially fabricate even Spinoza, because “человечество само [...] в эволюционном порядке каждый год, упорно выделяя из массы всякой мрази, создает десятками выдающихся гениев, украшающих земной шар” (Булгаков 194) [“Humanity, by itself [...] in an evolutionary manner, every year, by persistently weeding out the scum of the earth, adorns the globe with dozens of geniuses”]. It is easy to destroy, but it is impossible to create a new world or to bring up a new person. Sharikov is an allegorical image of the proletariat, which unexpectedly received many rights under the socialist system, but with his complete lack of culture Sharikov quickly discovered his inherent ability to betray and then destroy those who endowed him with these rights. Sharikov falls under the influence of Schvonder's communist activism and quickly learns to ask for more entitlements: “Мы в университетах не обучались, в квартирах по пятнадцать комнат с ваннами не жили! Только теперь пора бы это оставить. В настоящее время каждый имеет свое право...” (Булгаков 170) [“We didn't study in universities, didn't live in fifteen-bedroom apartments with bathrooms! Only now it's time to leave that behind. In modern times, each person has their right...”]. Noteworthy, this remark by Sharikov may also be a dig at Mayakovsky, who grew up poor and was dismissed from school

and never finished his education. Furthermore, from reading Engel's correspondence with Kautsky given to him by Shvonder, Sharikov made only one conclusion: "Взять все да и поделить..." (Булгаков 183) ["Seize everything and divide"]. We clearly see Bulgakov's reflection on the societal changes and his dislike of them: the newly created and uneducated lumpen proletariat depicted through Sharikov is detrimental to the country's educated and cultural elite such as with Drs. Preobrazhensky and Bormenthal.



Picture 2. *Vladimir Mayakovsky holding a dog. 1925. Unknown photographer.*

"How I Became a Dog" was written 10 years prior to Bulgakov's novel in 1915, before the revolution, and hence expresses Mayakovsky's opinion on the society at large and prelude to

forthcoming changes. Moreover, Mayakovsky demonstrates disdain for the pre-revolutionary Russian society by using the superstitious association that simple Russians had with dogs and the devil. The narrator in “How I Became a Dog” is mocked and harassed for his transformation due to superstitious beliefs. In contrast, Mayakovsky likes animals, as evidenced by his many illustrations and poems about animals (Lahti 157). Mayakovsky appears in a photograph from 1925 lovingly looking at a terrier-like dog in his arms (Picture 2); photographs with pets were unusual for the time, as most photographs were portraits or scenery because photography was still a luxury, especially in Soviet Russia (Маяковский 5:1). Examples of other poems expressing his love for animals include “Хорошее отношение к лошадям” [“Kindness to Horses”] (1918), that is evident in the title, and “Про Это” [“About This”] (1923). He states so in “Про Это”: “Я люблю зверье. / Увидишь собачонку — / тут у булочной одна — / сплошная плешь, — / из себя / и то готов достать печенку. / Мне не жалко, дорогая, / ешь!” [“I love animals. / I see a dog — / here at the bakery, this one — / with bald patches all over, — / from my own body / I’m ready to pull out my liver. / I don’t mind, my dear, / eat!”].

Mayakovsky’s love for dogs was so strong his friends called him “щен” [pup]; he even signed his love letters to Lili Brik with this nickname and drew himself as a dog<sup>5,6</sup> (Яблоков 27). Notably, the crowd is not nearly as sympathetic to dogs as Mayakovsky is. An old woman crosses herself for fear and hate of this transformed dog: “Она, крестясь, что-то кричала про черта,” (Маяковский line 42) [“She, crossing herself, screamed something about the Devil”]. We feel sympathetic towards the dog and the narrator’s frustration with and dislike of the crowd, and knowing that the poem was written before the October revolution creates a sense that Mayakovsky was foreseeing the eminent transformation of the society and the growing anger of the proletariat that would result in its transformation and generalized aggression towards existing

society, portrayed through barking and the hostile stance of the newly-transformed character.

Mayakovsky furthers his empathy towards animals by applying affinity of the working class and dogs in his poem, whereas Bulgakov takes another stance. As a trend, the vast majority of Mayakovsky's works sympathize with the proletariat and animals. Mayakovsky feels for and writes about both and the oppression of each; he advocates strongly for the communist revolution as well as the caring for animals and animals' feelings. While Bulgakov does not hate animals, he expresses criticism of the soviet experiment in his work. Sharik, as a stray dog, is endowed with intellect through his narration. Sharik can read, but also discusses his pain and suffering, including at the hands of proletarian cooks. Sharik makes for a sympathetic character when he is a dog. Notably, Sharik has very different views of class from when he becomes Sharikov. He transforms from a winsome stray into a loathsome man (Drews-Sylla 241). A dog, and the glands of an alcoholic criminal (Klim) are subpar materials for building an educated man (McDowell 223). Using this illustration as a means of criticism of Soviet attempts to create a "new man" from a yet-to-be-awakened proletariat following the revolution demonstrates Bulgakov's view that the proletariat need higher class gentry to be bellwethers of correct behavior (Caton 15). Lay people manipulated by Soviet propaganda become degenerates like Sharikov under the influence of transplanted organs and Shvonder. While readers most likely feel strong empathy towards a dog in Mayakovsky's poem, Bulgakov's characters do show empathy towards a dog but not towards a creature that the dog was transformed into. The theme of empathy is present in both works but it is directed toward politically opposite camps: the struggling, oppressed and angry proletariat in Mayakovsky's work and well educated elite and innocent creatures of the pre-soviet times in Bulgakov's.

The theme of immortality is very prominent in many works of both authors. *Heart of a*

*Dog* discusses immortality through scientific discoveries and specifically features “rejuvenation” as a means of achieving immortality. Rather than having creativity prominently displayed as the means of achieving immortality by ascending through one’s mind beyond the influence of their lives, Preobrazhensky does not simply turn to science for attaining knowledge, he studies rejuvenation surgeries to extend the youth and sexual prowess of his customers. Preobrazhensky rejects all teleological notions of evolution, and through his experimental results he upholds that evolutionary change is random and unpredictable (Howell 557). Notably, he uses these rejuvenation surgeries to gain favor with communist leaders that benefit from them: this allows him to keep his multiroom apartment, cook, and other privileges. His good standing with the government ultimately saves his life when later one of his patients intercepts the report that Sharikov labeled Preobrazhensky a “counterrevolutionary.” Though not specifically noted in “How I Became a Dog”, Mayakovsky dreamed of creative immortality in other poems. “В наших жилах — / кровь, а не водица. / Мы идём / сквозь револьверный лай, / чтобы, / умирая, / воплотиться / в пароходы, / в строчки / и в другие долгие дела,” (Маяковский lines 76-85, “Товарищу Нетте — пароходу и человеку” [“To Comrade Nette – steamboat and person”] 1926 г) [“In our veins — / flows blood, not water. / We go / through the barking blasts of revolvers / in order to, / through death, / reincarnate / as steamboats, / as lines of writing / and other enduring things.”]. Referring to future generations, Mayakovsky writes in “Во Вось Голос” [“At The Top of My Voice”] just how his poems will outlive him and allow his voice and works to pervade the distant future as a means for his creativity to achieve immortality: “Я к вам приду / в коммунистическое далеко // не так, / как песенно-есененный провитязь. // Мой стих дойдет / через хребты веков // и через головы / поэтов и правительств,” (lines 78-85) [“I will come to you / in the communist future // not like, / Yesenin’s ephemeral songs. // My

poems will reach / through the ridges of centuries // and over heads / of poets and rulers”].

However, Mayakovsky is not immortal and his works are better understood in the context of his time and events surrounding his life. “Чтобы сегодня “оживить” самого Маяковского, есть, кажется, лишь одно средство: вернуть поэту его время, а поэта - вернуть времени, восстановить те живые связи, в которых он существовал, заново честно обрисовать “контекст” его жизни” (Яблоков б) [“There is only one way to “revive” Mayakovsky today: to turn back time, and restore the connections he lived in and accurately repaint the “context” of his life”]. Though the theme of immortality of Mayakovsky’s character could be implied through the werewolf-like and thus immortal transformation of the character of his poem, unlike in Bulgakov’s novel, it is not explicitly featured in “How I Became a Dog” and thus is a distinct and contrasting aspect of both works.

The transformations of both Sharikov in *Heart of a Dog* and of the narrator in “How I Became a Dog” are also radically different in the sense that they depict more than just a surface change of a man into a dog or the change of an animal into a man and back. The former transformation was the result of an experimental surgery as part of Preobrazhensky’s ongoing studies on the effects of the endocrine system and hormones on organisms, especially regarding transplanting gonads in order to “rejuvenate” sexual function. The surgery performed on Sharik was a result of what is implied to be years if not decades of research conducted by Professor Preobrazhensky. Using his medical background, Bulgakov adds grotesque and realistic description of the surgery performed on Sharik, and the description of how the dog transforms into Sharikov. The process is painstakingly recorded in Bormenthal’s scientific notes describing a gradual transformation of dog into man, gaining human characteristics and language day by day. Bulgakov’s scientific knowledge adds a tinge of realism to an otherwise fantastical story of



how an experimental surgery went awry and transformed a lovable stray dog into a degenerate human.

It is interesting to note that the changes that Bulgakov's character undergoes throughout the novel do not transcend the barrier between mind and matter as true transformation does. (Fusso 388) The overall changes that Sharikov experiences are temporary and only physiologically and psychologically motivated through organ transplant. Additionally, the changes are reversible with just another surgical procedure to remove the transplanted pituitary gland and testes. The change in the character is echoing the role of a narrator in the novel: Bulgakov is not only changing Sharik into Sharikov, he also changes the narrators. The beginning of the novel and the end are narrated by Sharik, an intelligent dog, and an omniscient narrator. For the duration of his transformation as Sharikov, he no longer narrates, instead the narration alternates between that of an omniscient narrator and Dr. Bormenthal's notes.

Because of Bulgakov's awareness of the convention of dog colloquy, he takes it a step further to make a parody of the genre by reversing the sardonic canine narration on humanity to the human's narration on Sharikov (McDowell 205). Mayakovsky's character transforms into a dog and his newly acquired canine appearance and qualities originate from within and are magically forced upon him by the circumstances and his emotional reaction to his surroundings. In contrast, Sharikov's base nature is mainly derived from Chugunkin's human qualities but also possesses some of Sharik's canine qualities (Булгakov 167) for comic relief and to relay the author's dislike of the character. Moreover, the opening and closing cynomorphic narrative demonstrate that Sharik possesses as much soul, sentience, and sensibility as the human characters. Notably, since Bulgakov's original title was *A Dog's Happiness: A Monstrous Story*, this shows that Bulgakov was aware of and even emphasized Sharik's "right as an individual but

also the monstrosity of the violation of stripping him of his happiness” (McDowell 219). The qualities of changes that both characters undergo have different origins and therefore are very different in their appearances: a funny looking human-dog looking-like Sharikov is much less appealing to the reader compared to the looks of a regular dog with whiskers and a tail of Mayakovsky’s character.

The causes of the transformation in both works are very different and therefore the end results are completely opposite. Sharikov’s transformation was reversible and merely forced upon him through a surgical intervention and is a testament to the ancient ongoing debate of nature versus nurture that was brought to the forefront by the Soviet eugenics’ movement of the 1920s (Howell 545). In contrast, the narrator in “How I Became a Dog” is transformed by magical means. His transformation is werewolf-like, in the moonlight. “как собака лицо луны гололобой - /взял бы/ и все обвыл” (Маяковский lines 4-6) [“like a dog with his face turned to the bare forehead of the moon - / I would just / howl at everything and everyone”]. His transformation is almost circumstantial, catalyzed by burning anger and the light of the moon. His transformation is shocking to bystanders and someone even calls the constable to declare that the narrator sprouted a tail. People surround him and ostracize him as he reaches the culmination of his transformation, and one old woman trampled by the crowd even makes the sign of the cross at the sight of him. Mayakovsky depicts the audience’s reaction to the poet’s transformation as it somewhat also reflects the place of the dog in Russian culture (McDowell 203-205). Mayakovsky’s character is transformed under the pressure of the environment and of circumstances and hence could be considered more natural and sustainable, while Bulgakov’s character’s transformation was caused by a medical intervention and was eventually reversed by another surgical procedure, and the character was returned to a normal, permanent and

sustainable state.

In Bulgakov's novel, a dog turns into a despicable human and destroys the peace of his creator's apartment. Through his novel, Bulgakov shares the "fantastic grotesque" as seen with other Soviet anti-utopian science-fiction authors and mainstream writers of satire such as Gogol and Swift. Moreover, what Bulgakov and other anti-utopian science-fiction writers share with pro-Soviet utopian science-fiction writers is the depiction of a social chaos hidden within an old civilization that ultimately escapes to destroy it while creating a yet unknown new civilization in its stead (Nudelman 38-66). In contrast, Mayakovsky is entirely supportive of the new utopian civilization created through the forced changes of the old political system. Though not directly in his poem, but in Mayakovsky's other works written around the same time period, he indicates his strong support of the newly created utopian society and disregard for science (Маяковский "Гимн Ученому", "Революция"). Sharikov's transformation is initiated and reversed by his human creators to only entertain their own scientific curiosity and for the exact opposite reason the narrator in Mayakovsky's poem is so tortured: Sharik is embraced by communist laypeople as Comrade Sharikov while Mayakovsky's dog is rejected, chased and harassed by the crowd. This is a reflection of the different societies the two authors were living in at the time each work was written.

Both works portray the opposite emotional state of writers at the time when they were written. The theme of anxious solitude is prominent in "How I Became a Dog," as the narrator struggles to communicate and is even ostracized by his community "взял бы / и все обвыл" (Маяковский lines 5-6) ["I would just / howl at everything and everyone"], "не могу по-человечьи" (line 16) ["I can't speak like a human being"], and "И на улице не успокоился ни на ком я" (line 10) ["On the street, I couldn't calm down for anyone"]. His presumably

permanent transformation results in an even deeper solitude with his loss of speech altogether. It is widely believed that this poem was about Mayakovsky and how he felt isolated from his audience and nearly hopeless. In contrast to the depressive state of Mayakovsky, humor and satire are used by Bulgakov to laugh at the unnatural societal changes that could still be reversed and hence convey some hope. As a means of giving a satirical example of what sort of debauchery constitutes the proletariat of the 1920s, Sharikov is embraced and fully accepted into Soviet society in Bulgakov's novel. Additionally, encouraged by Shvonder and the housing committee, Sharikov was able to receive an identification document and even enlist. Sharikov finds a job working in pest control, and even manipulates a typist into marrying him until Preobrazhensky foils his plans. By showing a degenerate like Sharikov accepted and succeeding in early Soviet society, Bulgakov shows his ambivalence towards the soviet experiment, as he feels that degeneracy can thrive under these conditions. The hope, satire, humor and unacceptance of the new social norm of Bulgakov's novel are contrasting with the hopelessness, solitude and aggression painted by Mayakovsky's poem though both do so using dog transformations as a metaphor for the society each perceived at the time.

### Chapter 3

#### Conclusion

While both works share similar themes, most notably dogs and transformation, they reflect both authors' very different points of view at the moment in time when each was written. While Mayakovsky feels for animals and the working class, he believes that the revolution would help all of them, which is something he fervently supported until about a year before his death. Bulgakov sees the October revolution and forced changes as detrimental for all involved. Mayakovsky tries to elicit sympathy for those ostracized by pre-revolutionary Russia, including the narrator who transforms into a dog whereas Bulgakov shows how a degenerate transformed from an animal is readily accepted by the newly established Soviet society and hence detrimental to many directly or indirectly involved. Both works live on in creative immortality, which both authors believe in, but the themes of immortality in each work are also opposite: immortality is related to sexual rejuvenation in Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* with Mayakovsky's immortality presented less directly in terms of creativity and the forces of magic that induce the narrator's transformation in "How I Became a Dog."

The process of Sharikov's transformation underscores how emotional, verbal, and physical transformations are difficult, slow, incomplete and may lead to disastrous consequences. This is ultimately in response to Mayakovsky's belief that with words, slogans, advertising, and dogmatic teachings one can transform the world and ultimately create a utopia. Moreover, the transformation in Mayakovsky's character is complete, magical, and final in terms of his verbal abilities and total replacement of a human language with the dog's barking "Гав! гав! гав!" ["Arf! arf! arf!"]; however, Bulgakov is not limiting the transformation process as final and irreversible, he avoids labels, much as Sharikov is neither really a dog nor a man. Both works

elicit empathy in the reader, but that empathy is directed at the protagonist and antagonist of the stories and hence reflect the authors' opinions of the proletariat and of the societal changes in Russia. These differences in otherwise similar works circumscribe the differences in the authors' views: Bulgakov is not supportive of the changes following the October revolution, whereas Mayakovsky anticipates and embraces the new world order. Evil is depicted similarly in both works, but the transformation for good in each author's work outlines those major differences in opinion where that spark of hope should lie. Ultimately, the failure of a false faith in communism led to Mayakovsky's tragic demise and to Bulgakov's sardonic reflection of that major tragedy's repercussions on the Russian literary world of their time. We are left with their two immortal tales from which to ponder these questions.

## Notes

1. Most scholarly work on Bulgakov focuses on his magnum opus, *The Master and Margarita*. Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* is a lesser known work of his but still a biting political satire and creative work of science-fiction. Moreover, dogs have had an important place in literature, with a canine narrator being a popular trope in literature for millenia, as analyzed by Margaret Tejerizo (Tejerizo). Dogs also maintain a status as important symbols in Russian culture at large; Bulgakov's and Mayakovsky's works are mentioned as examples of canines in Russian literature (Mondry; Lahti). Several other prominent scholars have written interesting commentaries on and analyses of Bulgakov's and Mayakovsky's work, and specifically individual analyses of *Heart of a Dog* and "How I Became a Dog." Яблоков explains and discusses the dialogue of satire between Mayakovsky and Bulgakov over their literary careers. Since Mayakovsky was Bulgakov's contemporary, *Heart of a Dog* was compared to Mayakovsky's play *The Bedbug* by Diane Caton in her master's thesis, but a detailed thematic comparison and analysis of both authors' works on dog transformations, *Heart of a Dog* and "How I Became a Dog," has not yet been done.
2. English translations in brackets of Russian from Mayakovsky's and Bulgakov's works are my own.

3. «Окно сатиры». Фрагмент. Рисунок В. Маяковского. [*Window of Satire. Fragment of Mayakovsky artwork*] (Маяковский 2:288)

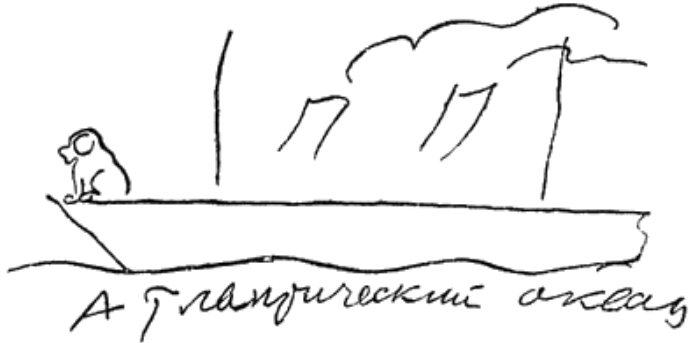


4. Обложка книги В. Маяковского «Ни знахарь, ни бог, ни слуги бога нам не подмога». Рисунок В. Маяковского. [Book cover of “Neither the Medicine Man, Nor God, Nor the Servants of God are Helpful to Us” by Mayakovsky. Art by Mayakovsky.] (Маяковский 3:288).





5. A letter from Mayakovsky to Lili Brik, June 22, 1925. A dog taking a trip on a steamer across the Atlantic Ocean. Words in the drawing read, "Atlantic Ocean" (Lahti 158).



6. A letter from Mayakovsky to Lili Brik, July 8, 1926. A little dog eating shish kebab while watching the sun come up in Simferopol on top of mount Ai Petri. Words in the drawing read, "sunrise, shish kabob, me (pointing to the dog), Ai Petri" (Lahti 158).



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