

Ireneusz Szarycz
Waterloo, Kanada

The Spiritual, Cultural and Political in Mikhail Bulgakov's Tale *Собачье сердце*

Mikhail Bulgakov wrote a tale *Собачье сердце* (*Heart of a Dog*) in 1925. The tale deals with the theme of a dangerous medical experiment. As Mariia Chudakova¹ rightly pointed out the plot of the story is not entirely based on the writer's own invention. Bulgakov being well aware of the works of Herbert Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816), send a strong political message to the Russian reader of the 1920s, where "[he] spoke his mind unambiguously for the first and last time"². It was a sharp satire against the Soviet power, against socialist ideas, and at the same time it was a parody on the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin. Through use of grotesque and of humor in *Собачье сердце*, Bulgakov laughs at those who think they can change the world. The political-allegorical reading insinuates that the canine-human transformation process in the story symbolizes the social Revolution in Russia of 1917, and that the events that developed as a consequence of this experiment signify political and cultural and social changes soon following it. As such, the Professor who conducted the medical experiment – Phillippph Phillipppovich Preobrazhenskii – bears the illusion of the transformer (преобразователь) that fails, as Lenin and his revolutionary policy failed to bring Russia relief, because having obtained power by force cannot bring any good to anyone, and the "result" of the experiment – Poligraf Poligrafofovich Sharikov, represents the ugly face of the proletariat and of the Bolshevik regime.

However, one should argue that the tale not only satirizes Soviet reality, but also deals with religious, linguistic and domestic aspects, which are not external to the satire, but an integral part of its multifaceted and complex structure. And of course, it would be impossible to deny the importance of language, dwelling, or religion to the explicit message beyond the political parable, which is not a simple allegory of

¹ Мария Чудакова, *Собачье сердце Михаила Булгакова*, "Знамя" 1987, № 6, с. 135-141. The tale's publication was initially prohibited in the Soviet Union, but circulated in samizdat until it was officially released in 1987. The same year Mariia Chudakova published her article on *Sobach'e serdtse*.

² Ellendea Proffer, *Bulgakov: Life and Work*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984, p. 133.

the political events but like other Bulgakov's works carries implicit symbols and ideas.

Religion, a major stone of Bulgakov's spiritual existence occupies a tremendous place in *Собачье сердце*, and in his other works. This should not come unexpectedly, since Mikhail Bulgakov came from a family with historically religious background that had a strong tradition of culture and scholarship belonging to intelligentsia, which had an impact on Bulgakov's writings to come. In every Bulgakov generation there was one Bulgakov who was a priest. Bulgakov's grandfather from his father's side, Ivan, was a priest in Orel province. Bulgakov's father, Afanasii Ivanovich was a Professor of theology. Bulgakov's mother Varvara Mikhailovna Pokrovskaiia also came from a religious family and her father was a bishop. Bulgakov's godfather organized an archaeological museum that collected religious artifacts. At school, Bulgakov studied folklore and legends. Afanasii Bulgakov also passed on to his son the love of history and the history of Christianity in particular, as well as an interest in demonology and mysticism. Afanasii Bulgakov was also well acquainted with Mason's rituals, and was the author of the article "Современное франкомасонство" ("Contemporary Franco-Masonry")³. So Mikhail Bulgakov was also familiar with these ideas, which together with Christian religion, folklore and mysticism subsequently influenced his later writings. He carried the values "of the Christian intellectual middle class" his entire life, passing it on to his writings.

The particular echo of folklore elements in *Собачье сердце* might be found in human-canine interchange in the tale. One of the reasons that a dog was chosen to become human might be linked to the folk legend according to which dogs were human guards in paradise in their previous life, but for telling lies were punished and expelled, and forced to bear dog like appearance⁴. The ambivalent treatment of dogs in Russian culture, which include the belief that dogs possess non-Christian nature (devils were often depicted as dogs in the Russian "lubok" material) and the ability to interchange with snakes (which also represent diabolical non-Christian forces) could be further seen in the description of dog's paradise, the "собачья сказка", and Preobrazhenskii's kitchen as heaven ("главное отделение рая") for Sharik. Amnestied before the operation, Sharik sees angels – "угодники", and a vision of himself as going to dog's paradise for his many sufferings in life.

The parallel between dog and human is also seen in the fact that the dog possesses human traits even in his canine state, such as the dog's ability to read and understand language, think and narrate, know the difference between right and wrong (Sharik feels shame when he encounters Preobrazhenskii's visitors, and describes Preobrazhenskii's apartment as an obscene place – "похабная квартирка"). He also has a "family history" (dog's grandmother had an extramarital affair with

³ Борис Соколов, *Три жизни Михаила Булгакова*, Москва 1997, с. 18.

⁴ Henrietta Mondry, "Beyond Scientific Transformation in Bulgakov's 'The Heart of a Dog'." *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 10 (2) (1996), p. 3.

“водолаз”- a diver, which can also be a human diver), and this ambiguity in meaning serves as a device for the humanization of Sharik.

This existence of “Шарик-пес” also implies the existence of a second guise of a “Шарик-человек” or a “werewolf,” who has as one of his guises a human hypostasis⁵, (his man-wolf nature theory is further implied when before the procedure Sharik imagined seeing disgusting wolf eyes – “почему-то в ванне померщились отвратительные волчьи глазаglaza”), and “...according to Russian folk beliefs dogs and wolfs were also interchangeable as representation of unclean, non-Christian power”⁶. And when he experiences another delirium from anesthesia, he has his second vision of paradise, where he sees wonderful happy pink dogs from the other side⁷, but though the dog is happy and experiences beautiful feelings, this vision, however, did not turn out to be a happy vision, “the apocalyptic event did not result in the successful achievement of the final goal, as the experiment stopped at the level of the arrival of the anti-Sharik, or anti-creation, and the world turned upside down, which can further symbolize the conflict between good and evil, the opposition of Heaven and Hell and the presence of an evil spirit in the Professor’s house⁸.

That this experiment is a symbol for the Russian people, who also participate in a rash social experiment, might be seen in the folklore name Ivan, the Professor’s assistant, Ivan Arnol’ovich Bormental’, similar to Persikov’s (from Bulgakov’s *Роковые яйца*) and Berlioz’s (from *Мастер и Маргарита*) assistants names – they are all “Ivans” (though Bulgakov in drafts has attempted to change their last names, he has never touched the first name, sometimes even calling Ivan “Ivanushka” as in Russian fairytales).

The evil spirit of this experiment is further reflected in a long diabolic chain of events, starting with the link between the Professor’s meals, kitchen and hell: Daria, a cook, seems “a furious executioner”, oven door reveals “a terrible hell”, Daria’s meetings with her lover “are also compared to trysts with the devil, and she also calls her lover a demon, drawing a parallel between his sexuality and rejuvenation: “Как демон пристал...отстань... Что ты, чисто тебя тоже омолодили?”⁹, and then continued into a symbolic “birth” of homunculus at the same day as the birth of Christ.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 6. Mondry also suggests that instead of being killed (the reverse operation is referred as the act of killing by Susane Fusso, Ellendea Proffer, Юрий Петровский), Sharikov has returned to his previous canine hypostasis.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 6.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 6.

⁸ On this see also Burgin, Шарогродский, Proffer, and Соколов.

⁹ Diana L. Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early Tragedy of the Scientist – Creator: an Interpretation of ‘The Heart of a Dog’.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 22 (4) (1978), p. 498. Михаил Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита: роман. Собачье сердце: повесть*, Москва, 1995, с. 434.

The operation was performed on December twenty fourth, and the “new man” “was born” in the night of sixth to seventh January, when he looses his dog like appearance, which corresponds with Catholic and Orthodox Christmas, but the creature created by the Professor is clearly the antithesis of transfigured Christ in his appearance, behavior and his relationship to his “father” as well.

In Mathew 17:2 Christ appears in white clothes as God’s Son: “And he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine like a sun, and his raiment was white as the light”¹⁰. On the contrary, Sharikov wears “soiled, tasteless clothes, a magnificently glaring image of petty-demon: “around his neck, a man wore a poisonly blue tie with a fake ruby pain. The color of the tie was so garish that, even when he closed his weary eyes from time to time, Phillipp Phillippovich saw in the total dark, now on the wall and now on the ceiling, a flaming torch with a blue corona”¹¹. A flaming torch could also be interpreted as similar to what is written on Valtasar’s wall – and symbolize bad events to come (Daniel, 5)¹².

After the transfiguration, in Mathew 17:5 God’s voice names Christ his son:

“behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him”¹³.

Exactly the opposite occurs with Phillipp Phillippovich and Sharikov. Sharikov disrespectfully calls the Professor “Dad” (Папаша) and the Professor denies “paternity” by saying he is not his father, and he demands respect when Sharikov speaks to him¹⁴.

Sharikov’s anti-Christ nature further expressed in his utterance is “abyr” or “ryba,” which gets a special meaning – it symbolizes Christ, God’s Son, Savior, the Christ himself is called “ryba”, Christians accordingly are called “rybaki,” but saying so implies the opposite, black mess¹⁵. And when Sharikov says the word on January 6 (Epiphany), Bormental’ puts in his laboratory report “Черт знает, что такое”. The word “черт” (chert) itself (also devil) appears many times in the text, as in the episode where Sharikov chases a cat and locks himself in the bathroom, causing a flood (which is also a sign of apocalypses) and provokes Zina (the servant) to call him “damned devil”¹⁶. In this episode alone there enormous use of devil like words: “какого черта...закройте воду” (by Preobrahenskii), “да не

¹⁰ Burgin, *Slavic and East European...*, p. 502.

¹¹ Burgin’s interpretation is different from Sokolov’s association of fire with Mason rituals.

¹² Сергей Шароградский, *Собачье сердце или Чудовищная история*, “Литературное обозрение: журнал художественной литературы, критики и библиографии” 1991, № 5, с. 89.

¹³ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 502.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 502.

¹⁵ Шароградский, *Собачье сердце...*, с. 90.

¹⁶ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 502.

открывается (замок) окаянный” (by Sharikov)”, “он (Шариков) взбесился” (by Preobrazhenskii), “что ты, леший, по всей квартире гоняешь?” (by Daria), “это черт знает что такое” (by Preobrazhenskii)¹⁷.

Not only Sharikov but also Shvonder, the House Committee, (the second “Sh” demon) is responsible for the turmoil that is haunting the Professor’s house. Shvonder has yellow sparks in his eyes, and he also gives Sharikov the green book – Friedrich Engel’s *Переписка с Кауцким*, – bears a symbolism of Devil giving the pseudo bible to his followers.

The Professor produced unintentionally not the better man – “revelation of God”, but “vulgar mug of the petty demon”¹⁸. The good taste and the intelligence of the Professor are opposed to low intellect, stupidity and aggressiveness of Sharikov. Preobrazhenskii “unwittingly given the ‘Soviet dogs’ entrée into his private world of taste and intelligence. He has tragically and ironically unleashed the forces of Chaos himself”¹⁹.

Further association between evil, Sharikov and Bolshevik parody is seen in the last argument before the reverse operation. Sharikov behaved as he was possessed, when he threatened the Professor and demanded his own place. He showed him “shish”, and pointed a gun against Bormental’. “Shish” is a hair standing up on Devils head, the same hair Sharikov has: ”Жестокие, как кустами не выкарчеванном поле”²⁰. This illustration with a gun resembles the phrase of Italian thinker Nikollo Makievelli: “Все вооруженные пророки победили, а все безоружные погибли”²¹. Here Sharikov parodies Lenin and other Bolsheviks who secured their power by force.

But Preobrazhenskii himself, an intellectual totally opposed to all communist “innovations” and terror is nevertheless a very complicated and multifaceted figure and his moral is seriously questioned. In my opinion, it has to do with his dual character in the tale: he belongs to gentry and opposes violence and Bolshevik theories on one hand, but on the other, he represents a Bolshevik leader in setting off the experiment and compels to achieve his ambitious. He is also far from being an altruist, and the dog’s exclamation when he gets a sausage that was meant in the first place to attract a stray animal and his assumptions later concerning the reason that he of all dogs was taken by the Professor due to being handsome and special is just an irony.

Everybody praises Preobrazhenskii for his ability: Bormental’ calls him “creator”, his patients call him “кудесник” and “светило науки”, he is described as

¹⁷ Михаил Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита: роман. Собачье сердце: повесть*, Москва, 1995, с. 459-463.

¹⁸ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 503.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 503.

²⁰ Б. Соколов, *Энциклопедия Булгаковская*, с. 434.

²¹ Ibidem, с. 434.

“божество” during meals and yet his divinity is an illusion²². Dinners, illustrated through heaven like association, bear non-Christian symbols: plates with flowers from Paradise and the smell is associated with Semiramid gardens, which are of non-Christian religion, and when Bormantal’ asks Phillipp Phillippovich about vodka “Новоблагославенная?” (“blessed” has a Christian context), the Professor replies, “Бог с вами... это спирт”, and his didactic preaching prophetic like tone is rather inspired by an earthy pleasures then coming from his soul: “reinforced by a hearty dinner, he thundered like an ancient prophet, and his head glittered with silver”²³.

He begins the operation with God’s blessing, but his dressing is referred to as the dress of a non-Christian priest, and singing “Aida” implies a priest of a pagan religion. The act of operation is a bloody act of violence. Professor’s asking for God’s blessing implies that his transformation later to a high priest during the operation “is a form of blasphemy”, and the devil is mentioned when there are almost no chances of dog’s survival²⁴. (Furthermore, the ambiguous moral relationship between the Professor and his creation, as well as both Sharikov’s and Preobrazhenskii’s demonical nature implied by the similar structure of their names and patronymics: i. e. their patronymics both derive from the same proper names, that is Phillipp and Polygraph (Phillippovich and Polygraphovich) and both start with a “P”. Also, it is possible to hear in Professor’s name and patronymic “Phillipp (Ph)illi(ppovi)ch” – П’ich – Lenin’s patronymic, whereas Sharikov’s name and patronymic symbolize a “pseudo-saint in the new Soviet canons, which celebrate ‘The Polygraphist Day’²⁵, and altogether introduces to us one of the many nonsense of the Soviet times, where this name is only one in the group of names appearing after pseudo saints or false values, such as Oktiabrina, Brigadir, Traktorina, Stalina and others).

Consequently, the Professor’s experiment does not bring the expected positive results, though Bormental’ says that Phillipp Phillippovich made a tremendous discovery by total humanization of the dog, yet, this humanization occurred by mistake, Sharikov remained half a man, half a dog, and Preobrazhenskii “serves as an autobiographical spokesman for his (Bulgakov’s) political and social satire and as tragic, Romantic hero in the Frankenstein tradition”²⁶, which can also explain the mixture of irony and sympathy towards the Professor. Bulgakov supports the Professor’s intelligence but opposes his attempts to interfere with nature²⁷. There

²² Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 500.

²³ Ibidem, p. 498.

²⁴ Proffer, *Bulgakov ...*, p. 128.

²⁵ Соколов, *Энциклопедия...*, с. 434.

²⁶ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 454.

²⁷ Burgin, Proffer, and Соколов agree on this matter saying that Bulgakov denies any interference with nature true course.

is a deep philosophical concept of the tragedy of inability to “reeducate” genetically implied evil, powered by dark instincts in human beings, which are older than mind, beyond the surface of tale. Through grotesque Bulgakov imposes the question of power of dark forces in one’s life²⁸.

Further, Preobrazhenskii, Dr. Moreau and Persikov can be connected as heroes of the same type: demonic type, where Dr. Moreau and Professor Preobrazhenskii are doing the same things: daring scientific experiments, fruits of the arrogance of the scientist, a challenge to nature²⁹.

But while the demonical aura of Professor’s experiment and the Professor himself is obvious it nevertheless does not make it any less a political allegory. In fact, the opposite, it only enriches its strengths and clears the message. I believe that for Bulgakov, who was a religious man and for whom the Bolshevik Revolution squashed and trashed his entire world and everything he believed in – and among those things of course the greatest sin – the denial of God, was natural to associate such power with Evil. Who, if not the devil himself, would deny God, ruin churches and proclaim a new, pseudo religion – Communism? Thus Bulgakov’s moral and religious beliefs are an integral part of his political message, rather than a separate autonomous idea.

It seems to be true what Burgin says about the reference to Faust – that Bulgakov by this reference integrates the “novel’s explicit political significance (failure of revolutionary science – failure of revolutionary politics)”, with its underlying moral theme³⁰. However, her statement that “a purely scientific, yet unintentional act of creation portends the moral failure of the creative scientist”³¹ seems to be the moral failure of communist ideology and ideologists at once rather than individual failure. Here the individual scientist stands for the collective image of all those leading into the “brighter future”, just like Sharikov stands for the proletariat and the collective “material” for those “engineers”.

Thus more than saying that “its political message notwithstanding, it is a tale about creative personality, whose essentially noble, yet arrogant creative effort ends if not in tragedy, then at least in moral ambiguity..., and ...the fact that the Professor is Bulgakov’s most autobiographical hero suggests, moreover, that the tragic fate of the scientist... parallels the similar fate of the creative artist in Soviet society”³². I would go beyond posing the personal tragedy of the individual (or even art-

²⁸ Василий Новиков, *Михаил Булгаков – художник*, Москва, 1996, с. 57-58.

²⁹ Юрий Петровский, *Повесть М. Булгакова ‘Собачье сердце’ и традиции русской литературы*, ”Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета”, Серия 2: история, языковедение, литературоведение 1994, № 2 (9), с. 67. Unlike Burgin, Proffer and Петровский totally deny resemblance between Preobrazhenskii and Bulgakov.

³⁰ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 504.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 504.

³² Ibidem, p. 504.

ists of Soviet society for that matter) at the center of the tale. The political message is too open and sharp and the associations with the Russian events are too striking to claim that personal tragedy is at the center of the plot. Rather, the tragedy of all Mother Russia is central here, and this “personal tragedy” is an allegory not only of Soviet artists but also of the tragedy of all people who dare think different, who dare to disagree. Of course, the individuals are first in line, and it is true that “in his mini-operation the Professor has done the same thing that was happening in the country on the whole³³. I would also not put the diabolical nature of Preobrazhenskii as a factor for the failure of the experiment, as such statements by Burgin and Mondry do: “in the allegorical reading of the text “дно” has taken the place of “верх”, hell or earth, has replaced the awaited heavenly state, because the dog ended up in the wrong hands, of the pseudo-creator”³⁴ or “clearly worthy of the name ‘Transformer’, the Professor demonstrates his Shamanist powers in his scientific rejuvenations. As the more spiritual “Transfigurer”, however, he fails to transcend the moral limitations of his material. He himself is unable to breathe soul into Sharik’s animal body; rather he seems, like a vampire, to have drained his blood”³⁵. First of all, the dog already had a soul and a moral, he was not just an unanimated dummy, but unfortunately the only thing from dog’s soul that “inherited” Sharikov was the cat’s phobia. Moreover, he had a good heart, changed by genes of Chugunkin. No matter who would perform this operation, the outcome would be the same – failure, because it is impossible to turn a proletarian into a “ruler of the state”, and there is also no need for artificial creation of genius. Also, there is no direct indication in the text that the Professor has influenced the operation process by his personality, whereas there are very open descriptions of Chugunkin’s medical history that did and very open statements against Soviet rule. The unfortunate outcome is due to a pure scientific mistake, and Preobrazhenskii is guilty for initiating the experiment and thus ultimately for its outcome, but had he had an angelic nature it wouldn’t change it, rather, he wouldn’t have set off the testing and then this story wouldn’t carry the same message. For the demonic nature of the Professor to influence the phenomenon, he had to possess a true magic power, which he doesn’t nevertheless the fantastical aura of the operation. Here demonical symbolizes rather than real demonic power figurative expression that stands for evil of the social events. Just like Preobrazhenskii is unable to create real magic he is not capable of transferring his diabolical traits upon his “descendant”, especially because Sharikov’s ancestor was evil enough by himself before the operation. The demonical presence is not the reason for fiasco; it is a conclusion of it. The presence of evil predicts evil ahead.

³³ Петровский, *Повесть...* с. 67. This view is generally shared by Proffer, Соколов, and LeBlanc.

³⁴ Mondry, “Beyond ...”, p. 7.

³⁵ Burgin, “Bulgakov’s Early...”, p. 502.

And more so, the more we want to find in Preobrazhenskii other than just a connotation to Bolshevik's leader Lenin, associating him with Bulgakov, Soviet artists or even the Devil, Preobrazhenskii's false divine like nature begs even further the connotation to Lenin, taking into consideration that Lenin himself was turned literally to a new pagan God, embalmed like an Egyptian pharaoh mummy and put away in the Mausoleum (like Egyptian pharaohs lying in their pyramids), where he still is to this day – and we feel the frightening shadow of Egypt's "Sacred banks of Niles" is present in the tale.

Having in mind that Lenin died on January 21, 1924, the similarity even grows stronger. Lenin also was treated as a new Messiah, as a Savior, he really was a Christ like figure, the new God instead of the "old" one and his ideology practically became the new religion.

The political and moral messages altogether depend on the outcome of the operation, and the Professor realizes his mistake of taking proletariat to be the "material" of his experiment. He realizes that there is no need to force and create another Spinoza – because nature will do it itself, so it seems that he has learned his message. Yet, he continues to think about other experiments the results of which are not known to us, so the future of these experiments is questioned, but I would disagree with Burgin that this fact makes political parable any less either:

That the significance of the Professor's experiment transcends a narrow political explanation is strongly suggested by novel's conclusion. If...Professor ceased experimentation... the point of this political parable would have been made. Yet, for the Professor, the ending is not a resolution, but rather a frighteningly ambiguous continuation. The Professor does not cease experimenting. The last lines of the novel focus on the 'stubborn, persistent, important man,' driven to continue his search for a scientific method of 'manufacturing Spinozas'³⁶.

Yes, Preobrazhenskii does not seize experiments – but even this does not diminish the allegorical reading. On the contrary, it only suggests that unfortunately the process has not been stopped, the Revolution has not been concluded, and terrible things are still ahead. The battle between good and evil continues –that is the battle between Soviet Power and Mother Nature – that is what the open ending stands for. I think that one very important point to be considered here is that Preobrazhenskii is playing a dual, ambiguous role, as noticed before. He stands both for Bulgakov and for the intelligentsia (in which Bulgakov saw the best people)³⁷ and for the allegory of the Bolshevik leader, no matter how one wants to find other motifs beyond

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 495.

³⁷ In the letter to the Soviet government dated March 28, 1930, Bulgakov claims to be the great supporter of Evolution – "сторонник Великой Эволюции". In the same letter Bulgakov also writes that he still sees in Intelligentsia the best people.

political parable. And the end is not the exception- while the Professor – Bulgakov – Intelligent has realized his mistake and “corrected” it. His twin fellow Evil genius is continuing his work³⁸. And finally, had the black magic or diabolic nature of Professor influenced Sharikov’s emergence, then he would have rather been truer of a demon as well, Voland-like figure. But his “possession” is rather symbolical then practical, just as the Professor’s divinity does not come to reality and his supernatural ability is only a matter of metaphor which does not come into a reality. This happens also because in *Соба́чье се́рдце* interestingly the figurative power of language is serving rather the message then the fantastical atmosphere of the tale.

In other words, the words in the tale remain just what they are – metaphors and do not come to realize themselves, and psychological changes are purely emotional and factual. Here we don’t see that:

The supernatural begins the moment we shift from words to things these words are suppose to designate. The metamorphoses...constitute a transgression of the separation of matter and mind as it is generally conceived...the transition between mind to matter has become possible³⁹.

That the focus of the tale is the political parable is enhanced and concluded by the music, literature, nutrition, and labor aspects. Alimentation, gustation and digestion occupy enormous space in the tale and alike have all a double meaning: together with physical consumption of food it means also the spiritual and cultural consumption of different values:

The author...uses food imagery and eating metaphors as a way to express some of the gray misgivings he harbored about the deleterious effects that the Bolshevik Revolution and the concomitant victory of the proletariat were having upon the level of culture in Soviet Russia... *Sobach’ e serdtse* engages the reader in a discourse that is at once gastronomical and culinary as well as political and psychological⁴⁰.

³⁸ The duality in the novel can be found also in other levels of the plot. The tale itself is invisibly divided into two parts: first part before the transfiguration and second part after (the same division happens in *Мастер и Маргарита*: the theme of Jesus is developed in parallel to a theme of Devil). Each major character has its antithesis: friendly and smart Sharik is opposed to aggressive and mean Sharikov, and he has an accomplice – Shvonder, just as Bormenal’ is Professor’s assistant. But even more, each character has also some traits of its antithesis: Sharik and Sharikov both grew up on streets, and Sharikov “inherited” cats phobia from Sharik, and Shvonder and Bormental’ both “defend” their colleagues and are determined to achieve their goal- Shvonder to take the apartment and Bormental’ to get rid of Sharikov at any means and cost.

³⁹ Susanne Fusso, “Failures of Transformation in ‘Sobach’ e serdtse’.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33(3) (1989), p. 387.

⁴⁰ Ronald LeBlanc, “Feeding a Poor Dog a Bone: the Quest for Nourishment in Bulgakov’s *Sobach’ e serdtse*”. *The Russian Review* 52 (1993), p. 59.

This issue of food intake as designation of the ideas lying beyond it is not unique to Bulgakov:

Following in the rich satiric tradition established by such great writers as Moliere, Gogol' and Chekhov, Bulgakov tends throughout his work to exploit the comic possibilities of food motifs, very often humorously contrasting physical with spiritual ingestion: that is, he frequently treats eating both as mimesis and as metaphor⁴¹.

In *Собачьё сердце* we see that food speaks more against the whole unjust system that creates hunger and misery among its inhabitants than against those individuals who worry about their full stomachs. The narration from the dog's perspective and his search for shelter and food both suggest that right from the beginning. The dog is forced to search for leftovers of food in order to survive and from the dog's perspective it is best to show severe malnutrition physical and later cultural:

...like many a human member of a lower social class, people who have become severely disenfranchised and alienated under the economic systems of War Communism and now N.E.P. capitalism, Sharik exists on the very margins of the society, forced to live in a harsh and cruel world, not of his choosing, where sheer physical survival predominates over all other instinctual urges, physiological desires, and spiritual aspirations⁴².

Thus Sharik becomes a main gustatory and observer of dinners in the Professor's home. Sharik living at the very lower level of the contemporary society represents millions of people who need food to survive, and it is their main task- to find food. Tsarist Russia suffered many "diseases", among them poverty and the lack of means to survive for many of its members, but War Communism, forcing peasants to give up all their provision and thus leaving thousands no other alternative than to starve, and the short relieving NEP period before Josef Stalin's collectivization, were hardly better option.

Nutrition is an ideological means of criticizing social inequality, and Sharik's struggle for life is conveyed through eating metaphors. The eating is also represented in two different ways – eating for survival and eating for pleasure, like those who eat at the restaurant at Neglinnyi Alley, and the poor typist Vasnetsova represents those who cannot eat at those fancy places and she eats at the usual Soviet cafeteria, getting stomach cramps. The search for a decent meal brings her together with the obnoxious Sharikov, because she cannot take Soviet food anymore. Food, its kind and where it is eaten serve as the indicator of socioeconomic scale of the

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 59.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 60.

individual and his belonging to a certain class. And, like Vasnetsova, Preobrazhenskii is also often perceived through gastronomical terms.

When Sharikov sees Preobrazhenskii for the first time, he immediately realizes that this good-looking man is not a proletarian, and Sharik views the Professor mainly through cooking terminology. Sharik, hungry as usual and also sick, wants the sausage that is no good for a wealthy gentleman. Dog's miserable condition also connected to the proletarian cook, who spilled hot water over him. Sharik compares proletarian cook to gentry cook Vlas, who treated stray dogs kindly and always gave them bones with meat chunks on them. For Sharik, the good alimentation can be provided by either Vlas or Phillipp Phillippovich, the gentry class, but not by proletarian cooks or Soviet cafeterias. The same could be true for all workers: the proletarians cannot feed them properly, both physically and mentally. Sharik also become a main gustatory and observer of dinners in the Professor's home. Sharik trades his illusionary freedom of being hungry free dog for the comfort and safety of Professor's apartment, ready to wear chain and collar, because the freedom does not satisfy by itself. Bolshevik's promises of freedom are just fiction, like the ruin – “дым, мираж, фикция” – ⁴³, because a deprived person depends on everybody and cannot truly be liberated.

Hunger and disease cause Sharik to follow the Professor to be saved, hunger dulls his other instincts and the desire to eat takes over. Only when he goes through a mental transformation and gets used to his secured position and comfort Sharik is soon free to progress to more civilized needs, more elevated desires, and more sophisticated taste. Only after satisfying his flesh Sharik is able to get beyond physical satisfaction. The same is true for workers and peasants, only after satisfying physical needs can they heighten their morality, and since Bolsheviks are unable to satisfy their flesh, the mind will remain poor. It is very hard to last for spiritual when the stomach is empty: Bulgakov makes this bodily function in his text serve as a trope for intellectual, moral and cultural ingestion:

When *Sobach'e serdtse* is read as a political allegory, the alimentary imperative elaborated in the opening section of the novella tells us metaphorically that the Soviet regime which came to power with the revolution has been unable to provide sufficient nourishment, either physical or spiritual, for the starving masses in Russia. Bulgakov's political message here reads that Lenin and his Bolshevik cohorts have reneged on the promise they made that first brought them to power in 1917: that is, to bring food to the populace. (Instead, they robbed food off the populace.) What the people of Russia need is a moral, spiritual and cultural leadership that, in addition to providing them literally with their daily bread, is capable of feeding them spiritual food as well, thus nurturing and preserving within them lasting cultural values⁴⁴.

⁴³ Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита...*, с. 428.

⁴⁴ LeBlanc, "Feeding ...", p. 65.

Food consumed in a special manner and at the right time also signifies order and civility, as opposed to Bolshevik chaos and bad manners. While Sharik with admiration observed the Professor's meals that irritates Sharikov who doesn't understand this parade. Shvonder is also irritated by the Professor's dining room, saying that not even Isidora Duncan has a dining room, suggesting that Preobrazhenskii should rather eat in his bedroom. A dining room is a symbol of good taste, proper manners, and overall cultural development, as opposed to public cafeterias. The Professor stands up against politics blended with alimentation, because Marxist ideology is an enemy of the digestion process, and those who do so have a bad appetite and overall depression, similar to the overall damage it brought to Russia.

The class war in *Собачье сердце*, the competition for dominance between high and low culture in Soviet Russia of the 1920s, occurs in the domain of music. The difference between choral singing and opera singing is introduced when the Professor warns that if Shvonder continues his singing, the house will be completely destroyed. The class struggle intensifies as all attempts of Doctor Bormental' and Professor Preobrazhenskii to civilize Sharikov turn out to be unsuccessful. Professor's attempt to teach Sharikov basic dining manners are a complete failure. Terrible eating manners match completely Sharikov's cultural level. The different cultural values are also evident in reading. Sharikov becomes a victim of the polygraph fiction, books with Marxist studies, the product of Soviet polygraph fabrication which he obtained from House Committee Head Shvonder, and the only "truth" he took from there was to confiscate everything and to share, which urges Preobrazhenskii to address his answer not only to Sharikov but to all uneducated proletarians about their low level of development and of education⁴⁵. Phillipp Phillippovich is eager to give Sharikov Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). This choice is significant in the sense of Preobrazhenskii's attempt to turn Sharikov into more sophisticated human.

And there is a striking similarity between Preobrazhenskii as a man of culture and Sharikov and other proletarians together with Shvonder as primitive beasts, and thus "Bulgakov advances a discourse that encourages the readers of *Sobach'e serdtse* to share in ... the imperialist desire for total mastery of what is foreign and strange by means of complete appropriation and incorporation"⁴⁶.

Bulgakov reveals who is really threatening whom – the imperialists predators are not the threat, but the proletariat, who crush everything on their way: "The battle over the book... may be seen to follow a well established tradition of viewing literature, and especially the knowledge it imparts, as food for the reader's mind"⁴⁷.

Preobrazhenskii also unambiguously warns against talking about Bolshevism and reading Soviet newspapers before dinners, because that cause bad digestion,

⁴⁵ See Соколов, *Энциклопедия...*, с. 434.

⁴⁶ LeBlanc, "Feeding", p. 75.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 75.

poor appetite and depression, and those who read “Pravda” – the main newspaper of Bolshevik party, lost weight.

In the 1920s a wide discussion was open around the essentials of proletarian culture. Some argued that this culture exists and is superior to all other cultures because it belongs to progressive (“ascending”) class. However, Lev Trotskii, Lenin’s close inmate, proclaimed that this culture still does not exist and probably won’t be because proletariat will fast emerge into another class. Lenin’s opinion also was that this culture is yet to emerge from the bourgeois culture.

But the last two theories completely contradict each other, because by definition, a proletarian is someone who has nothing, whereas culture is presumed to have various cultures acquired through time as a result of spiritual and physical development, so either a proletarian cannot have culture, or, having obtained one, he will no longer be a proletarian.

And having in mind this poor picture it will be not difficult to understand that it is impossible to demand a cultural or physical satisfaction from the bankrupt ideology of Bolshevik party. Cultural and moral malnutrition is followed by physical, which the Bolshevik party.

All this disorder is uncovering the tragedy of the situation in which Russia found itself in after the revolution. What is even worse is that this new system, whose danger was underestimated, is finding its way to the minds of the millions of people, thriving fear for some, and impunity for others.

Due to moral issues raised, Bulgakov’s story also remains remarkably up-to-date. The ethic failure – meanness, personal ambitious, lust for power and betrayals, experiments with nature as well as social system failure – dwelling problems, strive for living, cruel treatment of animals and culture wars, which have been transcending the limits of time for centuries all found their place in *Собачье сердце*. But above all, the tale is a concentrated attack on the Russian Revolution: the intelligentsia is implicated, the political message is spelled out (and almost underlined) by Preobrazhenskii; chaos and the terror of purge politics are accurately predicted. Shvonder denounces the Professor’s attitude towards the proletariat to higher echelons of power and Sharikov also carefully listens to every threat that the Professor makes and immediately informs Shvonder, similar to what would happen later, in the 30s, when this practice would turn into a suffocating system. As the true servant of the new system, depending on the circumstances Sharikov turns against his former ally when the latter no longer serves his needs, as when confronting Shvonder about his military duties (similarly to how the old party members were betrayed and eliminated by the new layer of ideological puppets during the purges). Sharikov does not really care about the socialists’ ideas or about serving the state, because he is a “приспособленец” and concerned only about his own interest.

And the tale is primarily a political allegory not only because it is much more sharp, overt and even prophetic in its political message than Bulgakov’s previous

work *Роковые яйца*, and thus striking with its similarity between the Professor's operation and social changes, but also because the experiment and then later its "outcome" – foul-mouthed, over-familiar, insolent and mean drunk thief Sharikov completely changing the flow of events of the story, bringing destruction to himself and people around him, similar to how Russian Revolution changed and wrecked the existing order⁴⁸.

Sharikov's appearance is the main axis on which are strung forthcoming problems. It is after his appearance the Professor's house becomes not only the main scene of evil events but eventually its main victim and we hear the dirty slang of the proletariat, who was not heard in the Professor's house before. It is precisely after that we can fully appreciate the true nature of the Professor (who twice commits a violent operation), his assistant (who is ready to turn to murder and kill Sharikov), Shvonder and his "team" (hardly educated, but ready to take over what does not belong to them, feeling their power and impunity), and eventually, the whole new system.

Sharik, and later Sharikov serves a nucleus that uncovers not only the image of the praised working class but also the nature of different kinds of people surrounding him. First, through the treatment of Sharik by his surrounding we can fully appreciate the working proletariat (cooks, door keepers and yard-keepers) and their difference from gentry workers. Then, through Sharikov we perceive the absurd Soviet realities: mandatory registration, housing confiscation, the importance of descent above all.

Собачье сердце is a complex allegory that embraces all levels of the plot – political, cultural, social, and also linguistic. It will remain a brilliant satire, allegory, fantasy, and a moral code according to which each and every one can learn the nature of "шариковщина" and know of its danger.

STRESZCZENIE

Motywy duchowe, kulturowe oraz polityczne w opowiadaniu Michaiła Bułhakowa „Psie serce”

W połowie lat dwudziestych Michaił Bułhakow napisał dwa utwory fantastyczno-naukowe – *Fatalne jaja* (*Роковые яйца*) oraz *Psie serce* (*Собачье сердце*). Ten ostatni został skonfiskowany podczas rewizji w mieszkaniu autora. Oficjalnej publikacji doczekał się dopiero po 62 latach i to nie w wydaniu książkowym, tylko w miesięczniku literackim „Znamia” w 1987 roku. W tym utworze znalazły odzwierciedlenie dwa główne nurty problemowe, dominujące w całej późniejszej twórczości Bułhakowa: satyra społeczno-politycz-

⁴⁸ See Peter Doyle, "Bulgakov's Satirical View of Revolution in *Rokovye iaitsa* and *Sobach'e serdtse*". *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 20 (4) (1978), p. 471.

na, wyrażana najczęściej w formie fantastycznej groteski, oraz fascynujący pisarza temat rewolucji i kontrewolucji. Tym problemom w *Psim sercu* poświęcony jest niniejszy artykuł. Bohaterem opowiadania jest profesor Preobrażeński, który przeszczepia psu Szarikowi ludzką przysadkę mózgową. Zwierzę zmienia się w człowieka i nabiera samych najgorszych ludzkich cech. W *Psim sercu* Bułhakow w sposób zawołowany po raz pierwszy i po raz ostatni podejmuje otwartą krytykę rewolucji proletariackiej, samego Lenina oraz nowego systemu. Nowy obywatel radziecki, którego przedstawicielem jest Poligraf Poligrafowicz Szarikow, reprezentuje ciemną stronę rewolucji proletariackiej bolszewickiego reżymu. *Psie serce* Bułhakowa jest skomplikowaną alegorią obejmującą wiele aspektów. W tym utworze autor nie tylko krytykuje radziecką rzeczywistość połowy lat dwudziestych, lecz obok aspektów czysto politycznych wprowadza aspekty duchowo-e. religijne, kulturowe, obyczajowe, a nawet językowe.