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Susanne Fusso
Wesleyan University, sfusso@wesleyan.edu

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FAILURES OF TRANSFORMATION IN *SOBAČ'E SERDCE**

Susanne Fusso, Wesleyan University

> "The men across the street have been talking about a change in the makeup of the Soviet man," academician Valery Pivovarov said, nodding toward the Kremlin towers . . . .
>
> Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has called for a transformation of the Soviet man as part of his campaign to cut back on waste, corruption and inefficiency to improve the economy.
>
> New Haven *Register*, 6 July 1986

> Now today, when the artist wants to deal with a living form and with a living, not a dead word, in wishing to give it a face he has broken and corrupted it. . . New living words are created.
>
> Viktor Šklovskij, "Voskrešenie slova," 1914

> "Tell me, my dear Faggot, . . . do you find the people of Moscow much changed?"
>
> "I do, messire." . . .
>
> "You are right. The Muscovites have changed considerably . . . outwardly, I mean . . ."
>
> "The much more important question is: have the Muscovites changed inwardly?"
>
> *Master i Margarita*, 1928–40

Bulgakov's *Sobač'e serdce* is the tale of a transformation: a meddling professor turns a perfectly nice dog into an obnoxious man. As recently as 1984, in Ellendea Proffer's biography of Bulgakov, the story has been read as an allegory of the revolutionary transformation of Russian society, a cautionary tale about the dangers of tampering with nature (Proffer, 123–33). Other readers have been understandably dissatisfied with the schematicism of an interpretation that draws an equation between plot events and political events and seems to deny the richness and complexity so characteristic of Bulgakov.[1] Yet, it is impossible to deny the allegorical aura of this fable-like work. If *Sobač'e serdce* is in fact an allegory, it is by no means a simple or naive one. Bulgakov's allegory is both broader and deeper than the political reading in the tradition of *Animal Farm* implies. It

has as its frame of reference not only the Marxist revolution but the cult of the new in all its forms: technological, commercial, linguistic, and aesthetic. The allegory is expressed not just in plot and theme, but in every level of the text. In other words, it is a matter not just of *fabula* but of *sjužet* in Tynjanov's sense, permeating style, lexicon, and narrative construction. The allegorical reading can be refined and deepened through a closer look at the process of transformation in *Sobač'e serdce* not just on the level of social and political themes, which lie relatively close to the surface and have been rather thoroughly elucidated, but on the level of language, where Bulgakov's critique of radical transformation finds perhaps its deepest expression. For of all Bulgakov's works *Sobač'e serdce* is the most skeptical about the possibility of instant, irreversible metamorphosis through the magical power of language.

In his study of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov characterizes metamorphosis as a type of transcendence:

> We say readily enough that someone monkeys around, or that he fights like a lion, like an eagle, *etc.* The supernatural begins the moment we shift from words to the things these words are supposed to designate. The metamorphoses . . . constitute a transgression of the separation of matter and mind as it is generally conceived . . . . the transition from mind to matter has become possible. (113–114)

This formulation reminds us of the beauty, swiftness, and irreversibility of transformation in that encyclopedia of change, Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* In Ovid's work human desire or guilt combines with divine power to effect miraculous and satisfyingly complete transformation. In *Sobač'e serdce*, transformations are human, devoid of theophany, and thus flawed, incomplete, and reversible—mind fails to control or transcend matter. On the highest level of generality, the stubbornly materialistic universe of this work is related to Bulgakov's attitude toward the recent social transformation of Russia, particularly in response to the myth of that transformation propounded by Vladimir Majakovskij.

Sobač'e serdce, written in early 1925 and not published in the Soviet Union until 1987, is set in the Moscow of the immediate past, December, 1924, to January, 1925, at the height of the NÈP period. A mutt named Šarik, who helps narrate the first three chapters, is lured home by the arch-bourgeois reactionary, Professor Filipp Filippovič Preobraženskij. Preobraženskij's scientific interest is in eugenics, the improvement of the human race, but he makes his living and protects his seven-room apartment from consolidation by performing rejuvenation operations on NÈP-men and government officials.[2] After a period of recuperation and fattening up, during which Šarik observes the goings-on in the *poxabnaja kvartirka*, he himself becomes the subject of an experiment. Preobraženskij practices his surgical techniques by transplanting the pituitary gland and testes of a recently

deceased criminal, Klim Čugunkin, into the dog. Contrary to the expected outcome—Šarik's death—the dog survives, gradually takes on human shape and the ability to speak, and christens himself Poligraf Poligrafovič Šarikov. Šarikov resists the educational efforts of both Preobraženskij's assistant Bormental', who attempts to drum the rules of bourgeois etiquette into the wretch's head, and the house manager Švonder, who gives him the *Correspondence of Engels and Kautsky* to read and gets him a job purging the city of stray cats. Šarikov's disruptive escapades take on a serious character when he writes a denunciation of Preobraženskij, and the exasperated professor and his assistant perform another operation, reversing the effects of the original one. The story ends with Šarik, scarred but ignorant of his interlude as a man, watching Preobraženskij continue his researches.

Šarik is born *u Preobraženskoj zastavy*;[3] Klim dies there. The entire story proceeds under the sign of *preobraženie*, transfiguration. On the level of style, the work is saturated with similes, metaphors, and metonymies, which have the momentary effect of transforming one thing into another. In narrative fiction, figurative expressions carry more weight than they do in everyday language because of the significance each detail acquires in the process of interpretation. Thus the figures of speech in *Sobač'e serdce*, as several critics have noted, transform the emotional tone of certain key scenes. The kitchen where Preobraženskij's cook, Dar'ja Petrovna, presides is a hell where she toils in *večnaja ognennaja muka*, and where she flays the bodies of defenseless grouse *kak jarostnyj palač* (60). The fire of her kitchen is transferred to her amorous exploits when she entertains her fireman lover. *Kak demon pristal*, she murmurs to him. *Do čego vy ognennaja!* he answers (61). The same change in coloration is given to the scene of the operation on Šarik, as an ominous tone begins to pervade the comic work. For example, Preobraženskij is referred to as *žrec*, pagan priest. This epithet, when combined with Preobraženskij's love for *Aida*, reminds us that the major function of the priest in that opera is to offer up the soprano and the tenor as human sacrifices (see Proffer, 127–28). He is also compared here to a *vdoxnovennyj razbojnik* (72) and a *sytyj vampir* (73).

Despite the effect of temporary transformation, these similes stay on this side of Todorov's limit between mind and matter. Dar'ja Petrovna remains a very earthly and innocuous servant despite her figurative ties with hell; Preobraženskij, variously referred to as *božestvo*, *francuzskij rycar'*, and Faust, remains a recognizably human and unheroic figure. The failure of figurative language to realize itself in *Sobač'e serdce* becomes more obvious when compared with the status of figurative language in *Master i Margarita*. Here there is a constant play with realization of commonplace metaphor. The inhabitants of Apartment No. 50 are said to have "mysteriously disappeared," when in fact they have been arrested, but when the Devil comes to town, people begin to vanish instantaneously and by supernatural means.

In an homage to Gogol', a bureaucrat's request, *čerti b menja vzjali*, is immediately granted, and his empty suit is left to toil away behind his desk. And when an audience expresses its dissatisfaction by calling for the M. C.'s head to be torn off, their metaphor is instantly realized by the demonic cat Begemot (*Master i Margarita*, 71–73, 186, 120–21). No such magical realizations of the figurative occur in *Sobač'e serdce*.[4]

Characters are transformed not only through figurative language but by the physiological changes accompanying emotional stress. Preobraženskij is particularly prone to turn an apoplectic red or a ghostly white under the travails caused by Šarikov and Švonder. The expression *on menjalsja v lice* marks the crisis of several scenes. Such changes in appearance are concentrated in the scenes of the two operations on Šarik. In the first, Preobraženskij's face *stalo strašnym* (71); Bormental''s becomes *mjasistyj i raznocvetnyj* (71). Even the professor's fingers are transformed: *svoimi korotkimi pal'cami, stavšimi točno čudom tonkimi i gibkimi* (73). In the later scene of the subduing and retransformation of the odious Šarikov, Bormental' is seen by the servants *s ne svoim licom* (150), and a bit later with *zelenoe lico* (151–52). Preobraženskij, too *v tot večer sam na sebja ne byl poxož* (152). Preobraženskij also undergoes a more protracted change in appearance. Under the strain of dealing with Šarikov, he begins to look older and more haggard. When a former patient comes to warn him of Šarikov's denunciation, he notices *čto professor sgorbilsja i daže kak budto posedel za poslednee vremja* (149). But this change is seen to have been reversed along with the change of Šarikov back into Šarik: *vse mogli ubedit'sja srazu, čto Filipp Filippovič očen' popravilsja v poslednjuju nedelju* (153).

All these changes are temporary and psychologically motivated. Bulgakov dealt with changes in appearance very differently in his 1924 story *D'javoliada*. Here the demonic Kal'soner drives his subordinate Korotkov mad by his rapid, supernatural transformations. He goes from being clean-shaven to having a long Assyrian beard and back again, his voice varies from the clang of a copper pan to a sweet falsetto, and he ultimately becomes a black cat and then a white cock that is swallowed up by the earth only to reappear in Kal'soner's original form (breathing fire this time) to preside over Korotkov's self-destruction. No explanation is offered; the story is so free with the mind-matter limit as to lose all narrative coherence. By contrast, the changes in appearance in *Sobač'e serdce* are well within the bounds of conventional realistic description. It is only in the context of the story's other types of transformation that they become at all remarkable.

An important verbal transformation is laid bare in Šarik's opening "narration."[5] The convention of the satirical canine observer is a very old one, going back at least to Lucian (see Ziolkowski). But Bulgakov introduces a curious twist. This dog's seemingly first-person narrative is contaminated by the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator. In Mirra Ginsburg's

English translation (1–10) Šarik's narration is printed in italics to set it off from the omniscient narrator's voice, but in the Russian the only signal is provided by the narrator's past-tense verb forms, which interrupt Šarik's present tense. Even Šarik's first-person narration, however, is invaded by bits of information that could be known only to the omniscient narrator, thus disturbing the illusion that the dog is speaking. Šarik lets fall certain facts that he could not possibly know at this point, such as Preobraženskij's name and patronymic (16) and the fact that he is *veličina mirovogo značenija, blagodarja mužskim polovym železam* (17).[6] When Šarik becomes a man, his first utterances are disconnected obscenities and fragments of conversations. Bormental' concludes: *Rugan' èta metodičeskaja, bespreryvnaja i, po-vidimomu, soveršenno bessmyslennaja . . .. kak budto èto suščestvo gde-to ran'še slyšala brannye slova, avtomatičeski podsoznatel'no zaneslo ix v svoj mozg i teper' izrygaet ix pačkami* (84). But this contradicts our initial impression of Šarik's command of language—in his opening narration he is coherent, shrewd, and the master of a literary style. The inevitable conclusion is that the opening narration is actually in one voice, but a voice that shifts between an objective presentation and an *imitation* of a dog's-eye view—a kind of ventriloquism. Bulgakov lays bare the convention of representing a character's inner life. The narrator indeed transforms himself into a dog, but it is an imperfect transformation. Gaps and incongruities are left in order to signal that this transformation too remains on the level of figurative language. This is not a dog's narration but a dog-like narration.

When we move to the level of plot, we find that transformation remains the dominant motif. Again, however, transcendence of the mind-matter limit fails to be achieved; verbal transformation remains verbal, and physical change is brought about by physical means. Rejuvenation is evoked in figurative language twice. Šarik, following the sausage held out to him by Preobraženskij, sees a poster with the words: *Vozmožno li omoloženie?* He answers: *Natural'no, vozmožno. Zapax omolodil menja . . .* (16). Similarly, Dar'ja Petrovna asks her ardent lover: *Čto ty, čisto tebja tože omolodili?* (61). One of Preobraženskij's patients calls him *mag i čarodej* (30), but his rejuvenation operations are not a magical feat but a technical one, and it is clear that the technique is still imperfect and in need of improvement. The same patient has green hair, as a result of using a dye made by the government cosmetics industry in an attempt to make his appearance match his rejuvenated sexual appetite. When he suggests that a method of rejuvenating hair might be Preobraženskij's next project, the latter replies: *Ne srazu, ne srazu, moj dorogoj* (32). This imperfect rejuvenation process can be compared with the magical action of Azazello's cream in *Master i Margarita.* The cream instantaneously takes ten years off Margarita's age—both her vitality and her youthful looks are restored in seconds.

The transformation of Šarik into Šarikov is also connected with figurative language. It evokes the whole complex of Russian expressions built on the word *sobaka*: *sobač'e sčast'e* (Bulgakov's original title for the work), *sobač'ja žizn'*, *sobake sobač'ja smert'*, and a remarkable saying attested by Dal': *Ne bej sobaki, i ona byla čelovekom* (Dal''s note: *obraščena v psa za prožorlivost'*). The pejorative connotations of these expressions, though, are more apposite to Klim the man than to Šarik the dog. The obnoxiousness of Šarikov is due not to his canine aspects but to the human legacy of Klim. If he has a *sobač'e serdce*, it is not in the literal sense of a heart actually belonging to a dog. Šarikov has Klim's human heart, which can be called *sobač'e serdce* only in the pejorative figurative sense.

Despite the metaphorical aura and proverbial documentation of the dog-into-man transformation, the transformation of Šarik, like the rejuvenation operations, is a matter of technical skill, not an instantaneous magical feat brought about by language. Bulgakov devotes an entire harrowing chapter to a description of the operation, informed by his own practical experience as a doctor. He emphasizes the intense physicality of surgery, the pressure to accomplish difficult maneuvers quickly, racing against the perishability of the body. He spares no detail of spurting blood or oozing tissue. The action of opening Šarik's cranium is described as a feat of craftsmanship: [*Preobraženskij*] *načal pilit', kak vypilivajut damskij rukodel'nyj jaščik* (71). Even the seemingly magical change in Šarik's shape after the operation, described in Dr. Bormental''s notebook, is eventually shown to be in accordance with physical laws, as defined within the story. Preobraženskij's discovery that the pituitary gland determines the shape (*oblik*) of the organism is the rational explanation for what otherwise would seem to be a supernatural occurrence.[7] The transformation of Šarik lacks magical ease and speed, but it also lacks magical completeness. Šarikov is not a new being, an educable *tabula rasa*, as Bormental' thinks. Preobraženskij recognizes that he cannot be educated beyond the limits of Klim Čugunkin. He refines Bormental''s definition of their discovery: *Odnim slovom, gipofiz—zakrytaja kamera, opredeljajuščaja čelovečeskoe dannoe lico. Dannoe! . . . a ne obščečelovečeskoe* (134). Thus this new creature has a past—the past of Klim Čugunkin, petty crook and alcoholic.

Early in the story, when Preobraženskij triumphs over the house committee that seeks to consolidate his apartment, Šarik thinks: *Čto on, slovo, čto li, takoe znaet?* (43). In fact it is not the power of language but the power of Preobraženskij's influence over his highly-placed patient that has done the trick. In general, language does not have the magical efficacy in *Sobač'e serdce* that it does in other Bulgakov works, notably *Master i Margarita*. Here we find, as in *Master i Margarita*, the maxim that a person cannot exist without a document.[8] In *Master i Margarita*, the existence of Aloizij

Mogaryč is obliterated and denied when his name disappears from the landlord's rentbook (*Nikakogo Mogaryča ne bylo*, 286), and the Master is restored from nonentity (*Ja teper' nikto*, 281) to full-fledged existence when he retrieves his papers. But in the epilogue of *Sobač'e serdce*, the document attesting to the existence of Poligraf Poligrafovič Šarikov is powerless in the face of the physical evidence of the re-caninized Šarik. Another manifestation of the power of language, frequently used by Gogol', is the way in which rumors take on a life of their own and begin to influence events in the physical world. In the Bulgakov work that immediately preceded *Sobač'e serdce*, *Rokovye jajca*, rumors about a scientist's experiment ultimately destroy him, when an angry mob bursts into his laboratory and beats him to death. In *Sobač'e serdce*, similar rumors fly, distorting the nature of Preobraženskij's experiment and linking it with the apocalypse, but they have only the minor result of an increase in annoying telephone calls. In one case, language in the form of rumors exerts an influence over life and death; in the other, despite the threat of apocalypse, language fails to be translated into physical action. *Rokovye jajca* bears an interesting relation to *Sobač'e serdce*. It treats similar plot material but in a very different way. Instead of being set in the immediate past it is set in the near future; as a result the events are given a more fantastic treatment. Of course *Sobač'e serdce* belongs to the genre of science fiction, since the physical laws it posits are not those that we know to be valid, and even Preobraženskij's imperfect operation surpasses the technological capabilities of medical science in the 1920s. But although *Rokovye jajca* is also about a scientific experiment gone wrong, its tone and atmosphere are entirely different from those of *Sobač'e serdce*. In *Rokovye jajca*, the Moscow landscape is illuminated by moving, speaking advertisements and news stories flashing from the roofs of skyscrapers; the results of Persikov's experiments culminate in scenes of cartoon violence and gore; the giant, malevolent reptiles to which his ray has given birth decimate the Možajsk cavalry and nearly encircle Moscow.[9] In *Sobač'e serdce*, the streets of the city and the psychology of the characters are realistically observed, and the treatment of Preobraženskij's experiment avoids hyperbole—Preobraženskij's troubles with Šarikov occur on a restricted, one might say intimately domestic, scale. Thus although both stories may technically be labeled science fiction, *Rokovye jajca* is much farther removed from traditional psychological realism than is *Sobač'e serdce*.

Sobač'e serdce lacks the quality determined by Todorov as the hallmark of the fantastic: the hesitation between a rational and a supernatural explanation for unusual events. The narration explicitly postulates a rational, scientific explanation for the change in Šarik; within the narrative, physical laws are obeyed. There are no magic or divine transformations here as in *Master i Margarita*, where demonic mountebanks turn rubles into dollars, a

beret into a meowing cat, and a human head into a jewelled goblet. *Sobač'e serdce* stays stubbornly within a materialistic universe, where verbal transformations remain figures of speech and physical transformations are difficult, slow, and incomplete.

Why does Bulgakov here discredit the magical power of language, while in other works he allows Todorov's mind-matter limit to be freely transgressed? A clue is provided by the presence in the text of Vladimir Majakovskij. Majakovskij appears precisely in his capacity as *čarodej* for the new Soviet state, utterer of magical incantations designed to influence external reality, high priest of magically realized metaphor. The first reference to Majakovskij appears in Šarik's opening narration. The dog quotes Majakovskij's most famous advertising slogan: *Nigde krome kak v Mossel'prome.*[10] Majakovskij took advertising very seriously; of this slogan he wrote: *Nesmotrja na poètičeskoe uljuljukan'e, sčitaju 'Nigde krome kak v Mossel'prome' poèziej samoj vysokoj kvalifikacii* (1:27). He saw advertising as the industrial and commercial branch of agitation. In a 1923 article, *Agitacija i reklama*, he emphasizes the magical efficacy of good advertising: *Nado zvat', nado reklamirovat', čtob kaleki nemedlenno isceljalis' i bežali pokupat', torgovat', smotret'!* (12:58). Advertising is the creation of a name that wields persuasive power: *Reklama—èto imja vešči. Kak xorošij xudožnik sozdaet sebe imja, tak sozdaet sebe imja i vešč'. Uvidev na obložki žurnala 'znamenitoe' imja, ostanavlivajutsja kupit'* (12:58).

In *Sobač'e serdce*, the "magical" power of advertising is seen from another point of view, as a pathetic deception. Majakovskij's attempts to create powerful names for Soviet products are consistently undermined in the text. His Mossel'prom slogan is wickedly altered by Šarik. When the dog sees the well-dressed Preobraženskij buying a sausage in a state store, he cries: *Začem ona vam? Dlja čego vam gnilaja lošad'? Nigde, krome takoj otravy ne polučite, kak v Mossel'prome* (17). Throughout the story, Soviet products are shown to be contaminations, substitutions, or pure fictions, as in the case of the galoshes that Majakovskij peddled for Rezinotrest.[11] When Preobraženskij asks Šarikov what will become of all the cats he's strangled in the Purge Bureau, he replies: *Na pol'ty pojdut . . . iz nix belok budut delat' na rabočij kredit* (143). The cats will, of course, remain cats, despite being called squirrels.[12] The "name of the thing" as advertised fails to change the substandard nature of the thing itself.

Another reference to Majakovskij occurs during a dinner at which Preobraženskij expounds to Bormental' his reactionary views on the recent revolution. When Bormental' timidly suggests that the sudden disappearance of galoshes and steam heat is due to *razruxa*, Preobraženskij explodes. He calls the word *miraž, dym, fikcija. Čto takoe èto vaša razruxa? Staruxa s kljukoj? Ved'ma, kotoraja vybila vse stekla, potušila vse lampy?* (52–53). According to Preobraženskij, *razruxa* is an imaginary scapegoat on which

people blame their intellectual and physical inability to cope with external difficulties. In his view, *razruxa* is in people's heads. *Značit, kogda èti baritony kričat 'bej razruxu!'—ja smejus' . . . Èto označaet, čto každyj iz nix dolžen lupit' sebja po zatylku!* (53).

It is not hard to guess that these "baritones" represent a paranoiacally multiplied Vladimir Majakovskij. It was indeed he who created the fairy-tale figure of *razruxa—trekljataja staruxa* for his *Okna ROSTA* agitational posters in 1920 (3:72). *Razruxa*, who also appears in act 5 of the 1920 version of *Misterija-buff*, is the embodiment of the forces of chaos and destruction. Hand in hand with her brother *Golod*, she goes about the country smashing machinery and gobbling up workers. Majakovskij depicts her as a bright-green goblin with a bent girder in her mouth (3:plate facing 428).

Both Majakovskij's advertising and his ROSTA windows were ubiquitous in Moscow of the 1920s, and they presented Bulgakov with a vivid image of Majakovskij's approach to the achievement of utopia.[13] Majakovskij creates a world of magic words, of glittering, if as yet nonexistent, consumer goods, of fairy-tale monsters, of heroic Red Army soldiers who can defeat any counter-revolutionary ogre as long as they are armed with the right rhyming couplets. In a 1923 feuilleton, Bulgakov depicts Majakovskij on a balcony, hurling words *tjaželye, kak bulyžniki* onto the crowd below (*Sob. soč.*, 1:316). If in *Sobač'e serdce* words are denied their usual magical weight and efficacy, it is perhaps because Bulgakov is attempting to counter Majakovskij's magical approach to the large-scale social transformation that forms the background to *Sobač'e serdce*—the 1917 revolutions.

Bulgakov's works of the decade following the Revolution fix on the physical obstacles blocking the path to utopia. He has left us a graphic picture of the lack of food, clothing, and especially living space endured by all Russians in those years. In his 1923 feuilleton *Sorok sorokov*, he looks back on the immediate post-Revolutionary period with clear eyes, denying the attempts of poets to change history through wishful assertion:

> Теперь, когда все откормились жирами и фосфором, поэты начинают писать о том, что это были героические времена. . . . Герои были сами голы, как соколы . . . . Возможно, что это были героические времена, но это были голые времена. (*Sob. soč.*, 1:296–97)

Like the smaller-scale transformations in *Sobač'e serdce*, the transformation of Russian society is a human production, and limited by human power and skill to cope with physical obstacles. Despite his belief in language, when dealing with the problems of post-Revolutionary Russia Bulgakov is concerned to deny the kind of magical incantation indulged in by Majakovskij and his epigones.

In speaking of the possible achievement of utopia, Bulgakov uses not Majakovskij's term "kommuna" but the term "zolotoj vek" (which he will consider to have arrived when sunflower seeds disappear from the streets of

Moscow; *Sob. soč.*, 1:288–89). The classical allusion reminds us that Bulgakov's attitude toward the past also contrasts with that of Majakovskij. For Majakovskij, the Revolution was a realization of the Futurist metaphor of complete newness, of being able to purge language and literature of its past and to start afresh. Bulgakov, who began his public career in Vladikavkaz defending Puškin in a debate against a Majakovskij clone, approached survivals of the past in a very different spirit.[14] For him the famous Futurist call to "throw Puškin, Dostoevskij, Tolstoj, *etc.*, *etc.*, overboard from the Steamship of Modernity" is not only obnoxious but impracticable. The eighteenth-century odic tradition lives on in Majakovskij (Tynjanov, 86; Terc, 195–219) just as the unpleasant predilections of Klim Čugunkin live on in Šarikov. Even the most radical invention of the Futurists, *zaum'*, cannot free itself entirely of the past; its most brilliant practitioner, Xlebnikov, relies for the power and resonance of his poetry on the meanings and associations accumulated by Russian phonemes and morphemes over the centuries.

As we have seen, Preobraženskij's transformation of Šarik fails to eradicate the past; the new creature is merely the sum of Klim's character plus a few doggy habits. Although this creates an uncomfortable situation for the professor, there is something comforting in the thought that nothing is really lost, that human transformations fail in completeness and irreversibility. In *Sorok sorokov*, Bulgakov's narrator looks out on a panorama of Moscow and sees not only the new but the old—he takes pleasure in recording the former names of buildings and institutions. The skyline is dominated by the "forty forties," the domes of Moscow's ancient churches that have witnessed so many humanly induced transformations. His is not the sour nostalgia of a Preobraženskij but the calm conscientiousness of an historian, noting the outlines of the past that remain ineradicably in the present and the future.

* * *

A final, tangential note. One of the most important functions of language is its labeling function. The consequences of accepting a label or having it forced upon one may be of life-and-death magnitude; the wrong label can mean prison, the right one can mean escape from starvation. Among the genres to which *Sobač'e serdce* belongs (the literature of talking dogs, of Faust, of Frankenstein) is the literature of hunger, the literature that investigates what happens when bodily needs and desires corrupt the spirit. (In a sense, *Master i Margarita* belongs to the same genre.) The imperative of the belly was of necessity a vital topic in Soviet literature of the post–1917 era. Even Majakovskij's apocalyptic *Misterija-buff* is really the story of a group of people in search of a decent meal. In *Sobač'e serdce*, Šarik is the character most aware of this imperative, having known starvation, and it is his search for security and satiety that leads to his temporary downfall. He initially

resists the name Šarik given him by passersby, on the grounds of inappropriateness: *Šarik—èto značit kruglyj, upitannyj, glupyj, ovsjanku žret, syn znatnyx roditelej, a on loxmatyj, dolgovjazyj i rvanyj, šljajka podžaraja, bezdomnyj pes* (15). Gradually, however, lulled by the bourgeois comfort of Preobraženskij's home, Šarik changes his identity from vagabond to oatmeal-eating *barskij pes* (65). He even begins to imagine an aristocratic lineage for himself: *Očen' vozmožno, čto babuška moja sogrešila s vodolazom* (57).

When Šarik is anesthetized, the last words that float through his head are: *Za čto?* (67). He has perhaps offered the answer himself in his preoperative meditations. He admits to himself that he has irrevocably adopted the label *barskij pes* and traded freedom for comfort. *Da i čto takoe volja? Tak, dym, miraž, fikcija, . . . Bred ètix zlosčastnyx demokratov . . .* (65). Unlike Majakovskij's *razruxa*, *volja* is not a fairytale witch but a word with a meaningful history. It is for Šarik's failure of courage, his willingness to deny the meaning of freedom, that he is delivered into the hands of his torturers. Šarik is restored to life at the end of *Sobač'e serdce*, but he has no memory of the transformation to which he has been subjected. There is no guarantee that the same thing will not happen again to the unsuspecting dog. The final scene emphasizes the reversibility of change. Whole phrases are repeated from the pre-operation narrative; the original equilibrium of Preobraženskij's apartment has been restored. But the seeds of change also remain, in the form of Preobraženskij's continuing scientific quest. Šarik has been granted at least temporary peace, but light, the awareness of danger that might arm him against it, has been denied.

Although the ending of *Sobač'e serdce* might seem to be a Bulgakovian idyll (drawn shades, humming radiators, intellectual at work), the final line from *Aida* cannot help but evoke the frightening image of the cowled surgeon-executioner; the ominous, threatening side of Preobraženskij's personality is clearly present up to the end. Despite attempts to identify Bulgakov with Preobraženskij,[15] Bulgakov's feuilletons of the 1920s do not deal kindly with people who hang onto seven-room apartments in the midst of a housing shortage. Bulgakov may have had a bourgeois background, but in 1920 he starved along with the proletariat. In *Sorok sorokov* his autobiographical narrator describes his Šarik-like position between two worlds:

Все буржуи заперлись на дверные цепочки и через щель высовывали липовые мандаты и удостоверения. Закутавшись в мандаты как в простыни, они великолепно пережили голод, холод, нашествие «чижиков», трудгужналог и т. под. напасти. Сердца их стали черствы, как булки, продававшиеся тогда под часами на углу Садовой и Тверской.

К героям нечего было и итти. Герои были сами голы, как соколы и питались какими-то инструкциями и желтой крупой, в которой попадались небольшие красивые камушки вроде аметистов.

Я оказался как раз посредине обеих групп.

(*Sob. soč.*, 1:296)

This ambiguous status leads him not to despair but to a feat of spiritual heroism:

> Я не погиб, несмотря на то, что удары сыпались на меня градом и при этом с двух сторон. Буржуи гнали меня, при первом же взгляде на мой костюм, в стан пролетариев. Пролетарии выселяли меня с квартиры на том основании, что если я и не чистой воды буржуй, то во всяком случае его суррогат. И не выселили. И не выселят. Смею вас заверить. Я перенял защитные приемы в обоих лагерях. Я оброс мандатами, как собака шерстью и научился питаться мелкокаратной разноцветной кашей. Тело мое стало худым и жилистым, сердце железным, глаза зоркими. Я—закален.
>
> (*Sob. soč.*, 1:297)

Survival is won by refusing to capitulate to either camp, by persistence and courage in holding onto freedom—freedom from labels.

Bulgakov's position in relation to literary conservatism on the one hand and the *avant-garde* on the other is similar to that of his autobiographical narrator *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Zholkovsky has subtly analyzed the way in which Bulgakov complicates the familiar carnival opposition between the forces of order (government) and of disorder (revolt) in *Sobač'e serdce*: the professor is both a challenger of the ruling ideology (the Soviet state) and a conservative opponent of disorder, while Šarikov, the carnival clown, is presented not as a liberator but as the villain of the piece. "*Èta paradoksal'naja konfiguracija—produkt togo perexodnogo istoričeskogo momenta, kogda pod Porajdkom, podryvu kotorogo posvjaščen Karnaval, možet ponimat'sja kak staryj, tak i novyj režim*" (Žolkovskij, "*Dialog*," 96–97). At the moment when the last have become first, when political (and literary) radicalism have become orthodoxy, the individual who wishes to side with either Order or Disorder may not know where to look. Bulgakov's literary strategies take full account of this bewildering *perexodnyj istoričeskij moment*. He refuses the label either of literary conservative or of avant-gardist; like the narrator of *Sorok sorokov*, he *perenjal . . . priemy v oboix lagerjax*, combining respect for tradition with brilliantly conceived experimentation. *Sobač'e serdce* may be a product of Bulgakov's reaction against the *avant-garde*, but *Master i Margarita*, with its strikingly original blend of psychological realism, horror-movie fantasy, and religious myth, actually makes us believe, contrary to the convictions of its author, that there can be something new under the sun.

NOTES

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1 Burgin has attempted to deny the adequacy of the allegorical reading, focusing instead on a psychological analysis of the character Preobraženskij.

2 Čudakova has discussed the journalistic interest in rejuvenation experiments in Moscow of the 1920s.

3 Bulgakov, *Sobač'e serdce*, 65. All citations are from this edition.

4 Of course *Sobač'e serdce* is not unique among Bulgakov's works in employing unrealized metaphors (see, for example, the diabolical metaphors for fire in "No. 13. Dom El'pit-Rabkommuna"). The point is that magically *realized* metaphors are a central device of the Bulgakovian fantastic which he pointedly eschews in *Sobač'e serdce*.

5 For discussion of the various narrators in *Sobač'e serdce*, see Goscilo.

6 Čexov's 1887 story "Kaštanka," about a lost dog who is adopted temporarily by a circus clown, is also narrated in the third person from a dog's point of view, but here the dog knows only what she can be expected to know from her limited perspective. Thus, she knows the names and patronymics of her fellow trained animals because she has heard them addressed by their master, but she does not know the man's name and refers to him as "the stranger" or "the master."

7 Cf. the cry of Margarita's neighbor, Nikolaj Ivanovič, who has been magically transformed into a hog: *Trebuju vozvraščenija moego normal'nogo oblika!* (239).

8 See Čudakova, "*Arxiv*," for a discussion of the magical power of bureaucratic documents as a theme in Soviet literature of the 1920s.

9 Maksim Gor'kij was disappointed that Bulgakov missed the opportunity to describe the attack of the monsters in a sort of "Godzilla Eats Moscow" finale (Čudakova, *Poslesloviе*, 136).

10 See Majakovskij, 5:253–311, for the advertisements he wrote between 1923 and 1925. Zholkovsky has pointed out that both the canine motif and the theme of "learning the alphabet from street signs" are prominent in Majakovskij's work (Žolkovskij, "O genii"; "Dialog," part 1). In the *posleslovie* appended to the first Soviet publication of *Sobač'e serdce*, Čudakova briefly mentions the story's implied polemic with Majakovskij and suggests that the plot of *Klop* was (directly or indirectly) influenced by it (139–41). (This article became available to me a year after the first version of the present essay was written.) For other echoes of Majakovskij in Bulgakov's works, see Gasparov, 205–206; Flejšman, 126–30; and Janovskaja, 311–14.

11 See also "Jubilejnoe" (1924), in which the poet proposes that Puškin join him in the ad game by pushing the very product that turned the NÈPman's hair green: *Ja by i agitki vam doverit' mog./Raz by pokazal:—vot tak-to mol, i tak-to . . . —Vy b smogli—u vas xorošij slog./Ja dal by vam* žirkost' *i sukna,/v reklamu b vydal gumskix dam* (2:340; emphasis added). The only other possibly explicit reference to Majakovskij's advertising is Šarikov's name, Poligraf, which alludes to Mospoligraf, another of Majakovskij's clients.

12 See Akakij Akakievič's cat-fur collar, *kotoruju izdali možno bylo vsegda prinjat' za kunicu* (Gogol', "*Šinel'*," 3:129).

13 In his fictionalized memoirs *Zapiski na manžetax*, Bulgakov represents his entry into Moscow from the Caucasus as occurring literally beneath the sign of Majakovskij: "На мосту две лампы дробят мрак. С моста опять бултыхнули во тьму. Потом фонарь. Серый забор. На нем афиша. Огромные яркие буквы. Слово. Батюшки! Что ж за слово то? Дювлам. Что ж значит то? Значит-то что ж? 'Двенадцатилетний юбилей Владимира Маяковского'" (*Sob. soč.*, 1:231). Bulgakov's narrator conjures with the strange Majakovskian word "Djuvlam," and comes up with a mental portrait of the poet not calculated to please its original: he imagines Majakovskij as a short, balding, bespectacled, nonsmoking forty-year-old man, whose favorite author is Arthur Conan Doyle and favorite opera is *Eugene Onegin*. The narrator's faith in the evocative power of the word (*Nikogda ego ne videl, no znaju . . . znaju*, 1:232) is comically undermined (and the universality of Majakovskij's fame is denied) by this spectacular failure.

14 Proffer, 35–37. See *Zapiski na manžetax* (*Sob. soč.*, 1:218–20) for a fictionalized account of this incident. Bulgakov's works express a consistently ironic and skeptical attitude towards *avant-garde* art and its spokesmen. See for example Haber's discussion of the demonic figure of Špoljanskij in *Belaja gvardija* as a parody of Viktor Šklovskij, and the ridiculing of Mejerxol'd in "*Stolica v bloknote*" (*Sob. soč.*, 1:284–86) and *Rokovye jajca* (*Sob. soč.*, 3:74–75).

15 See Burgin, 494; Proffer (130–31) reads Preobraženskij's speeches as direct expressions of Bulgakov's opinions.

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