

Erica Fudge

At the Heart of the Home: An Animal Reading of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*

When we try and contemplate who it is that we think we are in the world history has an important role to play. It can alert us to what we have lost; can point up how we have come to think what we think; and can remind us that what we think now will, inevitably, change — will be succeeded by other models, also temporary, also trying to make meaning out of who it is that we think we are. In these terms, the history of the human is not simply a history of progress from a “bad” model of who we are (Aristotle’s sense of the human as special and separate from all animals; Aquinas’s sense of the human as the only center of the moral universe, for example) to a “good” one in which our relationship with and location in the natural world is more fully acknowledged. Rather, we should perhaps also view the place of our species as a shifting one in which processes of what could be termed humanning, unhumanning, and rehumanning are constantly taking place.

Darwin’s work is, of course, one key way in which the human of modernity finds itself unhumanned and rehumanned. Evolutionary theory removes the boundaries between species — indeed, makes a concept of species almost irrelevant: “I believe that animals have descended from at most only four or five progenitors” (454 and 452) Darwin wrote in *The Origin of Species*, thus rendering untenable “the belief that species were immutable productions” (on paleoanthropological struggles to define the human see Mordsley). But even as it removes a previously unmoveable barrier between the human and the chimpanzee (see Fudge 2000), Darwin’s theory also places the human at the top of the evolutionary ladder: it is, after all, homo sapiens who is capable, at the end of *The Origin of Species*, of contemplating the “entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth.” It is only humanity, for Darwin, which can assess the “grandeur in this view of life” (459).

In this essay I will show how this history of humanning, unhumanning, and rehumanning gets played out in one early twentieth-century literary text. I will make the case that in Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Heart of a Dog*, a text that has been most often read as a political allegory, we can begin to see what it might mean to discover that the human is, after all, an empty category: a verb rather than a noun. The immediate context of this novella is the early twentieth-century political upheaval in Russia, but I want to argue that we should also regard contemporary scientific ideas about and uses of animals as significant. As such, my main argument is that reading *The Heart of a Dog* can remind us that we

have, perhaps, never been as human as we might imagine, and that we are always in the process of experiencing and disavowing this (see Wolfe, 6).

Alongside this sense of never having been the humans that we imagine that we are (and, I would argue, inseparable from it) is a recognition that how we read can help us to construct who we are. In this instance I will argue that an allegorical reading of *The Heart of a Dog* in which the dog has the role of a symbol supports the assumptions of the centrality and stability of the human, and that reading *The Heart of a Dog* as if it has something to say about human-animal relations begins to reveal how constructed that notion of the human really is.

I.

Mikhail Bulgakov wrote *The Heart of a Dog* in 1925, but it was banned by Soviet censors before publication. An official Russian edition did not appear until 1987, almost fifty years after Bulgakov's death. It was, however, published outside of the Soviet Union before then in the Russian journal based in West Germany, *Grani*, in 1968. Also in 1968 — an interesting year for philosophical constructions of the human — Michael Glenny's English translation of the novella was printed by Harvill Press in London. It is apt that this was the year that *The Heart of a Dog* made its first appearance in print as, like Louis Althusser's essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" — a key response to the events of May '68 — Bulgakov's novella deals with links between revolution and identity.

*The Heart of a Dog* tells the story of the famous doctor, Professor Preobrazhensky (a name that means 'transfiguration'), and his experiment on a stray dog that he takes into his home. The Professor transplants human testicles and a human pituitary gland into the dog and watches, astonished and appalled, as Sharik the dog becomes a foul-mouthed, lecherous human who names himself Poligraph Poligraphovich Sharikov (77). Meanwhile, as Sharik is becoming Sharikov, the house committee in the Professor's apartment block is at loggerheads with him because he has more rooms than legally he is allowed under the new socialist regime. The Professor regards the changes they are attempting to impose with horror: they would bring into existence not a new order but a new disorder, a world turned upside down: "So I can eat in the bedroom ... read in the consulting room, dress in the hall, operate in the maid's room and examine patients in the dining-room," the Professor notes of the committee's requests (30).

The committee are not satisfied with interfering with the domestic architecture of Preobrazhensky's apartment, however: they also use the arrival of Sharikov as a way of continuing to undermine the Professor's domestic life — demanding that Sharikov be given identity documents (and thus officially have an identity) and, at one point, giving the man-dog a copy of Engels's letters to Kautsky to read. They want him to become a good Soviet citizen. Finally, having put up with Sharikov's increasingly destructive behaviour, and having seen his previously Edenic flat almost destroyed in a flood, caused when Sharikov chased a cat into the bathroom, the Professor, the expert in rejuvenation, decides to reverse the experiment that has, ironically, aged him, and to return to the order of things before the experiment. He replaces the dog's testicles and pituitary gland in Sharikov, and at the end of the text Sharikov the man has gone and Sharik the dog has returned. The novella ends with the dog

wondering about his headache and his scars, but feeling "very, very lucky" as he lies on the rug by the fire while his master continues his experimentation (128).

Critics have recognised that this tale can be read as Bulgakov's commentary on contemporary Soviet history. It is an allegory which announces, as Bulgakov himself put it in a letter to the Soviet Government, the dangers of "the revolutionary process" over "beloved and Great Evolution" (Haber, 217). That is, that just as forced revolution in nature (figured in the transformation of dog into man) creates natural and domestic chaos, so the forced speeding up of change in the political order has likewise created social disorder in Russia. Thus, for Ronald D. LeBlanc *The Heart of a Dog* is a "tale of transformation gone awry." The experiment of man on dog is interpreted as an allegory of "the grand social experiment of creating a new species of human being; homo sovieticus" (LeBlanc, 58). It was perhaps for this reason that the "influential party figure" L.B. Kamenev said of the book in 1925: "It's an acerbic broadside about the present age, and there can be absolutely no question of publishing it" (Curtis, 66 and 75).

But *The Heart of a Dog* is more complex than this. LeBlanc, for example, goes on to discuss the imagery of eating in the novella, and the story of what he terms "cultural malnutrition" that can be found there (69). However, it is not just in the novella's imagery that complexity can be found. The question of who is the text's hero is rife with difficulties. Lesley Milne, for example, in a biographical interpretation of the novella from 1990, reads the "utterances" of the Professor as being "generally held by Western (and now Soviet) critics to represent Bulgakov's own views, despite the mask of caricature that sometimes overlies the Professor's features." But Milne also notes that things are not that simple; not only is the Professor, on occasion, a comic anachronism, as well as this "the dog partakes of the author's omniscience" (Milne, 62-4). Likewise, in her discussion of the novella Edythe C. Haber first claims that Preobrazhensky is the hero, but then also claims that that role is taken by the dog as well (Haber, 207 and 210). Such an interpretation is, like Milne's, a response to the narrative technique of *The Heart of a Dog*. It begins with Sharik, the stray dog, telling his own tale ("Ooow-ow-ooow-owow! Oh, look at me, I'm dying" [5]); shifts, when the Professor comes onto the scene, to the third person narrative voice ("The terrible snowstorm howled around the doorway..." [8]); is interrupted by the scientific notes of the Professor's assistant Bormenthal ("The dog in the presence of Zina and myself, had called Prof. Preobrazhensky a 'bloody bastard'" ... [62]); and ends in the third person, with the dog as uncomprehending subject of the text and the Professor as the all-knowing, god-like scientist still experimenting, still creating ("That evening the dog saw terrible things. He saw the great man plunge his slippery, rubber-gloved hands into a jar and fish out a brain ..." [128]). Shifting species boundaries in *The Heart of a Dog* are thus echoed by the shifting narrative voices.

We should beware, however, of reading *The Heart of a Dog* as a tale of animal rationality. Indeed, if it is an allegory, such an interpretation is impossible for, as John Simons has argued, in fables animals are "almost irrelevant. They are merely vehicles for the human and are not, in any way, presented as having physical or psychological existence in their own right" (Simons, 119). But, because of the complexity of its narrative technique it is difficult to read Bulgakov's text as simply an allegory, because an allegorical reading that interprets the dog as always symbolising something else silences the presence of that dog as the suffering center of the story, and this is certainly what we have in *The Heart of a Dog*.

A brief look at one other well known twentieth-century beast fable, *Animal Farm* (1945), allows us to see how this silencing works. If *Animal Farm* is interpreted as George Orwell's allegory of Stalin's USSR, then the animals as animals disappear from view and are replaced by the humans they symbolize. It is this kind of reading that provides the reason for the fulsome list "explaining" what each allegorical animal stands for in *Animal Farm* that is offered by Mitzi M. Brunsdale in her *Student Companion to George Orwell*: "The Pigs: the Bolsheviks who launched the October Revolution / The Dogs: the Soviet secret police (successively, the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, KGB) ..." (128-9). This is a list that makes teaching the text simpler but also cancels the possibility of reading it as having anything to say about human-animal relations. In Brunsdale's terms, to read *Animal Farm* as a text that might have something to say about animals is to misread it. But in her current work Susan McHugh is offering a counter to such a reading, and is interpreting *Animal Farm* as also being about animals and humans. Hers is a reading that brings back into focus some moral questions about the use of animals in agriculture (see McHugh's essay in this issue). It could be argued that this latter way of reading is typical of one kind of animal studies approach: it returns the animals to where they have always been in the first place; it reads what is in front of it as if it is what is meant and takes note of the presence of the nonhuman as meaningful in and of itself. But such a reading is also doing something else: refusing to simply interpret animals as symbolic is also a reminder that animals are, in such allegorical readings, absented in order for humans to be made central. Regarding animals as only ever symbolic is part of the process of humanning: it reconstitutes the human even as it assumes the human to be a pre-existing category. (My reading of allegory here replicates Martin Heidegger's reading of anthropomorphism as a mode of imagining that assumes the presence of a pre-existing and knowable thing called *anthropos* [see Tyler, 273].) Whether what can be traced through an animal-focused reading is about human-animal relations (McHugh's reading of *Animal Farm*) or about human struggles to define themselves (my reading — below — of Bulgakov's novella) is not the most important point. The most important point is that in both such readings the animals have been returned to the center stage — which is where they always were in the first place.

Like *Animal Farm*, *The Heart of a Dog* has been interpreted as an allegory, but as a more obviously complex one than Orwell's work is assumed to be; indeed, Susanne Fusso has argued that "Bulgakov's allegory is both broader and deeper than the political reading in the tradition of *Animal Farm* implies" (Fusso, 286). (Although we should remember, of course, that any claim for the greater complexity of Bulgakov's novella is in danger of reiterating Brunsdale's assumption of the simplicity of *Animal Farm*.) Diana L. Burgin reads *The Heart of a Dog* alongside the myth of Faust, Frankenstein, and Christian theology. Henrietta Mondry reads it not only as a comment on political ideas, but also alongside Russian folk narratives in which dogs and humans are linked. She argues for the presence of a "significant mystical subtext" in *The Heart of a Dog* in which, at the novel's end, the search continues to "return the dog and the man to the paradise from which they were both expelled when they were one" (Mondry, 9). Fusso suggests that what is central to the text is "the cult of the new in all its forms: technological, commercial, linguistic, and aesthetic." Here, the transformation of dog into man (and its reversal at the end) is read in broad terms to signify not only the "social and political themes, which lie relatively close to the surface," but also Bulgakov's scepticism "about the possibility of instant, irreversible metamorphosis through the magical power of language" — which takes the form of advertising and propaganda (Fusso, 386-7).

I want to add another possible interpretation to these, an interpretation that, I hope, returns the dog to the center of the narrative, not so much where he belongs, as where he has always been. Such a reading is based on the assumption that there are three levels of meaning in *The Heart of a Dog*, each paralleling the previous one, but each adding a new layer. As such, the political allegory that is found in the novella can be read as only one of a number of possible interpretations that are available simultaneously.

## II.

There is, then, unquestionably a presence of the social and political that is lurking in the apartment building in the form of the rules of the house committee (and thus in the rules of the Soviet state). This is the realm of what Althusser termed the repressive state apparatus. The Professor's struggle to maintain his living accommodation as he wishes is, on one level, a realistic recognition of the changes that were taking place after the Revolution. But his dealings with the house committee are also an allegory of the struggle many Russians were having to hold onto what they valued after the revolution. As well as this, to follow Althusser's lead once again, there are also structures in Bulgakov's novella that are ideological; that reproduce subjects through consent. The internalization of ideology is represented as we move further within the building. Thus, in relation to the state-run apartment building as a whole, we can find what I am terming the first level of meaning in the text: its reflections on political issues. But if we shift the focus further inside, to the private apartment, a second level of meaning can be found. Here the question is not about political, so much as domestic hierarchy, but upheaval is present once again.

In *The Heart of a Dog* the order of the home is encapsulated in the relationship between the dog and his master, as is typical of much writing of the period (see Fudge 2008, 25-33). Here human status is secured by the dominion of the human and the obedient submission of the animal: obedience here signalling not only canine acceptance of human rules, but also canine agreement with human rules — an agreement that makes human dominion seem natural. Sharik's devotion to the Professor is made clear in the opening pages of the novella: "I'll follow you wherever you like," he says to the man who appears to be his human saviour (12). If we turn to Althusser we can see that Sharik becomes a consenting subject of human dominion. Althusser writes:

the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. (169; italics in original)

Once inside the Professor's apartment Sharik, the stray, can no longer roam, and he becomes a house dog. His initial shame at this loss of liberty is quickly transformed into his belief that the collar he has been given is not simply a sign of his being owned, but allows him access to a world never available to him before. "A collar's just like a briefcase," he thinks, having walked past a policeman and the building's doorman without trouble (46): it gives him a certain social status, a status denied to the homeless, masterless stray. The domestic order — hierarchical, anthropocentric — is internalised by the dog, who then, in Althusser's terms, subjects himself.

This self-subjection is something that, on a political level, the house committee expect from the Professor, and fail to receive. And it is the Professor who, likewise, upsets the consensual relationship between pet and master that Bulgakov presents. This happens when, following the Professor's experiment, Sharik becomes Sharikov: when dog becomes human. It is not just that obedience has gone: "I didn't ask you to do the operation, did I?" — [Sharikov] barked indignantly" (74). It is also that an unspoken law has been broken. If there is a taboo against eating pets, as Marc Shell has noted (Shell, 131-3), there is also a taboo against experimenting on them — as the nineteenth-century vivisector Claude Bernard discovered to his cost when his daughter Fanny, so the story goes, discovered him vivisecting her best friend's pet: she became estranged from him and went on to form an animal welfare charity (Guerrini, 91). Thus, when Preobrazhensky performs an experiment on the dog to whom he has given a home, and to whom he has become master, he is overturning a relationship that sits at the heart of the symbolism of that home and that is central to conceptions of domestic order. The experiment itself — not what it achieves, but the simple fact that it happens — is an act that overturns order.

But we can go further than this: pet ownership is a relationship of difference and of order; it is paternalistic and hierarchical, and thus appears to support the binary opposition human/animal, which in turn creates the human as a category. But where pet ownership should mark out the humanity of the human, the Professor's use of the dog as an experimental tool reveals that his humanity, their relationship, and the home are compromised. In *The Heart of a Dog* home is a place where the domestic cohabits with the scientific, where the dining room is next door to the surgery, where the private meets the public. This home is where the heart is, but one gets the feeling that the heart here is an actual organ rather than a metaphor. It is not a place of love, but a place of mere life. An allegorical reading misses this.

Such a challenge to order as can be found in the representation of the home in *The Heart of a Dog* thus parallels the wider upheavals that the Professor sees in Soviet society. A structure of order — I have termed it paternalist, one could also in this context call it Tsarist — has been uprooted and chaos has followed. His experiment has brought the disorder of the political sphere inside. But I have already said that there is another version of inside also working in the novella. And this third level moves us from the apartment building, via the apartment, to the self. The nature of the experiment — what happens, not just the fact that it does happen this time — reveals another form of chaos, this time in the construction of the human as a species, and it is here, I think, that we should read the dog as a dog rather than as an allegory.

III.

Yvonne Howell situates her interpretation of *The Heart of a Dog* within contemporary debates about eugenics and argues that the text's "significance lies not in its overworked interpretation as an anti-Soviet satire or as a warning against scientific hubris. Rather it remains a brilliant exploration of the conundrum of where nature meets nurture in efforts to enhance humankind" (545). For her, the key context for the novella is the debate going on in the Soviet Union in the 1920s about the nature of the human after the revolution. The new social structure required new humans to live within it, and "[t]he architects of the revolution were confronted with the problem of constructing this new man, one who would be psychologically, physically, and culturally at home in the radically different society

envisioned by communism" (546). Howell traces different perspectives in the novel — eugenicist, culturalist, evolutionary, biologicistic — that reflect existing theories of the time, and thus reads *The Heart of a Dog* as, on one level, non-allegorical. Preobrazhensky's experiment is based on real ideas.

Howell is right, I think, to remind us that the "real" outside of *The Heart of a Dog* is not only the political upheaval of the 1920s in the Soviet Union, but is also a particular scientific debate that was taking place at the time. And her recognition of this also begins to return the dog as dog to center stage. I want to do something similar by turning to another scientific context of the 1920s, which I think is central to the action of *The Heart of a Dog*. Professor Preobrazhensky is a specialist in rejuvenation. Of the two of his patients we encounter in this text one is an old man made priapic by the medicine he has received, the other is a lecherous old woman with a young lover she is attempting to keep up with. Both are represented as monsters. The Professor undertakes such work only because he regards it as leading to a wider understanding: "You don't think I do these rejuvenation experiments because of the money, do you? I am a scientist." His experiment on Sharik represents the scientist — rather than doctor — at work. By transplanting the pituitary gland and testicles of a dead criminal into the body of the dog Preobrazhensky is attempting to investigate something with general implications: he was, he states, "concerned about something quite different, about eugenics, about the improvement of the human race." He is not content with exploring the possibilities of changing the individual, but wants to explore "the universal human image" (109). But he has come to realize that the experiment on Sharik is just as limited as the rejuvenation work he undertakes: that the pituitary is "the brain itself in miniature. And of no use to me at all" (109). But the science that underpins the Professor's work, while exaggerated and altered as is often the case in creative writing, is real. As Adam Roberts has noted of science fiction, the science aspects of novels need not be true, but they must "sound like scientific discourse" and must be "built on logical principles" (9). This is the case in *The Heart of a Dog*, and Bulgakov's use of contemporary scientific ideas reveals not just an allegorical possibility in the meaning of the experiment ("revolutionary process" is set against "great Evolution"), but rejuvenation science becomes a means of exploring the wider implications for thinking about what it is that this thing called the human is in a moment after revolutionary change.

In the early twentieth century interest in rejuvenation was sparked by experiments being performed in particular by two doctors: Serge Voronoff, a Russian émigré living in Paris, and Eugen Steinach, in Vienna. Using different techniques, and developing out of increased medical understanding of the role of the glands and their function in the body, both were convinced they had found a method of reversing the physical decline and loss of sexual potency that was understood to come with age. Steinach's method was to perform a kind of vasectomy on the male patient, allowing in theory for the growth of the "interstitial [i.e. testicular] tissue," which would in turn enlarge the puberty gland, which would thus "secrete more testicular hormone than before" (Armstrong, 49). An operation on women using the application of x-rays to the flesh surrounding the ovaries was also available, and lies at the heart of Gertrude Atherton's 1923 bestselling novel *Black Oxen*, which was made into a film the same year. The title of the novel is taken from the final lines of W.B. Yeats' verse drama, *The Countess Cathleen* (1912): "The years like great black oxen tread the world, / And God the herdsman goads them on behind, / And I am broken by their passing feet" (Yeats, scene 5). In a completion of the circle, Yeats himself underwent the Steinach operation in 1934 (see Armstrong).

Voronoff's method of rejuvenation was different from Steinach's and is the one that I am more interested in here. Put simply, Voronoff argued that the grafting of slices of monkey testicle onto the testicles of men would lead to rejuvenation. He began by experimenting with ageing rams in 1917, and the first experiment on a human male took place in 1920. As the historian of these experiments, David Hamilton, has written,

In explaining his use of the monkey as a donor, [Voronoff] said that this choice was initially forced on him by the lack of human donor glands. However, he found that not only did the monkey glands succeed, but they survived better than human glands, because of their "virility." The monkey (a chimpanzee in his early work, a baboon later) was chosen simply because it was so close to man, and Voronoff pointed out that this species shared many of the blood groups of man. (41-2)

These monkeys and apes were perceived as purer — more natural — beings than humans, and thus as more virile. Such purity was a belief that, as Donna Haraway has shown, can also be traced in developments in primatology taking place at the same time (Haraway, 62).

What is also clear from these experiments might appear somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the use of animals and animal matter in the transformation of human bodies reveals the closeness of humans and animals. But, on the other hand, the fact that humans can use animals as tools in their experiments itself draws a firm line between humans and all other species, and is an assertion of dominion. In a sense, Voronoff's work encapsulates the problem of the human that I am proposing: the performance of the experiment simultaneously reveals human animality and human dominion, and the human is unhumaned and humanned in one movement.

One way around this paradox is, I think, found in the understanding that the animal grafts will actually enhance the humanity of the man receiving them; he does not compromise his human status, but rather becomes a kind of superman — mature, experienced, virile, potent (and it is no accident that the desire for virile mature men comes after the decimation of the population of young men which happened between 1914 and 1918). Tarzan, first created by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912, although never a recipient of an ape graft, becomes a kind of icon of this idea: he was, Burroughs writes, "A perfect type of the strongly masculine, unmarred by dissipation, or brutal or degrading passions" (Burroughs, 182). It seems paradoxical that his manliness comes from his apeliness, but contemporary conceptions of non-human primate purity might explain this.

As with Steinach's work, culture responded to Voronoff's experiments revealing how famous — infamous — they were (see Berliner). In 1922 another novel, this time a bitter-sweet comedy, was written about these rejuvenation experiments. The summary — "What this Story is About" — from inside Bertram Gayton's *The Gland Stealers* reads:

Gran'pa is ninety-five, possessed of £100,000, a fertile imagination, and a good physique. He sees in the papers accounts of Professor Voronoff's theory of rejuvenation by means of gland-grafting. Nothing will satisfy him but that the experiment should be made on himself ... He acquires a gorilla, a hefty murderous brute, and the operation is performed with success. That is only the beginning ... Inspired to philanthropy by the thrill of regained youth, Gran'pa decides to take a hundred or so old men to Africa, capture a like number of gorillas, and borrow their glands ...

In this novel it turns out that it is not, after all, the experiment that has made Gran'pa youthful, but hope. The gorilla is merely a living — castrated — placebo.

Voronoff was not the only surgeon to perform this kind of operation, however. In a 1968 letter preceding the publication of his translation of *The Heart of a Dog* Michael Glenny suggested that “Bulgakov probably got the idea for [Preobrazhensky] from a real Russian rejuvenation surgeon, Bogomolov, who was famous in the ‘twenties for his use of monkey glands” (Glenny, GLE/2/1/1). And in America a quack, “Dr.” John R. Brinkley, set up his own clinic in Kansas, where he used goat testicles, and came up with the advertising slogan, “You are only as old as your glands” (Hamilton, 40). Interest in Brinkley can be traced in 1922, the same year as the publication of *The Gland Stealers*, in the Buster Keaton two-reeler, *Cops*. In one scene Keaton takes his thin, toothless and weary horse into a yard where a sign reads “Dr. Smith Goat Gland Specialist.” The horse emerges frisking and performing leaps. A downtrodden Keaton stands, looks at the sign, looks at the horse, looks down at himself, and with an embarrassed shrug re-enters the yard on his own.

A more serious account of a slightly different but analogous use of animal matter to aid rejuvenation is offered in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes short story, “The Creeping Man,” which was first printed in *The Strand Magazine* in 1923. Here the taking in of the animal comes to pass by other means, but the outcome is the same as in the other cultural representations of the rejuvenation experiments. Holmes’ puzzle centers on the question, “Why does Professor Presbury’s faithful wolf-hound, Roy, endeavour to bite him?” (164). The answer, it turns out, is that Professor Presbury is no longer fully Professor Presbury. In an attempt to regain his lost sexual potency, the Professor, an ageing academic, has been injecting himself with Dr. Lowenstein (“lion stone”) of Prague’s “strength-giving serum” from the black-faced langur, the “biggest and most human of the climbing monkeys” (183). While the Professor has gained vitality, he has begun to lose his humanity: “He was crawling, Mr Holmes — crawling! He was not quite on his hands and knees. I should rather say on his hands and feet, with his face sunk between his hands” (168). As Holmes notes at the story’s conclusion, “It was the monkey, not the Professor, whom Roy attacked” (184).

As in *The Heart of a Dog*, Conan Doyle links the experiment with different levels of chaos: the use of animal matter signifies human dominion, and yet what follows from it works in the other direction. The domestic disorder that first signaled the problem takes the form of the dog attempting to bite his master — reiterating the link between orderly dog ownership and orderly human status. In fact, the attempt to bite the master is imagined by Holmes as a parallel event to the master’s animalization. We thus begin with the human — uncompromised in its power and superiority — and we end with the creeping man. But, of course, we never really begin with the uncompromised human at all. Instead there is the vision of the impotent human attempting to regain what has been lost: there is unhumanning and rehumanning.

#### IV.

The recognition of the ease of this slide from human power to human frailty is presented in a particular way in *The Heart of a Dog*. About halfway through the novella the Professor’s assistant Bormenthal rejoices at the apparent success of the experiment: “Oh what a glorious confirmation of the theory of evolution! Oh, the sublime chain leading from a dog to Mendelejev the great

chemist!" (67). But six lines later his joy turns to despair as he realizes the wider implications of the Professor's discovery, when he recognizes that this chain is indeed an evolutionary one, and is not static like the classical Great Chain of Being. Bormenthal's assertion of human superiority, illustrated by the figure of "Mendelejev the great chemist," slides into a horror of what is still unknowable and as such is an acknowledgment of the limit of the human. If evolution provides a link between the dog and the great chemist, where is the boundary between animal and human? Where is the difference? Bormenthal writes: "Now as I walk along the streets I look at every dog I meet with secret horror. God knows what is lurking in their minds" (67). Suddenly — and logically — as human reason can transform a dog into a man, the specter of non-human subjectivity rears into view.

Such we might term a particularly post-Darwinian scepticism (on pre-Darwinian scepticism see Fudge, 2006). If there is an evolutionary link between a dog and a human, how can one say for sure that there is nothing going on in the animal's mind? Where in the second half of the sixteenth century Michel de Montaigne wondered philosophically, humanely, "When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?" (401), Bormenthal has Darwin to aid his contemplation of what Jacques Derrida has called "the abyssal limit" of the human (Derrida, 381). How do we know our dogs aren't contemplating us, rather than us contemplating them? The experiment, which should symbolize the absolute object status of the dog, in fact reveals that the separation of human and dog is impossible, and it is only a symbolic reading of Bulgakov's text that will miss this. Only an analysis that pays attention to the animal will recognize that what is being held up for scrutiny in *The Heart of a Dog* is not only homo sovieticus, but homo sapiens more generally. Bulgakov reveals the human to be an impotent, priapic, monstrous construction engaged in using animals as objects even while acknowledging the closeness of humans and non-humans. But as well as working within an existing philosophical framework, Bulgakov also seems to outline some of the connections made later by Althusser between the political sphere and human identity — a fact highlighted by the publication date of the English translation of *The Heart of a Dog*: political revolution also uproots personal identity.

In this novella, as in wider speculations about the nature of the human by Montaigne, Derrida, and numerous others, there lurks at the heart of the home, then, a most unhomely being: unhomely meaning, literally, unheimlich, uncanny — defined by Nicholas Royle as: "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. ... It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of the hearth and home" (1). What Bulgakov reveals to us is the most dislocated thing of all: the human. And sitting by its side, playing with it is, as ever, the animal.

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