

# *A Preliminary Study of the Intellectual Image in Bulgakov's Works*

## *- Exemplified by “Heart of a Dog”*

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**Abstract:** Mikhail Bulgakov is one of the renowned Soviet writers of the 20th century, whose works are noted for their imaginative and highly satirical nature. The intellectual image serves as one of the main character categories in the author's works. Bulgakov casts on these characters the ideology and social atmosphere of Soviet society in the early 20th century. “Heart of a Dog” is a milestone in Bulgakov's novel writing. The purpose of this essay is to take Professor Preobrazhensky as an example, to analyze the common points of the author's image of intellectuals who are extravagant, conservative, and obstinate, and to further analyze the tragic destiny of these intellectuals from the aspects of scientific ethics and personal worship.

**Keywords:** “Heart of a Dog”, Mikhail Bulgakov, Intellectual Image, Scientific Ethics, Personal Worship

## 1. Introduction

In Bulgakov's works, the figure of the intellectuals always occupies an important place, such as Professor Persikov in *The Fatal Eggs*, Berlioz and writers of MASSOLIT in *The Master and Margarita*, or Professor Preobrazhensky and Doctor Bormenthal in “Heart of a Dog”. These intellectuals are more than just vivid individuals; they are a cultured, educated, and advanced social class. They have much in common, but they have distinctive epochal and national traits due to cultural traditions and social peculiarities.

“Heart of a Dog” is a satirical work of great artistic and intellectual value, and it was written in January 1925 by Bulgakov. One of the novella's main characters, Professor Preobrazhensky, is a typical image of the Soviet intellectuals of the early 20th century, and the writer's depiction of the character is very impressive. This is a professor who lives in a favorable situation, loves science, and, at the same time, is a bit arrogant. To achieve his scientific goal of rejuvenation, he creates a man with a “dog's heart,” Sharikov, who ruined the professor's personal life and public fame. The ridiculous fate of the professor is not only for dramatic effect but also reflects the complex mental experience of Soviet intellectuals, including Soviet writers, such as pain and relief, uncertainty and persistence, skepticism and faith, as well as Bulgakov's far-reaching thoughts on the development of science and technology.

This essay will mainly take the image of Professor Preobrazhensky in “Heart of the Dog” as an example, supplemented by analogies with the images of intellectuals in other works, to analyze and summarize the characteristics of the images of intellectuals in Bulgakov's works and further reveal the importance of scientific and technological ethics that the writer wants to convey to the public through these figures and to expose the contradiction of the inappropriate coexistence of religiosity and anti-religiosity that exists in intellectuals.

## 2. Personal traits of intellectuals

Most of the intellectuals in Bulgakov's books have an excellent educational background, live under favorable conditions, are well-paid, and enjoy a high social status. At the same time, these people are selfish, focusing only on their careers and lives, separated from the whole society, and weak and incompetent, without their own opinions, afraid of taking responsibility.

In “Heart of A Dog”, Professor Preobrazhensky is a professional who specializes in eugenics, and he is an expert in transplantation, as well. He has built up a reputation in his field and boasts fame in Moscow,; many people come to him for medical and surgical purposes. He lives an ostentatious life, as he has a seven-room apartment, which is not accepted in Soviet society due to the nationalization of private property. However, the professor overlooks these regulations and behaves at discretion. Moreover, he also asks for another room to serve as a reading room, which is a rude requirement. The kitchen maid, Darya Petrovna, and Zina are responsible for the professor's diet and living. Professor Preobrazhensky's daily diet is highly delicate, as well. The ingredients are high-class, like thinly sliced salmon, pickled eels, and fresh cheese [1].

Moreover, the food is served in fine tableware and luxurious foreign wine. From the perspective of Sharik, the lavish life of the professor is just like The Gardens of Semiramis, which is unimaginable to him. Furthermore, Darya works in a relatively large kitchen, as in Sharik's eye, the kitchen is a kingdom, as there is a lot of kitchenware in it, and the food is delicious. Darya is just a normal cook, but she wears jewelry. It can be deduced that she also lives a decent life, not to mention Professor Preobrazhensky.

This kind of richness can also be seen in other Bulgakov's works. For instance, in Fatal Eggs, Professor Persikov is a famous zoologist. He also lives in a five-room apartment. Marya takes care of his daily life. While at work, he is assisted by Pankrat. Also, in The Master and Margarita, writers of MASSOLIT lead extravagant lives and gather daily at the House of Griboedov, discussing mundane topics such as today's meals and vacation resorts while having nothing to show for their literary endeavors.

Although these intellectuals enjoy a high reputation in society, they are close-minded and indifferent to everything except their field of study. They view themselves too highly and are arrogant. In “Heart of A Dog”, when the members of the house committee, led by Shvonder, asked the professor to buy some journals at a low price for the benefit of German children, he refused apathetically because, indeed, he has no interest and sympathy for what is happening. What matters to him is his research and his living standard. Moreover, his assistant, Doctor Bormental, also has a detached personality. After the failure of Professor Preobrazhensky's operation is disclosed, the professor feels disappointed and loses his reputation. But Bormental does not feel panicked or sorry at all. Instead, his first reaction is to mock his instructor, from which his hard-heartedness is shown.

Similarly, Professor Persikov is also a close-minded person despite his achievements in zoology. His detachment from society leads to the extinction of chickens and brings Moscow a disaster. Associate Professor Ivanov, being jealous of Persikov's talents, puts all the blame on Professor Persikov by making false accusations and trapping him when investigating the responsibility after the accident, which results in the death of Professor Persikov by the mob.

In addition, most of the intellectuals in Bulgakov's works suffer from weakness in their personality. When confronted with problems or disasters, they never find solutions or take responsibility. Instead, they try to circumvent these responsibilities. Preobrazhensky regarded Sharikov as an "unexpected laboratory creature." When Sharikov called the professor's dad, he tried desperately to dismiss his paternal relationship with Sharikov. In other words, he wanted to deny the fact that it was he who created Sharikov, a half-man, half-dog. When Professor Preobrazhensky discovered that Sharikov acted like a villain and bothered his life, he never thought of teaching him the right behaviors and correct worldview. He became disappointed and helpless. Under Bormental's instigation, he decided to kill Sharikov, which is irresponsible and ruthless. Likewise, when the snakes had caused irreversible consequences in Moscow, Professor Persikov still argued that he was innocent and blamed others. In *The Master and Margarita*, the chairman of MASSOLIT, Berlioz, reckoned that Jesus never existed, claiming to be an atheist. But when he faced Woland's trials, he underwent a mental breakdown, demonstrating that he doesn't have his claims and his beliefs are tenuous.

### 3. The Problem of Scientific Ethics

As a former trained doctor, Bulgakov has unique insights into the field of natural sciences and was aware of the problems of scientific and technological ethics as early as the beginning of the 20th century. The writer's scientific fiction imagination is based on reality, so it has a highly realistic significance. The writer indirectly expresses his viewpoints and reflects reality through the free and broad imagination dimension of science fiction themes.

The author emphasizes his work's consistency of scientific spirit and ethics [2]. Scientific exploration should be able to undergo ethical and moral supervision and scrutiny, and scientific and technological production and scientific and technological experiments and the relevant scientific research must follow scientific and technological ethics. Bulgakov espouses the view of natural evolution and believes that scientific experiments should not violate the rules of nature but should conform to nature and objectively look at the laws of nature's development. In addition, human beings should not be too arrogant about their scientific knowledge and abuse and misuse the scientific knowledge they have acquired, or it may lead to irrecoverable tragedies [3]. Meanwhile, if one wants to create something new for the benefit of humankind, he should first test his creativity and feasibility; otherwise, it may lead to the antithesis of his original purpose.

In "Heart of a Dog", Professor Preobrazhensky created a man with a "dog's heart" like Sharikov, and in the end, turned him into a dog, which is a reversal of "natural selection" and "ethical selection" in the process of human civilization [4]. The professor's first transplantation of Chugunkin's organs into Sharik violates natural evolution. In contrast, the second murder of Sharikov and his transformation into a puppy is tantamount to a criminal act, depriving the most basic humanity. Thus, the writer expresses in the end through the words of Blumenthal: instead of groping his way along in parallel with nature, the researcher forces the issue and lifts the bottom of the curtain: there, you can have Sharikov and put him in your porridge for breakfast [5], which means a scientific researcher will suffer if he disobeys natural rules. Also, in *The Fatal Eggs*, an unprecedentedly sharp frost prevented people from a great disaster. In this way, the author wanted to emphasize the power of nature, the fact that it is nature that averts the spread of disaster through timely intervention and correction of behavior that is against the laws of nature. Whether it is Preobrazhensky's life being wrecked by Sharikov in "Heart of a Dog" or the fact that both Korotkov, the protagonist of *Diaboliad*, and Prof. Persikov, the protagonist of *The Fatal Eggs*, end in death, their tragic endings are in part because they did not take moral responsibility for their scientific experiments. Curiosity about ourselves and the world around us is an innate instinct, and it is this instinct that drives the development of science and technology, but how can science be applied in such a way that it does not devastate human society? The writer proposes a moral imperative: that man should be morally

responsible for his actions, which can, to some extent, make the consequences of scientific experimentation more manageable.

#### 4. Personality cult in “Heart of a Dog”

Moreover, “Heart of a Dog” was written after the failure of the Russian Revolution in 1905. The failure of this revolution urged Soviet scholars, led by Bulgakov, to rethink and self-criticize the class in which they were [6]. According to the author, the biggest flaw of the intellectuals is the duality between religiosity and anti-religiosity. On the one hand, after the exposure to the atheistic ideas of the Enlightenment, Soviet intellectuals abandoned conventional religious ideas to a large extent and substituted them with atheistic humanism. On the other hand, those intellectuals were prone to become excessively heroic due to the limitations of their class: they were isolated from society and the public. They reckoned that they could take the place of God and salvage the world. This is a process of self-deification. The intellectuals constantly exaggerate their role and influence, placing themselves in the position of God.

In “Heart of a Dog”, the author expressed this point by the figure Sharik. In Sharik's eyes, Professor Preobrazhensky is like a god. It is not only because the professor gives Sharik food; thus, the DogDog admires him. This is also a reflection of the author's inner world. It shows the professor's boundless trust in himself and his indulgence. Also, the last name of the professor, Preobrazhensky, has a religious connotation of transfiguration and points to the professor's area of specialization in rejuvenation and his subconscious wish to play God [7].

In the following stage of self-deification, they become undisciplined in all matters, including personal life and behaviors. The individual heroism of intellectuals frees themselves from the shackles of morality, believing that their actions are based on the goal of saving society and people. Thus, all their behaviors are justified. They assume that they have the right not only to gain and dispose of property at their wish but also to determine the life of other people as well [8]. Professor Preobrazhensky transplanted the organs of Chugunkin into Sharik to achieve his goal of rejuvenation. Though Chugunkin had passed away because of a fight, the professor still had no right to use his corpse.

Furthermore, it is crueller of him to kill Sharikov with Doctor Bormenthal when he finds the experiment has failed and Sharikov ruined his life. In the organ transplant operation, Professor Preobrazhensky's ferocity is also shown. He acted maniacally and insensitively, quite different from his usual image of a respectable intellectual. His face was disgusting and cold, and his eyes shot out a sharp light like a murderer, a sated vampire. This, indeed, is a symbol of dehumanization and distortion of traditional worldviews. The professor appears to be more a demon than a deity [9]. It could be argued that the professor's operation was conducted at the cost of other's lives. Though at the end of the novella, he told Doctor Bormenthal not to overstep the moral norms under any circumstance, which could be seen as his introspection and regret, in most cases, he did not feel guilty about his behaviors. Instead, he felt more gloomy about the failure of his experiment. From his perspective, his experiment was meaningful and could bring humankind benefits. Therefore, it is utterly feasible for him to carry on this human experiment.

In the end, Bulgakov warns the reader through the protagonist's despondent ending that this kind of rampant, bottomless personal worship is never acceptable, and soviet intellectuals should be practical, keep in touch with the public, and undergo a more radical transformation of their worldview.

#### 5. Conclusion

On the one hand, Bulgakov inherits the tradition of satirical art of Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin and the tradition of Russian realism, which takes social reality as the main object of presentation and

criticism. On the other hand, his novels are completely of magical realism and have a humor effect. The tragic fate of these intellectuals is partly due to their character: although they love academics, they are closed-minded, incapable of listening to other people's opinions, and egotistical. While conducting scientific experiments, they failed to abide by ethics and respect the laws of nature. At the same time, after being exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment, the intellectuals' anti-religious nature gradually manifested into fanatical and blind personal heroism, which led to their tragedy. Blind personal heroism, which was the catalyst leading to their tragedy. Through the grotesque and ironic depiction of the tragic fate of these figures, the writer is lamenting their misfortunes and enraging their indifference, expressing his care and concern for the whole society and the era.

Admittedly, the study's limitation is an ideological gap between the Chinese and Western researchers. The supportive evidence is not ample, as well. Considerably, more work will be needed to make the study more innovative and the analysis more in-depth.

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