RECOGNIZING THE FACE OF THE CLASS ENEMY:
REASSESSING THE PROSPECTS OF THE SOVIET EXPERIMENT IN THE NEP
LITERARY CONTEXTS OF BULGAKOV’S HEART OF A DOG AND
MAYAKOVSKY’S THE BEDBUG

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ABSTRACT

DIANE ELLIOTT CATON: Recognizing the Face of the Class Enemy: Reassessing the Prospects of the Soviet Experiment in the NEP Literary Contexts of Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* and Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug* (Under the direction of Beth Holmgren)

This comparative analysis focuses on Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* (1925) and Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug* (1929). After providing a brief historical and literary context for these two ideologically opposed authors, this thesis explores both works’ representations of the 1920s intelligentsia specialist and his role as a behavioral model and catalyst in the revolutionary evolution of the mythic new Soviet man. Additionally, the fate of Bulgakov’s newly constructed Soviet proletarian specimen Comrade Sharikov is considered in reference to that of the defrosted 1929 Prisypkin in Mayakovsky’s vision of the scientifically regulated Soviet utopia of the future. Ultimately, this thesis aims to explain the surprisingly similar tone of ambivalent acceptance of the New Economic Policy (NEP) status quo that emerges in both of these works within the framework of Bulgakov’s unaltered prerevolutionary perspective and Mayakovsky’s growing disillusionment with the course of the Soviet state.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the sixth scene of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s satirical play The Bedbug: A Fairy Tale Comedy [Klop: Feericheskaia komedia] (1929), a scientist from a utopian 1979 rattles off a list of B-words that, in his estimation, belong to an incomprehensible, obsolete language of the past: “Beer, bureaucracy, God-seeking, bagels, Bohemia, Bulgakov.”¹ Mayakovsky’s inclusion of his contemporary, Mikhail Bulgakov, in this list is not surprising; indeed, it is yet another in a series of his searing public jabs at Bulgakov. The deep ideological rift between Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky (1893-1930) and Mikhail Afanasievič Bulgakov (1891-1940) is anecdotally documented by Valentin Kataev in his Grass of Oblivion [Trava zabven’ia] and referenced by a range of sources;² Proffer in her 1984 Bulgakov: Life and Work convincingly presents the two as diametrically opposed ideological foes.³ Certainly by 1929 “Bulgakov” had become virtually synonymous with “bourgeois” for Mayakovsky and, consequently, emblematic of the pre-revolutionary bourgeois ideals Mayakovsky was working to replace.

¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, Klop, in Sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh, Tom 10, (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Pravda, 1979), 39, “Буза, бюрократизм, богоискательство, бублики, богема, Булгаков…”

² V. P. Kataev, Trava zabven’ia, (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo VAGRIUS, 1998), 377-382. Proffer, Sahni, Milne, and Brown all address this relationship in their biographies.

Yet by this year the two men were waging a concomitant artistic-ideological battle against a common enemy: Stalin’s increasingly restrictive and prescriptive cultural policies. Confronted by the stifling literary regulations of the early Stalinist period, the ideological trajectories of Mayakovsky’s and Bulgakov’s lives began to converge in an unexpected way. Whereas the conservative revolutionary skeptic Bulgakov’s worst fears were merely confirmed, Mayakovsky’s idealistic hopes were challenged and undermined. Bulgakov understood his eventual resignation to the crushing implementation of socialist ideals as a necessity. Yet Mayakovsky, the self-proclaimed leader of Russian Futurism, had billed himself the adman of the Soviet experiment and his late ideological turmoil and wavering conveyed utter disillusionment and great disappointment. I contend that Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* (1925) and Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug* (1929), while written only four years apart, offer an intriguing, complex demonstration of their ideological convergence, especially in their final assessments of the present state of Soviet affairs and the grim prospects for the future of the Soviet experiment and the creation of the new Soviet man. In an unexpected parallel with Bulgakov’s conclusions in *Heart of a Dog*, Mayakovsky’s dashed hopes and idealistic visions of the future in *The Bedbug* are replaced by an ambivalent acceptance of the 1920s New Economic Policy (NEP) proletariat as the achievement of the working class’s maximum potential in terms of cultural and moral development. I aim to show that this unlikely ideological convergence was the product not only of a shared disenchantment with NEP, albeit for different reasons, but also the imagined implications of the early days of Stalinism, which completed the total debasement of Mayakovsky’s revolutionary ideals and dashed the hopes of *the* poet of the Revolution.
A brief comparison of the ideological trends conveyed in Bulgakov’s and Mayakovsky’s early works in tandem with an examination of the NEP atmosphere of the 1920s will help us better appreciate why and how *Heart of a Dog* and *Bedbug* approach, from opposite directions, a common sense of ambivalence and bleak vision of the future prospects of the Soviet experiment. By examining how both works depict Soviet attempts to bring about the spontaneous emergence of a powerful and self-aware working class of new Soviet men to the fictional experiments described in these two works, I will assess each author’s prognosis for the future of the Soviet endeavor. Turning to their texts, I then will demonstrate how the conditions of NEP there depicted expose the ideological and social weaknesses of the working class. I will examine the figure of the NEP specialist as a model and judge of proper morality, behavior, and ideology and investigate the prospects for his ability to serve either as a scientific or poetic guide to the proletariat. By analyzing the negative results of the experiments conducted in both works, I hope to discern the focus and implications of the authors’ carefully crafted satirical social criticism. If both authors initially agree that NEP represents a counterproductive ideological compromise, what do they see as the corresponding ideal? To what extent do these works suggest that that ideal is attainable? How can this surprising ideological convergence be explained by the authors’ own experiences in the Soviet Union, especially with the advent of Stalinism? Accepting that these two works ultimately harmonize in their disparaging outlook on the Soviet experiment, how can we account for their wildly different fates in the Soviet Union?
Mayakovsky vs. Bulgakov

The ideological rift between Mayakovsky and Bulgakov derived from both authors’ class backgrounds and predated both the revolution and their mutual acquaintance. In the wake of the 1917 Revolution, though, the disagreement between the two became even more pronounced and figured more prominently in the lives of both. Bulgakov was, from childhood, well read in the works and approaches of such cultural icons of the past as Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gogol, and Dostoevsky. These were the same cultural idols that the Futurists, Mayakovsky’s revolutionary band of avant-garde painters and poets from 1909 to 1914, proclaimed “more incomprehensible than hieroglyphics” in 1912. While Bulgakov was gleaning a pre-revolutionary Russian cultural education by reading Gogol (1809-1852), Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889), and Chekhov (1860-1904), Mayakovsky was avidly pursuing his own distinctively Soviet political education even as he sat in Butyrka Prison. The conflict between these two authors, consequently, reflected the ongoing contest between traditionalism and Modernism.

In the aftermath of the Soviets’ rise to power, Bulgakov’s pre-revolutionary ideals soon contributed to his marginalization in Soviet society, while, by contrast, the Bolshevik Revolution brought Mayakovsky willingly into the mainstream. Mayakovsky’s pre-revolutionary avant-garde work with the Futurists and some of his most well-known poems, including Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy [Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia] (1913), A Cloud in Trousers [Oblako v shtanakh] (1915), and The Backbone Flute [Fleita pozvonochnika] (1915), glorify the themes of revolution and, more specifically, the role of

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4 Maiakovskii, “Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu,” 617, “Академия и Пушкин непонятнее гиероглифов…”
the artist and poet as a cultural leader and tool for transforming Soviet society. He aggressively sought to combine his ideology and his art in service of the revolutionary aims of the Soviet state, and he castigated the pre-revolutionary bourgeois ideals and icons of the White Russians, for whom Bulgakov was an unwavering ally and voice of support. Bulgakov’s *ars gratia artis* appreciation of his literary work was directly opposed to Mayakovsky’s Futurist ideals and was increasingly at odds with the Soviets’ cultural policies, which demanded ideologically purposeful creation and contributions from Soviet artists. While Mayakovsky saw himself as a sort of superhuman interlocutor, spokesman for the masses, and a catalyst for and product of revolution, Bulgakov, an unabashed bourgeois intellectual, never abandoned his pre-revolutionary conviction that the proletariat could not evolve into an ideal class of world citizens. Thus, in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the dichotomy between their two outlooks grew wider and more antagonistic. Indeed, by 1925, Mayakovsky was already discussing the applications of Soviet art and the expectations for Soviet artists with many of Bulgakov’s well-known enemies, including O. S. Litovsky and Leopold Averbach of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), whose ranks he would ultimately join as he signed on for the ideological fight against such “neo-bourgeois” artists as Bulgakov.⁵

Mayakovsky’s artistic ideals fell almost naturally in sync with the political and social goals of the new Soviet regime, and he was an avid supporter of the Soviet undertaking. He published regularly in the journal of the Soviet Commissariat of Education, *Art of the Commune [Iskusstvo kommuny]*, and worked with his former Futurist colleagues to establish the Left Front of Art (LEF), an organization of writers whose chief aim was to

⁵ Proffer, 251.
“institutionalize and rationalize the alliance of the former futurist avant-garde with the proletarian state” and, by so doing, to serve the revolutionary Soviet state through their work. In the 1920s he actively participated in the collective endeavor of constructing a socialist state: he traveled throughout the Soviet Union and around the world performing agitational and activist verse, authored advertising slogans and jingles, and produced propagandistic graphic art for the state.

Although Valentin Kataev recounts an intense meeting of the two authors, including their witty repartee, as Proffer notes, Kataev is often unreliable and one cannot conclude based solely on this anecdote whether Bulgakov and Mayakovsky were ever in direct or open disagreement or competition. Nonetheless, their works amply express an ongoing ideological disagreement. In his writing and his daily life, Bulgakov was increasingly at odds with the ideals of the Futurists and Mayakovsky was at the vanguard of Futurism and its subsequent permutations. Both authors were absolutely convinced of their respective positions: Mayakovsky stood on the side of the Bolshevik Revolution and looked to the future, while Bulgakov never abandoned his pre-revolutionary social, moral, and cultural ideals. By the late 1920s, Mayakovsky was no doubt ready to toss Bulgakov off the “steamship of modernity” just as he had jettisoned classics, including Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy in 1912. Bulgakov’s work, specifically Days of the Turbins [Dni Turbinykh],


7 Kataev, 377-382; Proffer, 251-253.

was the sort of bourgeois entertainment that Mayakovsky ridiculed in *The Face of the Class Enemy* [*Litso klassovogo vraga*] (1928). In addition, Mayakovsky participated actively in the vicious public campaign against Bulgakov led by the Soviet press in 1928 and 1929. In his usually unapologetic, declamatory style, Mayakovsky decried Bulgakov and his work publicly and in his own writing on many occasions.

In 1929 Mayakovsky’s dramas *Bedbug* and *Bathhouse (Bania)* were staged as Bulgakov’s plays were being systematically banned.

Rehearsals of Mayakovsky’s first play began immediately after its approval by the Soviet of theater (30 December), and the premier took place on 13 February 1929 – a timetable unthinkable for Bulgakov! It can be supposed that Bulgakov attended one of the first performances. *Bedbug* ran virtually daily to the end of the season; in fall, the play was staged by the GBDT (Gosudarstvennyi bol’shoi dramaticheskii teatr) affiliate in Leningrad (where Bulgakov had not managed to stage a single one of his plays for more than two seasons).

Thus, the rivalry between the two authors grew tangible and personal as the Soviet authorities tightened their regulation of literature and hailed Mayakovsky as *the* Poet of the

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10 Brown, 311, 351. Milne reproduces a 1928 cartoon depicting a cockroach from Bulgakov’s *Flight* pulling the train of the Moscow Art Theater off its tracks (147).


12 Chudakova, 312, “Первая пьеса Маяковского сразу после утверждения ее Советом театра (30 декабря) начала репетироваться, и 13 февраля 1929 г. – в немыслимый для пьес Булгакова срок! – состоялась премьера. Можно предполагать, что Булгаков был на одном из первых спектаклей. До конца сезона «Клоп» шел почти ежедневно; осенью пьеса была поставлена филиалом ГБДТ (Государственный большой драматический театр) в Ленинграде (там, где Булгакову так и не удалось за истекшие два с лишним сезона поставить ни одной своей пьесы).”
Revolution. The Futurist’s activist artistic embrace of the Bolshevik party line guaranteed Mayakovsky the sort of political support and freedom that Bulgakov could never hope to garner. According to Kataev, who attended one of the early readings of *Bathhouse* with Meyerhold, Mayakovsky was praised by attendees not only as the next Pushkin but also the next Molière: “After the reading [of *Bathhouse*], as usual, debates began, which, at someone’s prompting, led to talk that, thank God, a new Molière had finally appeared among us.”

Mayakovsky, it seemed, was encroaching upon, challenging, and superseding Bulgakov in every realm:

> Bulgakov hears this comparison of Mayakovsky with Molière not only from the mouth of Meyerhold, who is as distant from him as Mayakovsky himself, but also from the mouths of his new associates Kataev and Olesha. And the relation of MXAT’s young actors – with whom Bulgakov’s theatrical career was connected – toward the entire situation could not have left him indifferent. “Molière?... I’ll show you how Molière really was and who today can be rightfully compared with him.”

If Mayakovsky dismissed Bulgakov as his contemporary on the steamship of modernity, then Bulgakov was equally loath to admit Mayakovsky, whom he acknowledged as a great poet, into the ranks of the classics like Pushkin, Gogol, and Moliere. Chudakova suggests that this comparison was the impetus for Bulgakov’s beginning work on the play *Molière* in 1929 and Gorky’s subsequent commissioning of Bulgakov to write a biography of

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13 Ibid., 325-326, “После чтения (*Бани*), как водится, начались дебаты, которые, с чьей-то легкой руки, свелись, в общем, к тому, что, слава богу, среди нас наконец появился новый Мольер.”

14 Ibid., 326, “Сравнение Маяковского с Мольером Булгаков слышит не только из уст Мейерхольда, столь же далекого ему, как сам Маяковский, но из уст своих недавних приятелей – Катаева и Оlesi; не могло оставить его равнодушным и отношение ко всей ситуации молодых актеров МХАТа, с которыми связана была его театральная судьба. «Мольер?.. Я покажу вам, каков был действительно Мольер и кто сегодня может сравниваться с ним по справедливости…»”

15 Ibid., 327.
Molière for his series *The Lives of Remarkable People*. The play explored the fate of Moliere and resonated with Bulgakov’s own ongoing artistic battles with censors and the dangers inherent in subjugating art to tyrannical power. Bulgakov’s dramatic exploration of the French playwright, one of his favorites, was summarily banned in early 1930 to Bulgakov’s immense disappointment, and the editors of Gorky’s series deemed Bulgakov’s first-person narrative of Molière’s life too creative for their historical purposes.

Interestingly, Mayakovsky and Bulgakov both seemed to be at once strangely fixated on one another, each taking the other as the face of an otherwise amorphous foe. In one of his final notes, recorded by his wife Elena Sergeevna, Bulgakov reminded himself to “read Mayakovsky as one should.” Bulgakov perceived Mayakovsky as his ideological adversary but respected him as an author and was quite upset by his death in 1930. Not convinced by Mayakovsky’s poetic farewell, he explains that his “love boat had smashed against convention.” Bulgakov asked his friends, “Just because of that? No, impossible. There has to be something else here.” Still pondering Mayakovsky’s death at the end of the year,

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16 Ibid., 326-328.

17 Proffer, 315; 367-371.

18 Chudakova, 479, “Маяковского прочесть как следует.”


Bulgakov wrote his own poetic response in “Funérailles:” “Why is your boat cast / Prematurely into anchorage?”

The impact of Mayakovsky’s suicide in April 1930, however, was not merely emotional or personal. The fateful telephone call of 18 April 1930, in which Stalin promised Bulgakov a “favorable answer” to his letter of 28 March, assured Bulgakov a position, if only as an assistant director, at the Moscow Art Theater, and saved him from the streets, destitution, and death, which he described as his only other recourse in a letter to the authorities. While the immediate results of this phone call were clear and tangible, it is difficult to say whether, as is so often suggested in sources, “Stalin restored Bulgakov to creative life.” The leader’s personal intervention did serve as a reassurance for Bulgakov and a tacit protection from the dangers of arrest and execution that became widespread in the 1930s. Bulgakov’s position, consequently, was somewhat precarious, and he was conscious of his indebtedness and necessary obligation to the Soviet authorities. He spent the remainder of his life struggling to subvert this stifling position of dependence in pursuit of his own creative endeavors, especially in the novel Master and Margarita.

Bulgakov’s ideological disagreement with Mayakovsky reflected his general disenchantment dating from the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. A product of the Russian educated class, Bulgakov from a very young age was steeped in the tradition of nineteenth-

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21 Sahni 184; Chudakova, 348, “Почему твоя лодка брошена / Раньше времени на причал?”

22 Chudakova, 339-340, “…я прошу Советское Правительство поступить со мной как оно найдет нужным, но как-нибудь поступить, потому что у меня, драматурга, написавшего 5 пьес, известного в СССР и за границей, налицо в данный момент нищета, улица, и гибель.”

century Russian literature and highbrow art, including opera and theater. Just as Bulgakov never abandoned these models of artistic creation, so he remained staunchly convinced of the social ideals espoused therein and his own understanding of the immutability of human nature. The growing conflict between his pre-revolutionary social ideals and the new Soviet ethos fueled Bulgakov’s ongoing battle to uphold his literary integrity in the face of censors’ demands for ideologically pure and purposeful works of art. Ultimately, Bulgakov’s unwillingness to concede to the prescriptions of the Soviet authorities rendered him virtually unemployable in the Soviet Union.

Bulgakov’s work quickly gained renown abroad for its facile humor and sardonic satire, which spotlighted and critiqued the grim realities of Soviet life in the wake of the October 1917 Revolution. In the early 1920s he wrote many humorous sketches and short stories, which appeared in *Gudok (The Whistle)*, the newspaper of the railway workers’ trade union, and *Nakanune (The Eve)*, a Berlin-based Russian paper. While Bulgakov gained fame as a feuilletonist, he encountered great difficulty publishing his other works. After significant content concessions to editors, Bulgakov managed to publish only the first part of “Notes on the Cuff” [*Zapiski na manzhetakh*] in *Nakanune* in 1922. The work was finally banned in 1924. In 1925 a collection of Bulgakov’s stories was released as *D’iavoliada* [*D’iavoliada*], which contained, among other stories, “The Adventures of Chichikov” [*Pokhozhdenia Chichikova*], in which Gogol’s characters reappear in NEP-era Moscow of the 1920s and flourish in an environment that they find strikingly similar to their own nineteenth-century world. It also included the novella *The Fatal Eggs* [*Rokovye iaitsa*], in which the scientist Persikov’s discovery of a transformative ray is co-opted by the Soviet

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24 Proffer, 77.
state and mistakenly used to enhance reptilian eggs, thereby creating a plague of enormous man-eating anacondas and crocodiles on a collective farm in a future 1928 Soviet Republic. The scientist and his institute are destroyed in the ensuing mass hysteria, and the ray and its capabilities are lost with the scientist, who was specially privileged to understand and control it. Bulgakov’s foray into the genre of science fiction and exploration of the scientist-hero began with Persikov in *The Fatal Eggs* and continued with Preobrazhensky in *Heart of a Dog*, which was written the same year but first published in Russian only abroad in 1968. Indeed, *D’iavoliada* was Bulgakov’s only work to be published during his lifetime, and it cemented Bulgakov’s reputation for powerful satire and devilish irony in the Soviet Union even as it attracted mainly negative attention from Soviet critics.

Bulgakov’s pre-revolutionary sentiments precluded his ever fitting neatly into the ideologically driven Soviet art of the 1920s. Mayakovsky became the poster boy of the future, and Bulgakov was condemned by critics and contemporaries (including Mayakovsky) for his bourgeois ideals and behaviors as well as his pre-revolutionary cultural aspirations and artistic models, which stood in direct opposition to the Soviets’ proletarian priorities. He was labeled “yesterday’s man” and dismissed by critics as one of Russia’s “former writers” already in 1921. Bulgakov’s skepticism and reservations about the Revolution trapped him in a precarious situation that cast his own survival into the balance. Reality only ever confirmed his own inklings, and he weathered the Soviet state as a disappointed but resigned participant, intent only on pursuing his own “brilliant work.” On the other hand, Mayakovsky’s energetic optimism was largely self-sustained; he grew daunted by the reality

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25 Milne, 1.

26 Ibid., 20, “блестящая работа.”
of a Soviet state increasingly mired in bureaucratic rhetoric, speaking an empty language, and bogged down in *byt*, the morass of minutiae that constitutes daily life. Mayakovsky’s idealism poised him for the disillusionment that culminated in his 1929 suicide. Mayakovsky’s art, already inextricably linked to his persona, finally became so intertwined with the course of revolution that its failure on the sociopolitical front spelled self-destruction.

The Sociopolitical Context of NEP

Both Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* and Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug* focus on building a better proletariat, a task that was also an integral component of the contemporary zeitgeist in the early Soviet Union. Both works are set in the present context of the Soviet 1920s and both casts of characters reflect a NEP-era social order. In order to understand this social hierarchy and to place these two experiment-based works in the context of the Soviets’ own grand endeavor, I explore here the aims of the overarching Soviet attempt to create the new Soviet man and to gauge how NEP represented a concession to the undeniable failures of that effort on economic and social fronts. Also, an examination of the political atmosphere of the NEP era will help us understand the origins of the neo-bourgeois class derided by both authors and the NEP specialists whose intellectual expertise afforded them special privileges under NEP and who figure prominently as social judges in both of these works.

NEP was undertaken in earnest by the Soviet state in 1921 as a calculated retreat from the blatant economic failures of War Communism. Recognizing that the Soviet grand experiment was progressing too fast, Lenin acknowledged the need for some temporary concessions to capitalism as part of a “long series of gradual transformations into a large-
scale-socialized economy.**27 NEP allowed for an increased measure of private ownership, even while the state would maintain sole control over the core industries of production. Peasant farmers, under NEP, were allowed to sell their products independently. Market prices prevailed as independent enterprise cropped up, selling farm products as well as manufactured articles for personal profit. NEP thus fueled the emergence of a sort of neo-bourgeois class of new independently wealthy consumers, who frequented fancy restaurants in Moscow but whose very existence called into question the progress of the Soviet socialist experiment. Professor Preobrazhensky’s patients in Heart of a Dog belong to the neo-bourgeois class that Prisypkin in Bedbug is about to join. Bulgakov presents this stratum of NEP-men as a token of the imminent failure of the revolution, and Mayakovsky pillories it as an inexcusable ideological sellout that threatened the future of the entire Soviet socialist endeavor.

Lenin’s conception of NEP advocated collaboration not only with private enterprise but also with the intelligentsia and cooperation among classes, an apparent ideological compromise that he justified as a necessary intermediate step in the building of socialism.**28 In addition to the economic concessions to private entrepreneurs and industrialists, NEP also restored some power to the intellectuals and specialists. Members of the “old intelligentsia” employed in the military, science, medicine, education, literature, and the arts were allowed and prompted to “resume their former occupations.”**29 As a result, the innovative and

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influential work of Russia’s intellectual elite continued and flourished in the early Soviet Union. Indeed, Leonard Schapiro once referred to NEP as the “golden age of Marxist thought in the USSR.”

Bulgakov’s Professor Preobrazhensky is a prototypical NEP specialist whose scientific expertise affords him a measure of social, economic, and political liberty; during NEP his scientific scholarship legitimizes his pre-revolutionary lifestyle and value system despite their apparent conflict with the new Soviet ethic. NEP accordingly recognized the literary elite’s skills and abilities as indispensable to the construction not only of socialism but also to the formation and cultural edification of the new Soviet man. Mayakovsky’s Oleg Bard receives special status and authority as a NEP artist; he cynically promotes NEP-era materialism with impunity. As a result, NEP literary critics tolerated both entrenched pre-revolutionary authors as Bulgakov as well as promising new Soviet writers as Mayakovsky. With the institution of the First Five-Year Plan, however, these intellectual skills were more forcibly harnessed in service of the Soviet state as the ideologically unforgiving poetics of socialist realism began to dictate artistic style as well as theme.

NEP was necessitated, at least in part, by the need to carve a unified, motivated, and culturally self-aware industrial working class out of an amorphous, dispersed, and largely peasant proletariat, the key to the theoretical success of the Soviet experiment. According to Lenin, the ultimate social goal of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic was to free workers from the onus of their own history of repression and exploitation under capitalism by empowering them as they deserved and wanted. In the wake of the 1917 Revolution, however, a revolutionary working class had still not made itself manifest. Thus, not only were the


30 Ibid., 34-35.
Soviet authorities faced with the daunting task of building socialism, which demanded the economic concessions of NEP, but also now needed to mold the Soviet man, which demanded the cultural compromises of NEP.

The task of creating a new Soviet man was not easy, mostly because the theoretical Soviet man was supposed to emerge organically with the ascension of socialism. The social consciousness of the proletariat had merely to be awakened; the raw material for the proletariat had to be shaped and molded into the Soviet ideal. The new Soviet man would be both the product of the Soviet experiment and its subsequent promulgator. He would be at once the created and the creator. Thus, the new Soviet man was, as Elena Gomel explains in her article on Soviet science fiction, “supposed to be both humdrum and sublime, both immeasurably better than, and the same as, the average citizen… [he] had to hold fast to his humanity while at the same time transcending it.” He was destined to become the hero of science fiction because he was by definition supernatural, and this leap toward human engineering was not difficult in an era eager to test the bounds of humanity as it embraced science as its new religion. As soon became apparent on many fronts, the evolution of the new Soviet man (if it were actually occurring) was progressing too slowly. As with all of the other processes in the early Soviet Union, production would have to be accelerated, and the new Soviet man would have to be actively created.

The role of the new Soviet man with his impossible unification of blatant paradoxes was much more easily realized in literature than in real life. The new Soviet man described by Gomel as the stuff of science fiction is a precursor of the positive hero of socialist realism.

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(the accepted method of Soviet literature adopted by the writers’ union in 1932), who must transcend the “‘spontaneity’/‘consciousness’ dialectic” that Clark identifies in The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual. Clark argues that the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of historical dialecticism based on class struggle (cf. Lenin’s “The Three Main Points”) can be more abstractly conceived as an historical contest between purposeful, politically-conscious actions and sporadic, anarchic actions, including strikes and popular uprisings, which can be attributed to “vast impersonal historical forces” rather than to conscious, deliberate motivation. Thus, “historical progress occurs not by resolving class conflict but through the working-out of the so-called spontaneity/consciousness dialectic.” Accordingly, the end of history, i.e., communism, is reflected in the ultimate resolution of the dialectic and the triumph of consciousness. That final realization of “consciousness,” however, will be such that “it will no longer be in opposition to ‘spontaneity,’” and the inherent paradox is overcome. The creation of the new Soviet man was fraught with this same challenge: to combine in creation and realization the past and the present, the conscious and the spontaneous. Accordingly, the task for socialist realist literature, as Clark observes, was to set up models or “official myths” that would serve as “lessons in the working-out of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic,” to create positive heroes as prototypes for the new Soviet man. The same challenges that faced the Soviet state as historical dialecticism thus

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33 Ibid., 15.

34 Ibid., 15-16.

35 Ibid., 16.
were posed as challenges to Soviet literature in the form of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic described by Katerina Clark.

The moral and intellectual development of the new Soviet man remained a secondary and more problematic question in the face of the daunting fundamental task of creating the man himself; nonetheless, the mental edification of the new Soviet man is at the core of Mayakovsky’s and Bulgakov’s assessments of the potential of the Soviet experiment. According to the model postulated by Marx and Engels, “a humane socialist morality would prevail” after an interim period during which an adversarial, “ruthless proletarian morality” would predominate. In Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*, for example, Shvonder and Comrade Sharikov embody this ruthless proletarian morality that Preobrazhensky cannot abide and which his experiment suggests cannot be justified by the promise of the elusive humane socialist morality. For Mayakovsky, however, the ever-narrowing definitions of this imposed humane socialist morality allow for the creation of his dystopian, 1979 future. Indeed, with the ascension of Stalin to power, NEP was replaced in 1928 with rapid industrialization and aggressive collectivization under the First Five-Year Plan. The Five-Year Plans effectively refocused the Soviets on the future, but Mayakovsky was already leery of a course he saw leading to an authoritarian philistine future. *Heart of a Dog* and *Bedbug* isolate the inherent paradox between the Nietzschean Soviet endeavor to create the new Soviet man and the practical constraints of the current Soviet reality, which demanded compromises like NEP. Likewise, both works’ experimental premises link them directly to the overarching Soviet socialist aim.

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Bulgakov and Mayakovsky explore the potential of the Soviet-led revolution of the spirit to bring about the spontaneous emergence of the new Soviet man, a goal to which Bulgakov never ascribed any meaning and in which Mayakovsky by 1929 was already losing faith. Their works present very compelling experimental versions of the new Soviet man, in conjunction with acrid social satire and critique. In the following analysis of these two works, I pursue a comparison of 1) both authors’ depictions of the NEP environment of the 1920s and its profiteers and 2) their characterizations of these NEP-men in contrast to NEP intellectual specialists in the case of Preobrazhensky in *Heart of a Dog* and the elite as reflected in Oleg Bard and the elite Renaissance women of *Bedbug*.

How do NEP-era specialists judge the prospects of the Soviet experiment in these two works? Do these specialists promise any succor to the floundering Soviet experiment? How does Mayakovsky’s comparison of NEP with his 1979 future dystopian counter Bulgakov’s consistent valorization of the past in Professor Preobrazhensky? How do these works’ disparate approaches lead Mayakovsky and Bulgakov to a common conclusion on the fate of the Soviet experiment? In answering these questions I aim to provide an insightful comparative analysis, which will yield many interesting and unexpected plot, characterization, and thematic similarities. By placing these two works in the historical framework of NEP and the larger conception of the Soviet experiment, I will also attempt to elucidate both authors’ perspectives on the future course of the Soviet endeavor and to explain why Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug* was staged the very year it was written while Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* was deemed unpublishable in the Soviet Union.
The task of creating a new Soviet man emerges as a theme of Bulgakov’s 1925 novella *Heart of a Dog* when Professor Philip Philippovich Preobrazhensky inadvertently discovers the transformative process of anthropomorphosis during a pioneering eugenics experiment. The resulting creation, Comrade Sharikov, is an ideal prototype for testing the Soviet hypothesis: unencumbered by any historical memory or pre-existing capitalistic value system, Comrade Sharikov is a blank ideological slate, a being who can be entirely molded by the NEP Soviet socialist atmosphere. The effects of life in NEP Soviet society on the newly minted proletarian are unarguably corrosive and detrimental, and NEP is never accepted by Professor Preobrazhensky as an ideal. Thus, his investigation indicts the larger Soviet endeavor, while he is held up as an ethical experimenter and behavioral model. Importantly, Bulgakov’s judgment of the values, behaviors, and social norms espoused by Soviet citizens in the NEP period in *Heart of a Dog* is not contingent upon comparison with an idealized future; rather, he assesses the NEP environment by injecting an otherwise historically and socially unfettered and unbiased scientific creation into the present setting. Through the scientist’s ongoing evaluation of his evolving experiment, Bulgakov passes judgment on the progress of the Soviet undertaking and the potential for achieving its professed goal of erasing class boundaries by empowering and acculturating the working class. Preobrazhensky is distinguished in Bulgakov’s narrative not only as a NEP specialist
but as a moral judge based on his pre-revolutionary standards. How do the events and characters of the novella reflect the disparity between the ideals and goals of the socialist experiment and the NEP reality? The outcome of Preobrazhensky’s experiment challenges the future of the Soviet experiment as a whole. How does the author’s endorsement of the scientist’s destructive action function as a resolution of the novel and convey an ambivalent acceptance of NEP as the pinnacle of the Soviet attempt to empower and elevate the working class?

The Hero Takes on the Socialist Experiment with a Quiet Vengeance

Philip Philippovich Preobrazhensky is the hero of Heart of a Dog and the focal point of the novella’s NEP setting. He is a pillar of the Russian pre-revolutionary intellectual elite. He does not fit into the Soviet mold economically, ideologically, or socially, but under NEP his technological and scientific expertise allows him some luxury and political latitude in his spacious apartment/laboratory in Moscow’s Prichistenka region. This region of Moscow is an important and purposeful choice for Bulgakov, since, as Proffer observes, it was home to the remnants of the “working intelligentsia, the professionals who were engaged in scholarship and original scientific research.”¹ Preobrazhensky is an unabashed bourgeois intellectual and a scientific expert. His expertise also earns him certain respect from Bulgakov, who, as Proffer suggests, generally “saw the benefits which came from the scientific mind at liberty” because of his own background as a doctor.²

¹ Proffer, 124.
² Ibid., 113.
This respect is conveyed throughout the work’s narration not only through the voicing of the professor himself (quoted in dialogue and thought) but also through the voices of supporting characters. His centrality as subject combined with the tone of his narration legitimizes Preobrazhensky’s assertiveness and self-confidence not only as a scientist but as a moral arbiter, and it justifies his assuming the role of behavioral model to the up and coming Soviet proletariat, his protégé Bormenthal, and his erstwhile canine-turned-worker Comrade Sharikov. Although Preobrazhensky is never ceded direct narrative control, in his dialogue, overtly quoted thoughts, and his point of view as articulated by the novella’s third-person narrator, he exudes a deserved intellectual and moral superiority; he is confident not only in his status as an intellectual but in his classist behavior and pre-revolutionary social expectations. Interestingly, the only characters ceded first-person narrative control are those who are naively awed by the professor and his accomplishments. Thus, he is first depicted through the eyes and mind of the canine Sharik; there he is all but deified as a distant, affluent, and powerful but benign benefactor. This awe-inspired distance is maintained in the novella’s exposition through Bormenthal’s and the third-person narrator’s extensive quotation of Preobrazhensky’s lectures, retorts, and running social commentary. As a result, Preobrazhensky’s perspective is indirectly endowed with authority, and the world of this novella is essentially his fortress and domain. Indeed, his very name Preobrazhensky, derived from the verb preobrazhat’ meaning to transform, labels him a creator. He wields immense scientific power and proves to possess lofty moral authority.

His all-encompassing and unfaltering self-confidence, which is first remarked by Sharik, distinguishes him from his forerunner Persikov in Bulgakov’s Fatal Eggs. A brief comparison of these two central characters underscores Preobrazhensky’s greater courage,
power, and arrogance. In this earlier exploration of the privileged scientist-hero, the professor is similarly and rightfully self-assured in his intellectual superiority, but this confidence does not extend beyond the walls of his laboratory; and his character proves too weak to bear the weight of the social authority to judge and recast the Soviets simultaneously as Preobrazhensky does. Persikov of The Fatal Eggs fails personally and socially where Preobrazhensky excels. Persikov, whose name is derived from the Russian persik meaning peach, responds to the Soviets’ requisition of his five-room Prichistenka apartment, neglect of his laboratory, and cooption of his prized experimental ray only with idle threats of emigration. The Fatal Eggs’ objective third-person narrator asserts immediately that Persikov (etymologically a fruit rather than a creator or actor of any sort) “always spoke with assurance, for his erudition in his field was utterly phenomenal,” but this assurance extends only to matters of scientific fact and procedure; he simply never addresses or acknowledges any other issues.3

Persikov proves too tentative in his reactions to the encroaching onslaught of Soviet ideology in both the social and scientific arenas. He mocks his new Marxist lab assistant who cannot distinguish a reptile from an amphibian, but he offers no social critique and no model for behavior outside of the research context. Similarly, in Persikov’s interactions with his ambitious but shortsighted assistant Professor Ivanov, Persikov appears naïve and unassertive. Ultimately, Ivanov is to blame for the leaking of Persikov’s discovery to the press and the Soviet authorities, but Persikov, “engrossed completely in the study of the ray,” never reins in the giddy assistant, who, like Preobrazhensky’s assistant Bormenthal, 

3 Mikhail Bulgakov, Rokovye iaitsa, in Sobranie sochinenii v desiatı tomakh, Tom 2, (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Golos, 1995), 305, “…он говорил всегда уверенно, ибо эрудиция в его области у него была совершенно феноменальная…. А вне своей области…профессор Персиков почти ничего не говорил.”
immediately places the professor’s discovery in an inappropriate, unscientific context:

“Professor, you have discovered the ray of life…the heroes of H. G. Wells are simply nonsense compared to you.”

Persikov also fails to restrain the overzealous Soviet authorities who are eager to use the ray to save face internationally by salvaging their decimated domestic poultry production. Persikov cedes control of his experiment too easily and is too preoccupied with his scientific pursuits to evaluate, much less serve as a model for, the wayward social trajectory of the Soviet experiment, of which he seems to take little notice. The scientist, having lost control of his experiment, is himself destroyed, but his authority emerges not through wit or narrative complexity but rather through horrific plot twists and grotesque coincidence. Ultimately, only too late, the Soviets realize that the scientist possessed some intangible and irreplaceable quality necessary to harness the powers of the ray, but this quality is never made explicit and Persikov is only posthumously empowered.

In contrast to Persikov’s clinical physical introduction and objective description, Preobrazhensky is presented compassionately as he proves himself to the unprepossessing canine Sharik. Thus, even before the professor coaxes Sharik back to his laboratory, the abused canine recognizes immediately that the professor is a “citizen not a comrade” and asserts further that his eyes confirm that he is a gentleman not a proletarian. Sharik’s description of the professor serves as the reader’s first introduction to Preobrazhensky.

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4 Ibid., 341, “всцело погрузился в изучение луча;” 316 “Вы открыли луч жизни! …герои Уэльса по сравнению с вами просто вздор.”

Importantly, at the outset, Sharik has no personal biases associated with Preobrazhensky; he has never even made his acquaintance. The abused dog, however, carefully and accurately introduces many people and judges their humanity, which the canine recognizes is largely associated with class distinction, based on their treatment of animals. Sharik surmises tellingly that the professor “won’t kick you, but he isn’t afraid of anyone himself…he is a gentleman engaged in mental work.” Preobrazhensky’s overt display of generosity to the dog surprises Sharik because it seems to defy Sharik’s class-determined system of behavior classification, and this “exceptional deed” ingratiates Sharik to the professor whom he henceforth refers to as his “benefactor.” Preobrazhensky’s unexpected show of moral goodness does not fit Sharik’s social schema; and, as a result, it immediately places Preobrazhensky outside the newly imposed Soviet social order and suggests a new social barometer: a scale of humaneness that easily elevates the professor in the dog’s eyes. Bulgakov thus establishes the Professor as an ideal, authoritative behavioral model even for a dog and Sharik as a natural judge of humanity, and these roles are never undermined, even as the professor’s ulterior motives are revealed and his wayward experiment devolves.

Sharik’s introductory characterization is subsequently reinforced throughout the novella in the professor’s material arrangement, his language, and his behavior, which bespeak his position of confident, albeit outdated, socioeconomic superiority. His position of intellectual privilege and moral superiority are underscored from the very beginning of the work by Bulgakov’s narration of the scientist, and this position of authority is reaffirmed consistently by the voices of the surrounding cast of characters. All of Preobrazhensky’s

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6 Ibid., 49, “…не ворует, этот не станет пинать ногой, но и сам никого не боится… Он умственного труда господин.”

7 Ibid., 50, “моей благодетель.”
interactions reflect a sharp, perceptive wit and a satirical intellect that find no parallel among the representatives of the NEP proletariat. The scientist’s academic pursuits stand in positive contrast to his NEP patients’ superficial ideals and aspirations, and his interactions with this cross-section of NEP society solidly place him outside the social context of that Soviet undertaking. He is as distanced from his patients as he proves to be from the Soviet experiment’s young NEP mouthpieces, whose ranks his creation Comrade Sharikov joins. Additionally, Preobrazhensky’s stance on the immutability of human nature is clear and resolute from the outset, and his fateful experiment only confirms his conviction that not only is the proletariat class inherently degenerate but also its moral influence is corrosive and destructive; even his careful, purposeful behavioral modeling elicits no positive results. Rather, the attempt itself betrays Preobrazhensky’s presumptuous hubris.

Like Persikov in *Fatal Eggs*, one of Preobrazhensky’s most important qualities is his unwavering and supremely rational exercise of self-restraint. Unlike the Soviet political authorities who in *Fatal Eggs* rush literally headlong into a disaster of their own making and who in *Heart of a Dog* are busy fomenting what Preobrazhensky deems economic and social ruin, the scientists never lose sight of the larger context and broader implications of their actions. Thus, even as Preobrazhensky performs various and sundry for-profit rejuvenation procedures on vain, materialistic NEP-era patients, he is cautious in his approach and realistic in his expectations. Preobrazhensky’s NEP patients constitute a third sector of the NEP social hierarchy: the party-loyal and newly affluent class of well-connected bureaucrats reaping the material benefits of the new social order with flagrant disregard for its associated ideological demands. Preobrazhensky, the NEP specialist, is similarly preserved outside the ideological constraints of the new Soviet social order but with the intellectual capacity to
pass judgment on its progress and prognosis. He tolerates his patients and clearly profits from their NEP-era materialism, but he greets their laughable attempts to regain their physical youth and their ecstatic reactions with only muted approval. Aloof, he hums tunes from his favorite opera *Aida* to himself as they regale him with stories of their sexual escapades, interrupting only to remind them to progress with caution, “not all at once.”

The Professor’s intellectual restraint and moral conservatism emerge in opposition to the material greed of the NEP bourgeoisie and the petty morality based on party fiat displayed among the NEP proletariat.

Preobrazhensky’s cautious self-restraint is echoed later in his warnings to his laboratory assistant and protégé Dr. Bormenthal, who is giddy with the prospects of their inadvertent discovery of the roots of anthropomorphization. Preobrazhensky tries to temper Bormenthal’s ambitious predictions with the grim reality he sees, but Bormenthal, like Persikov’s assistant professor, copiously recording every step of the dog’s humanization, is overcome by the awesome potential of the accidental discovery. Preobrazhensky is quick to acknowledge his mistake, but Bormenthal immediately adds, “This does not detract in the slightest from the staggering importance of his amazing discovery.”

Bormenthal is enamored both of the professor and his inadvertent discovery. He, like Ivanov, however, does not yet possess the scientific or social capacity to assess the discovery’s long-range implications, which immediately occur to Preobrazhensky. As Preobrazhensky himself appears increasingly troubled and unsure of how to proceed with the experiment, Bormenthal, in his journal of observations, indulges in his own fantastic hypotheses,

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8 Ibid., 59, “Не сразу, не сразу.”

9 Ibid., 89, “От этого его изумительное, потрясающее открытие не становится ничуть меньше.”
uncontainable and almost childish excitement, and panegyric descriptions of the professor, which are in sync with Sharik’s initial perceptions.

It is Preobrazhensky who quickly sets about refining the monster he has created. He scolds and instructs Sharikov while Bormenthal is overwhelmed by the sheer prospect of each step of his evolution. Bormenthal records every swear word Sharikov utters as a testament to his intellectual development, while Preobrazhensky scoffs and corrects this uncouth behavior from the outset. Preobrazhensky has no delusions about exactly what he has discovered. In fact, when the dog does not die as Preobrazhensky expects, the ramifications of his discovery are, at first, almost too much for him to handle. Preobrazhensky never loses sight of the consequences of his creation, and he struggles to edify both Sharikov and Bormenthal socially and scientifically. Ultimately, Bormenthal, a promising student of science himself, acquiesces to the professor and even volunteers to end the experiment himself by poisoning Sharikov: “Good God, I am only just beginning to realize what this Sharikov could turn into.”

Sharikov, like the members of the housing committee, however, proves resistant and never responds positively to the professor’s behavioral modeling and moral guidance.

The narrative additionally establishes Preobrazhensky’s values and behaviors as social models even though they clearly stand in opposition to the Soviet political authorities’ policies. The professor’s moral authority and intellectual superiority serve as a legitimizing basis even for his somewhat underhanded and manipulative dealings with the Soviet bureaucracy. Preobrazhensky’s work can by no means be considered purely scholarly; he is willing to compromise his medical integrity so long as his NEP patients remain willing and

10 Ibid., 123, “Боже мой, я только теперь начинаю понимать, что может выйти из этого Шарикова!”
able to hand over a “bundle of large bills.”

Thus, he thrives in the relaxed economic atmosphere of NEP precisely because he takes advantage of a system that he regards as fundamentally flawed in its ideology and backward in its social order. He exploits his position of academic authority to assert his predominance socially and does not hesitate to call in favors from his satisfied patients who are bureaucratically well connected. Thus, when the housing committee threatens to file a complaint about his insouciance and refusal to submit to their authority, the professor is unfazed; he accords them no authority and makes a mockery of their pretense of power. Preobrazhensky sees the socialist experiment failing all around him, and he not only remarks these shortcomings regularly but also uses the system’s weaknesses as much as possible for his own gain; as the Soviet system itself is indicted by the narrative, Preobrazhensky’s brand of morality appears preferable.

Likewise, although Preobrazhensky’s living arrangements and lifestyle of material comfort are not posited as noble ideals, they are never challenged in the narrative. His lifestyle seems a necessary component of his pre-revolutionary perspective and presents a promising alternative to the socially regressive, unthinking, and threatening Soviet bureaucrats. His sense of entitlement flies in the face of the Soviet ethics espoused by the housing committee, but his unwavering commitment to his pre-revolutionary system of values and expectations remains unchallenged. Thus, while Soviet policy dictates demand that Preobrazhensky’s material possessions and spatial comfort be stripped away, he remains in full possession of his pre-revolutionary social values, which he sees as fast becoming a commodity in an era of ruthless proletarian immorality. His palatial apartment with its elegant furnishings indicates the extent to which he has successfully managed to maintain his

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11 Ibid., 59-61, “пачку белых денег.”
comfort level. Indeed, even as the apartments in the Kalabukhov house are subdivided, Philip Philippovich remains smugly situated in his seven-room home-office bedecked with relics of his bourgeois past, including oriental rugs and chandeliers. When the housing committee intimates that the Professor should voluntarily consolidate by giving up his dining room, the Professor continues to insist on his pre-revolutionary social norms; he responds matter-of-factly that he is rather eager to acquire an eighth room to house his library. Unmoved by the committee’s classist arguments, Preobrazhensky, always the model of decorum, merely reminds them that he is “not Isadora Duncan,” whom the committee cites as having already made material concessions to the revolution, and insists on preserving his pre-revolutionary status quo: “I shall dine in the dining room, and operate in the surgery!…allow me to take my meal where all normal people take theirs, that is, in the dining room, and not in the foyer or the nursery.” Ultimately, Shvonder, the intrepid, militant leader of the housing committee, is humiliated, and Preobrazhensky’s unwavering class confidence and determination are validated from below by Sharik, who approves and admires the professor’s aggressive attack on the upstart housing committee: “There’s a man for you…just like me.”

Preobrazhensky’s lifestyle, behavior, social mores, and values are pre-revolutionary and bourgeois, and he is not convinced by the Soviet charade of rhetoric and superficial adjustments. Sharik’s reaction bolsters the professor’s elevated position of moral judgment and reaffirms the qualities of benevolence and fairness that most impressed the canine upon their initial encounter.

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12 Ibid., 64-65, “Но я не Айседора Дункан!! … Я буду обедать в столовой, а оперировать в операционной! …прошу вас…мне предоставить возможность принять пищу там, где ее принимают все нормальные люди, то есть в столовой, а не в передней и не в детской.”

13 Ibid., 65, “Вот это парень…весь в меня.”
Preobrazhensky remains as unwilling to cede any of his bourgeois entitlements as he is to abandon his bourgeois moral standards; he treats the housing committee brusquely and dismisses their demands almost recklessly while simultaneously schooling them in proper etiquette and respect. His efforts to educate the newly empowered proletariat through modeling and consistent recasting of their behavior, however, suggest a willingness on the professor’s part to participate in the Soviet experiment, which he sees as poorly planned and executed. Throughout his interactions with Shvonder and the housing committee, Bulgakov narrates Preobrazhensky as a model of behavior. The professor never loses the fearless confidence that Sharik notices immediately upon first seeing him; he is never intimidated. His resistance to their parroted ideological rhetoric is unrelenting. His every word is a model of decorum to which he hopes to elevate the proletarian moral standard; he repeatedly interrupts their rhetoric “didactically” and “weightily.” Shvonder and his eager comrades on the new housing committee are as shocked by Preobrazhensky’s unapologetic bourgeois lifestyle as they are by his tendency to address them as “gentlemen” and “dear sir”; the professor counters their line-item requests with both values and nomenclature. In fact, completely sidetracked and momentarily distracted from their official purpose, they respond only to this seemingly more minor, albeit more personal affront: “First and foremost, we are not gentlemen.” The housing committee is stupefied when the Professor rebukes their manners, not to mention their demands. In contrast to the professor, the members of the

14 Ibid., 62-63, “наставительно…внушительно.”

15 Ibid., 62, “господа.”

16 Ibid., “во-первых, мы не господа.”
housing committee are completely swept up in and actively propagating the Soviet agenda. They fancy themselves sexless, equal comrades serving the state.

Preobrazhensky is equally devoted to his cause of preserving his pre-revolutionary morality, ethical code, and nomenclature. He points out repeatedly that housing committee member Vyazemskaia, despite her ambiguous appearance, is a woman – a “directress” not a director, and, according to the professor’s bourgeois code of manners, is therefore entitled to wear her hat indoors.\(^{17}\) Recognizing Preobrazhensky’s inappropriate usurpation of the committee’s authority, one committee member challenges the professor, “Are you mocking us?” but Preobrazhensky ignores him and asks them to proceed with their business.\(^{18}\) Preobrazhensky’s tone of mockery is absolutely obvious to the reader; the professor outwits and outranks the housing committee at every turn in an overt expression of disdain for the new Soviet bureaucracy based on a Soviet class hierarchy that, in the professor’s estimation, defies merit, logic, and intellect.

Preobrazhensky’s bourgeois lifestyle is patently objectionable in the new Soviet context, but he is never undermined in the narrative. He refuses to assimilate to the imposed ideals and superficial manifestation of this new Soviet sham reality defined by socialist ideals and implemented, if only superficially, by impudent young proletarians like Shvonder. In contrast to the housing committee members, who willfully imagine away any apparent contradictions to the party-dictated truth, Preobrazhensky is an intellectual, a scientist, and a

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 66, “За-ве-дую-щая, - поправил ее Филипп Филиппович.”

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 63, “Вы издавае-тесь…?”
“man of facts, a man of observation…an enemy of unfounded hypotheses.”\textsuperscript{19} He refuses to accept any politically asserted truth as empirical fact and observation, and he does not believe that the superficial changes that have taken place in the Soviet Union are proof of an all-encompassing transformative socialist revolution. Preobrazhensky is not interested in the new Soviet social norms, which he dismisses as markedly abnormal and based on superficial standards and demonstrations. He does not read \textit{Pravda}, which his medical studies have shown leads to slowed reflexes, depression, and loss of appetite.\textsuperscript{20} The professor’s outlook highlights the tensions perceived by members of the Russian intelligentsia who, like Bulgakov, clung to pre-revolutionary social norms, and it establishes the basis for the scientist’s subsequent judgment and condemnation of his own proletarian monster. His insistence on this pre-revolutionary moral, social, and ethical standard and his painstaking maintenance of his limited material turf empower him in Bulgakov’s \textit{Heart of a Dog} in a way that would be inconceivable in a work by Mayakovsky. Bulgakov’s portrayal of Preobrazhensky is an unequivocal validation of the NEP non-party specialist and an endorsement of his own pre-revolutionary material and social norms.

\textbf{Preobrazhensky’s Fateful Experiment}

Preobrazhensky’s own transformation into a sort of Dr. Frankenstein happens rather inadvertently, and the scientist’s reaction reflects and underscores his by-now established position of rational restraint as well as moral and social authority. Indeed, Preobrazhensky undertakes his experiment on the canine Sharik in hopes of uncovering the secret to total

\footnotesize \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 70, “Я человек фактов, человек наблюдения. Я враг необоснованных гипотез.”

\footnotesize \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 69.
rejuvenation. Yet his experiment, which is no doubt partly intended to fuel his already thriving NEP eugenics enterprise, does not achieve the desired results. The compassionate canine Sharik, once implanted with the organs of a human specimen, is humanized rather than rejuvenated. Preobrazhensky is quick to ascertain the negative social implications of his experiment and internalize the blame for his mistake. Bormenthal never evaluates the experiment on a social scale. His excitement and naïve anticipation serve as foil to Preobrazhensky’s self-torment at the prospect of having unleashed what proves to be a proletarian monster: “Do you understand now, Doctor [Bormenthal], why I rejected your conclusions in Sharik’s case history? My discovery, may it be damned, of which you make so much, isn’t worth a rap.”21 While Preobrazhensky is empowered as a judge of humanity and kindness well before his experiment begins, his reactions to the devolution of his experiment demonstrate his ability to hold even himself to the highest moral and ethical standard. Nonetheless, as he asserts early on, he does not particularly like the proletariat, and he has already passed summary personal judgment against them and against the Soviet endeavor. The failure of his own experiment so confirms the professor’s presentiment that the Soviet experiment is doomed to failure as long as its success is predicated on the spontaneous reacculturation and moral self-improvement of the proletariat that even Bormenthal cannot deny the findings.

Certainly, Preobrazhensky’s operation on Sharik has the potential to prove the professor wrong and to validate the Soviet experiment, but it instead affirms the professor’s pre-revolutionary bias and further elevates his perspective in the scope of the novella.

21 Ibid., 122, “Теперь вам понятно, доктор, почему я опорочил ваш вывод в истории шариковской болезни. Мое открытие, черти б его съели, с которым вы носитесь, стоит ровно один ломаный грош…”
Sharikov could become the idealized new Soviet man, but he does not. Rather than rising up to attain the elusive socialist proletarian morality envisioned by Soviet ideologues, Sharikov sinks to the lowest levels of the Soviet proletariat. Despite the pleadings of his obsequious if unrestrained assistant, Bormenthal, who wants to continue the effort to socialize and develop Citizen Sharikov psychologically, Preobrazhensky cannot deny that the experiment has run its course and now is only doing damage: “A perfectly delightful dog is transformed into such filthy scum that your hair stands up to think of it.”

Finally, Preobrazhensky’s reasoning appeals to Bormenthal, who has served as a foil throughout for the scientist but now provides a foil for the proletarians, who prove unable or unwilling to accept the professor’s behavioral and ethical models. Preobrazhensky’s decision to destroy his creation is the ultimate test and confirmation of his capacity to act as social arbiter, and it reaffirms his own pre-revolutionary ethical standards, by now understood as a bar of humanity in the context of *Heart of a Dog*.

Preobrazhensky’s unexpected creation yields an allegorical case study of the Soviet authorities’ treatment of the proletariat. Sharikov’s development is a proving ground for Preobrazhensky’s social theories that suggest the proletarian masses are constitutionally incapable of attaining the lofty heights envisioned for them in the socialist framework. Ultimately, Preobrazhensky cannot allow the experiment to continue not only because Sharikov’s presence threatens his personal security, but also because it is unethical. Thus, he returns Sharikov to his by now preferable canine form. The professor recognizes his mistake and ends his experiment not out of thought for his own personal fate, which by now is for him a non-issue, but out of regard for the broader social implications of his creation.

22 Ibid., 122, “…милейшего пса превратить в такую мразь, что волосы дыбом встают.”
The Proletarian Specimen Acculturated by NEP

Professor Preobrazhensky’s rejuvenation investigation becomes a sort of Nietzschean experiment to transform the canine Sharik into the proletarian Sharikov once the operation results in the creation of a human. Preobrazhensky’s accidental assumption of the creator role importantly stands in stark contrast to the purposeful, politically conscious Soviet endeavor to create the New Soviet Man. Indeed, Professor Preobrazhensky’s experiment on Sharik is his most inherently valuable scientific endeavor; it is the only project he undertakes for research purposes rather than immediate profit. As a result, in further contrast to the Soviet revolutionary idealists, Preobrazhensky has no established goals for the endeavor; he is troubled and confused by the unexpected outcome. Once Sharikov and his proletarian nature emerge, however, Preobrazhensky’s roles as social and moral authority are activated once again. A difficult question of moral objectivity arises when the creator is forced to judge his own creation. Preobrazhensky does not falter, however, in upholding his deep-seated ideals and ethical codes. He is resolute in his assessments of the proletariat as a whole and of Sharikov in particular. Thus, when he realizes that the experiment is hopeless and detrimental, he takes action to end it. Preobrazhensky’s scientific objectivity and the pre-revolutionary models that already privilege him in Heart of a Dog are thus further validated as behavioral models.

In contrast to the Soviet authorities, Preobrazhensky, like Persikov in The Fatal Eggs, retains the self-restraint and ethical objectivity necessary to evaluate and assess the consequences of his experiment. In contrast to Persikov, however, Preobrazhensky is strong enough to assert his self-restraint and moral judgment in spite of the threatening Soviet
authorities. Consequently, his destruction of his creation is momentous and can be read not only as a mockery of the Soviet’s class-based legitimization of the worst elements of society, epitomized in Sharikov, but also as a broader condemnation of the Soviets’ failure to appreciate the future implications of the current Soviet experiment. Preobrazhensky returns to the pre-experiment status quo, the NEP reality of science for profit, which is presented as preferable although admittedly not ideal.

As Bormenthal notes in his typically naïve and overly enthusiastic tone, Preobrazhensky has accomplished an immense scientific feat; he has discovered the source of “not merely rejuvenation, but complete humanization.” Bormenthal, like the Soviets, is overcome by the sheer possibility of what could be attained in the future and gives no thought to the grim realities and limits of human nature that trouble Preobrazhensky. Bormenthal fails to appreciate the enormous social implications of the unexpected success of Preobrazhensky’s experiment.\(^23\) Replicating the procedure of the Soviet experiment almost exactly, Preobrazhensky endows an animal with proletarian characteristics and thus places it in an unfamiliar and largely unmerited position of great power (even over the Professor himself); his results, then, are not surprising: he creates a monster. Sharikov, like the newly empowered working class itself, is a paradox of development: “a creature just in the process of formation with a feeble intellect,” but who, once suddenly empowered (if only superficially), nonetheless allows himself “to speak with utterly insufferable impudence…[and] to offer advice on a cosmic scale…on how to divide everything up.”\(^24\)

\(^23\) Ibid., 89, “Ф. Ф. как устный ученый признал свою ошибку – перемена гипофиза дает не омоложение, а полное очеловечивание.”

\(^24\) Ibid., 112-113, “…вы еще только формирующееся, слабое в умственном отношении существо, все ваши поступки чисто звериные, и вы в присутствии двух
The satire is further heightened by the fact that Preobrazhensky implants his proletarian raw material into a beast who is shown to be nobler in his natural state than an organic worker.

The more elusive element of the experiment, then, hearkens directly to the Soviets’ own faltering contemporaneous undertaking: transforming the Russian worker into a suitable Soviet proletariat leader. Once imbued with the genetic characteristics of the lumpenproletariat, Sharikov, in stark contrast to the erstwhile canine Sharik, is unfit to live with the professor in his apartment (not unlike the members of the housing committee). As Henrietta Mondry observes, “while the transformation of the stray Sharik into a well-behaved and well-groomed dog occurs naturally and unproblematically, the transformation of a proletarian kham Sharikov into a ‘house-trained’ respectable human being is an unattainable task.”

The proletarian specimen, the Soviet ideal, proves anything but ideal and soon becomes uncontrollable. As Philip Philippovich fears, the heart of the dog is degraded by the implanted mind of the poor proletarian specimen Klim and not vice versa. Notably, Preobrazhensky has happened on a lousy representative for his experiment, much as the 1979 scientists do in The Bedbug: as the dog becomes increasingly anthropomorphized, he displays greater resemblance to Klim physically and behaviorally. He plays the balalaika “with reckless ease,” drinks to excess, uses profanity profusely, spits, and litters the apartment with his cigarette butts. Like Prisypkin in Bedbug, Sharikov’s demeanor is coarse and uncouth; he is insouciant, insolent, and impudent. Unlike his Mayakovskiian

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26 Bulgakov, Sobach’e serdtse, 94, “с заливчатской ловкостью играли…на балалайке.”
counterpart, however, who is redeemed by comparison with future Soviet humans, Sharikov is condemned by comparison with the past when he is judged by Preobrazhensky’s pre-revolutionary standards.

Sharikov’s proletarian progenitor is the source of both his corruption and his acceptance into the Soviet working class. Sharikov exhibits the worst traits of his proletarian organ donor Klim, learns the behaviors of Shvonder, and retains none of the endearing compassion and innate perception of Sharik. Indeed, the only remnant of his canine roots is his atavistic pursuit of cats and food. His senses are dulled and his ethics are based on a ruthless proletarian morality that allows for the aggressive destruction of the bourgeoisie through any available means. As a result, he invites his acquaintances into the professor’s apartment and allows them to filch money. Notably, his own understanding of the Soviet class hierarchy and the accompanying proletarian mentality that justifies this ruthless class warfare is lacking, and Sharikov pilfers from the housing committee. Whereas Sharik once felt compassion for the typist and identified with her suffering, Sharikov now tries to ensnare her. Comrade Sharikov is a predator; he unrelentingly pursues Zina and harasses women. Sharikov can no longer assess moral uprightness or identify humanity in others; he possesses neither of these qualities. He has the instincts of an animal of the lowest order; he reacts rashly and makes swift and condemning judgments based on his sensory perceptions of the current situation. The professor observes the progressive denigration of the canine Sharik warily: “The whole horror…is that his heart is no longer a dog’s heart, but a human one…and the vilest you could find!”

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27 Ibid., 124, “…весь ужас в том, что у него уже не собачье, а именно человеческое сердце. И самое паршивое из всех, которые существуют в природе.”
As Sharikov becomes more incorporated into the working class, his interactions with Preobrazhensky recall the professor’s earlier dialogues with the housing committee; he challenges the professor’s material and behavioral values. The devolution of Sharik into the proletarian monster Comrade Sharikov runs its course as Preobrazhensky expects. Sharikov proudly proclaims himself a member of the “working class…no bourgeois, no NEP-man,” demands to be properly initiated into the ranks of the working class, and, accordingly, focuses on official appearances and physical demonstrations of his class status. He expects a proper name and official registration in the professor’s apartment. He begins addressing the professor as “comrade,” defends “the interests of the working class,” and dismisses the professor’s expectations and manners as from “Tsarist times.” Philip Philippovich cannot abide his creation, but the new man assimilates almost effortlessly into the Soviet working class precisely because his coarse qualities, so abhorrent to the professor, appeal to his Soviet comrades and echo the values and standards they espouse and have already demonstrated in their interactions with the professor. Ultimately, Sharikov turns on his own creator, informing on Preobrazhensky for his bourgeois living accommodations.

Preobrazhensky transforms a dog into a proletarian, but he fails where the Soviets fail; he proves scientifically incapable of edifying the proletarian mind to the level envisioned by the Marxist-Leninist ideologues and such optimistic supporters of the socialist undertaking like Mayakovsky. His efforts to guide Sharikov’s development by modeling desired behavior and establishing clear boundaries parallel the Soviet political authorities’

28 Ibid., 98, “Да уж известно, не нэпман.”

concerted attempts to foment the spontaneous, organic reacculturation of the proletarian masses; Preobrazhensky’s failure thus attests to his own broader perspective on the bleak prospects of the revolution to create a working class worthy of its newly ordained position of preeminence. The experiment has reached its maximum potential, and its failure is obvious not only to Preobrazhensky but also finally to Bormenthal. Preobrazhensky cannot endow his proletarian monster with his own bourgeois morality, much less a socialist variety. Similarly, Shvonder teaches Sharikov to parrot party-speak rhetoric, but even Shvonder is displeased with the development of Sharikov’s “social consciousness.” Sharikov reads Engels, but when questioned on the content, his conclusion is quite crude: “What’s there to propose? … They write and write…Just take everything and divide it up…. ”

When Shvonder appeals to the professor on Sharikov’s behalf, he arouses Sharikov’s primal fear as he explains that the creation must be registered in case a “war breaks out with the imperialist sharks.” Frightened and, as usual, reacting instinctively, Sharikov retorts, “I won’t go to no wars! ... I’ll register, but if it comes to fighting, they can kiss my…. ” In response, Preobrazhensky merely throws a glance of vindication in Bormenthal’s direction as if to say, “How is that for morality?”

Preobrazhensky thus demonstrates that his experiment, a small-scale replica of the grand Soviet design, can yield only superficial, physical changes but no substantive lasting positive results. In contrast to the canine Sharik, Comrade

30 Ibid., 111, “Да что тут предлагать… А то пишут, пишут...Взять все да и поделить.”

31 Ibid., 101, “А вдруг война с империалистическими хищниками?”

32 Ibid., “Я воевать не пойду никуда… На учет возьмусь, а воевать – шиш с маслом.”

33 Ibid., “Преображенский и злобно, и тоскливо переглянулся с Борменталем: «Не угодно ли-с, мораль».”
Sharikov is dishonest, disrespectful, uneducated, uncouth, ungrateful, unpatriotic, and unmotivated, in sum, utterly unequipped to inherit the reins of industry and leadership. Bormenthal finally accepts what Preobrazhensky “realized ten days after the operation,” but, as Preobrazhensky asserts, Shvonder, like the Soviet authorities, is undeterred by the disappointing results of his efforts to appropriate Sharikov into the proletarian ranks:

“Shvonder is the worst fool of all. He does not understand that Sharikov is a far greater menace to him than he is to me. Today he does everything to sic him on me, without realizing that if anyone should then turn him against Shvonder himself, nothing will be left of him or his.”

Preobrazhensky’s eugenics experiment that evolves into a Frankenstein-style creative endeavor parodies the aspirations of Soviet science, as his own creation proves too much for him. The professor, however, is in a unique position to undo the course of history in a way that the Soviet authorities certainly could not; he can reverse the experiment. Like Shvonder and the working class that Preobrazhensky derides, his newly minted proletarian Comrade Sharikov does not reflect the professed noble ideal of the supposedly newly empowered socialist working class. The scientifically created proletarian Sharikov is an abomination worse even than his comrades since his proletarian form represents a marked devolution from his canine state and does not even compare favorably to Shvonder himself. The professor’s scientific explorations are validated and supported because he never loses sight of his code of ethics and morality. Tucked away in his Prichistenka ivory tower, he returns quietly to his eugenics operations. The failure of his experiment leaves the professor and the proletariat

34 Ibid., 123, “А я понял через десять дней после операции. Ну так вот, Швондер и есть самый главный дурак. Он не понимает, что Шариков для него еще более грозная опасность, чем для меня. Ну, сейчас он всячески старается натравить его на меня, не соображая, что если кто-нибудь, в свою очередь, натравит Шарикова на самого Швондера, то от него останутся только рожки да ножки.”
right where they started, in the NEP reality of the 1920s. Sharik recovers from his debaucherous, unimpressive stint as the proletarian Sharikov and lapses comfortably back into his life of luxury, idolizing Philip Philippovich as “the superior being, the dignified benefactor of dogs.”35 The professor, roundly dismayed by the perverse social reordering that has put the hopeless likes of Shvonder and Comrade Sharikov in positions of power, slinks back to his for-profit sexual enhancement procedures and his quiet life of bourgeois comforts in his Prichistenka enclave.

Throughout this novella Philip Philippovich is distinguished from Soviet society at large both because of his status as a scientific specialist and his pre-revolutionary ethical, moral, and behavioral standards. He emanates class distinction, social moral rectitude, and poise in opposition to the proletariat who are actively disenfranchising him. Importantly, however, this glorification of Preobrazhensky consistently ignores his complacency, coldness, and pomposity. Simultaneously, Bulgakov’s satire turns on the ease with which Sharikov is grafted into the Soviet bureaucracy and the differently positive attitudes of Bormenthal and Shvonder toward the monster. Bormenthal’s embrace of the creator role is a negative foil for Philip Philippovich’s cautious, wary, contemplative, rational approach. Shvonder is finally embarrassed and forced to admit that he did in fact register and enroll a talking dog for work in the Soviet bureaucracy. Ultimately, Preobrazhensky is allowed to continue what Sharik describes as his “frightening doings” because he has not been consumed by his Faustian quest.36 The professor’s ability to retain his ethical standards in the face of temptation and the context of sweeping social revolution sets him apart from

35 Ibid., 136, “…высшее существо, важный песий благотворитель.”

36 Ibid., 137, “страшные дела.”
Bormenthal, Shvonder, and Sharikov, and, most importantly, from the Soviet authorities and their overly optimistic social engineering ambitions. Philip Philippovich survives as a prime example of the bourgeois specialist tolerated by the revolution. The story’s conclusion shows that the 1920s NEP proletariat truly represents the culmination of the working class’s potential for moral and cultural development; the future offers no hope for further improvement and even the pre-revolutionary ideals of the past now seem out of reach except in contingently secured niches.
CHAPTER 3

THE BEDBUG

Like Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*, Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug* is situated, at least initially, during the NEP era. In contrast to Bulgakov’s valorization of the past in the character of Professor Preobrazhensky, Mayakovsky’s satirical treatment of the NEP present is juxtaposed with a fantastic dystopian Soviet state of the future. The play’s plot hinges on the unlikely protagonist Ivan Prisypkin’s cryogenic time travel to the Soviet Republic of 1979. In this future the grand Soviet endeavor has been accomplished to the satisfaction of Soviet authorities, a possibility that Bulgakov could not even imagine. Even Mayakovsky’s conception of the Soviets’ attempt to mold the well-defined new Soviet man from the amorphous mass of the Russian working class is utopian only in its scientifically regulated mechanistic functioning, which has minimized inefficiency and maximized orderliness but at a great cost to humanity. On a human level the Soviet experiment has failed just as Preobrazhensky’s experiment does. My comparative analysis of *The Bedbug* and *Heart of a Dog* will first examine the NEP protagonist Prisypkin, his poetic guide possessed of bourgeois morality Oleg Bard,¹ and their NEP environs. Secondly, I will analyze how Mayakovsky positively reevaluates Prisypkin in the context of his dystopian Soviet future

¹ In the Russian original his name is Oleg Bayan, which hearkens to the medieval bard Bo yan, who is invoked as a kind of muse in the twelfth-century “Slovo o polku Igoreve.” In their translation of *Bedbug*, Max Hayward and George Reavey translate his name as Oleg Bard, which is, therefore, especially effective in conveying the poetic role intended for this character.
and how his recasting as an unlikely hero marks a shift in Mayakovsky’s ideological and literary assessment of the prospects of the Soviet revolutionary effort explainable by the nascent advent of Stalinism.

**Prisypkin Courts NEP Before a Panel of Poetic Judges**

Neither Prisypkin nor his mentor Oleg Bard is directly analogous to Bulgakov’s NEP specialist hero Preobrazhensky, but the two both assume the role of behavioral model for the proletariat, albeit in Bard’s case with an air of self-mockery. As a result, these two protagonists reflect their authors’ respective ideological approaches to dealing with the present. Preobrazhensky is a physical and moral relic of a lost pre-revolutionary Bulgakovian ideal. Bulgakov’s narrative renders him an unchallenged authority figure supported by the instinctual approval of the canine Sharik, the adoration of his NEP patients, and the eventual submission of his assistant Bormenthal. He is the standard for comparison with the NEP present and qualified to serve as its moral judge. Bard functions similarly as a judge, but he never assumes the moral authority to model and recast Prisypkin’s behavior effectively. Rather, he serves to focus the audience’s attention on the inherent contradictions in Prisypkin’s understanding of the implications of socialist revolution. By exposing the emptiness of Prisypkin’s misapplied party rhetoric, he adds to Mayakovsky’s satire of the ideologically misguided, profiteering NEP proletariat.

Accordingly, Prisypkin, too, becomes a standard for comparison, but only after he himself is first undercut by Mayakovsky. Like Shvonder and Sharikov, Prisypkin is a member of the proletariat. He is derided in the play not for the proletarian characteristics he shares with his Bulgakovian comrades but for his lack of sociopolitical consciousness and his
neo-bourgeois NEP proclivities. He exhibits the materialism of Preobrazhensky’s rejuvenation patients, not the ruthless proletarian morality of class warfare exhibited by Shvonder and Sharikov; nonetheless, his behavior parallels that of the avid party-line Soviet Sharikov rather than the sex-crazed, materialistic, bureaucratic NEP-men. Consequently, Prisypkin can hardly be read as a hero, especially in the play’s opening acts. Only in the future does Prisypkin come to incarnate a measure of humanity that strikingly parallels Preobrazhensky’s verdict in *Heart of a Dog*. And, notably, in the future, the Soviet authorities object to his uncouth proletarian manners and behavior much as Preobrazhensky treats Sharikov, but Prisypkin is surprisingly redeemed in that interaction.

Preobrazhensky laments the loss of humanity that he sees manifest in the proletarian’s lack of respect, kindness, honesty, and etiquette; he indicts them on account of their ruthless morality. As the self-stylized poet of revolution, Mayakovsky assumed part of the burden for transforming the proletariat and, ideally, ushering in the socialist humanity that was to be part of the radiant future. Mayakovsky’s endeavor, in the fashion described by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, was predicated on the proletariat’s natural internalizing and understanding of the underlying ideology that justified their claim to power. NEP appeared to be a tacit admission that the economic policies of socialism were failing because the ideological infrastructure was not in place, and the behavior of citizens such as Prisypkin confirmed that individuals were not spontaneously internalizing socialist ideology. Prisypkin understands that he is part of a privileged class but neither knows why nor cares. Under NEP, he, like Preobrazhensky’s patients, succumbs easily to the bourgeois, materialistic temptations offered by the limited consumer market. Prisypkin exhibits all of the worst behavioral traits of the proletarian morality identified by Bulgakov but none of the associated redemptive ideological
underpinnings of socialist revolution. Mayakovsky’s portrayal gives little hope for improvement; indeed, Prisypkin goes down in flames during his raucous, debauched wedding party, which is itself a sort of realized metaphor of mangled Soviet ideology.

The implications of Prisypkin’s behavior are not difficult to understand, and his conduct elicits strong rebukes in the young workers’ hostel from a chorus of his former comrades, who are endowed, at least momentarily, with the narrative authority to judge Prisypkin. Prisypkin has forsaken his class and they are resentful, and Mayakovsky ensures that they voice their disappointment. The second scene opens with a barefoot youth lamenting that “someone’s swiped my boots again.” The same problem necessitates the employment of security guards in Preobrazhensky’s Kalabukhov house in Prichistenka. The guilty proletarian is none other than Prisypkin, whose manners betray the same proletarian lack of respect that repels Preobrazhensky from his own creation and the proletariat as a whole in *Heart of a Dog*. In turn, the mechanic points out that Prisypkin is “no worker…he quit his job today, he’s marrying a young lady….” Another member of this workers’ chorus notes Prisypkin’s behavioral degradation: he has traded in his “beer bottles and fish tails” for “cologne bottles and ties.” This same voice of the working class adds, perceptively, the trouble is not the tie, but that “he’s tied to the tie – not the tie to him.”

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3 Ibid., 19, “До рабочего у него никакого касательства, расчет сегодня брал, женится на девице….”

4 Ibid., 16, “Бутыл с-под пива да хвост воблы, а теперь баночки Тэжэ да ленточки разрадуженные.”

5 Ibid., 17, “Не в галстуке дело, а в том, что не галстук к нему, а он к галстуку привязан.”
materialistic regression is a testament to the risky ideological wavering inherent in NEP. Prisypkin aims toward the material comforts and cultured tastes Preobrazhensky enjoys and espouses, but he possesses neither the intellectual expertise nor the ethical standards that validate the professor’s lifestyle in Bulgakov’s narrative. In Mayakovsky’s conception, the NEP neo-bourgeois is unequivocally worse than the unprimed pre-revolutionary proletariat mass.

In striking parallel to Sharikov’s regression, Prisypkin’s social consciousness remains underdeveloped and so he backslides ideologically when presented with that opportunity in the limited free-market atmosphere of NEP. Both Prisypkin and Sharikov are unable to understand their place in the new Soviet class hierarchy. Both misapply their new empowerment; Sharikov attacks the bourgeoisie as he aggressively adopts Shvonder’s rote party speak and worker mentality, while Prisypkin sees his new status as an invitation for social climbing. Prisypkin, however, does not realize that, in the Soviet context, he is climbing in precisely the wrong direction. The free-market consumerism of NEP only evokes his most basic materialistic instincts. Ignorantly taking advantage of his new position of class superiority, he comes to epitomize the class enemy in spite of his working class provenance. He is a member of the “victorious class,” but he is determined that the only way to avoid future “petty bourgeois squabbles over fly buttons” is to buy more of them.6 Prisypkin takes his serendipitous position of social authority to heart in all of the worst ways.

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6 Ibid., 11, “Он - победивший класс…”; “В нашей красной семье не должно быть никакого мещанского быта и брючных неприятностей. Во! Захватите, Розалия Павловна!”
He envisions a future in which his children are “refined” and his house is full to the gills with material possessions like a “horn of plenty.”

While Prisypkin has donned the label of victorious proletariat, he has internalized none of the accompanying socialist ideology, much less any lofty socialist morality. He effectively dissociates the underlying ideological and teleological struggle of socialism from his current position of class superiority. Under NEP Prisypkin is able to maintain his nominal membership in the now privileged working class while adopting a lifestyle modeled on that of his supposed class oppressor, the bourgeoisie. He has thrown off his worker’s chains but in pursuit of the wrong ideal. He redeems his shared class victory as a ticket out of the proletariat and into the echelons of the petty bourgeoisie; his marriage to the entrepreneurial manicurist Elzevir Davidovna Renaissance belies the extent to which Prisypkin has dissociated the Soviets’ socialist ideology and aims and the past suffering of the working class from his new privileges and opportunity for material and social advancement. He understands the new Soviet class hierarchy only insofar as it establishes his de facto position of power. He considers it a privilege reserved only for his fellow card-carrying proletarians even to address him by the lofty title “Comrade” (his bourgeois fiancée is excluded), but he has abandoned his proletarian love in pursuit of the material gain associated with a marriage into money. Certainly, in the broader Soviet context, it is Elzevir

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7 Ibid., 10, “Мои будущие потомственные дети должны воспитываться в изящном духе.”; “У него дом должен быть полной чашей.”

8 Ibid., 10, “Не называйте меня товарищем, граждanka, вы еще с пролетариатом не породились.”
who is marrying up; as the appropriately named chorus-like observer Oleg Bard notes, Prisypkin is “bringing an immaculate proletarian origin and a union card into the family.”

Mayakovsky’s negative description of Prisypkin is furthered through his association with his bourgeois fiancée and her mother. His materialistic aspirations are more condemnable than the attitudes of the bourgeois women with whom he shops in the opening act. The Renaissance women demonstrate self-restraint and reason. Ironically, while Prisypkin sets his sights on a “wardrobe with a mirror,” it is the bourgeois Renaissance matriarch who argues over kopeks and even thanks “Comrade Skripkin” personally for overthrowing the tsar and driving out “Mr. Ryabushinsky” so that she can “claim [her] civic rights and buy [her] herrings in the Soviet State Co-op.”

By contrast, Prisypkin is nothing short of enamored by the material possibilities afforded him as a member of the working class under NEP. He is ready to abandon his comrades for the Renaissances’ “good life” of bourgeois manners and material comfort, replete with “a wife, a home, and real etiquette.”

In the context of NEP, Prisypkin represents the failure of the Soviet endeavor to foster the evolution of the new Soviet man. Oleg Bard, his poetic guide and coach, satirizes his quest as he butchers party rhetoric to justify Prisypkin’s haphazard understanding of his new position. While he is not as socially aloof or materially secure as Preobrazhensky, Bard fits the model established by Preobrazhensky of the NEP specialist who serves as a model of

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9 Ibid., 9, “Оне к вам древнее, незапятнанное пролетарское происхождение и профсоюзный билет в дом входят.”

10 Ibid., 12, “Так вы были правы, когда вы убили царя и прогнали господина Рябушинского!…Я найду мои гражданские права и мои селедки в государственной советской общественной кооперации!”; “Я зеркальным шкафом интересуюсь.”

11 Ibid., 23, “Я за хорошую жизнь боролся…и жена, и дом, и настоящее обхождение.”
behavior to the up-and-coming working class. He easily identifies and mocks Prisypkin’s misappropriation of Soviet rhetoric and his misapplication of socialist ideology, but, unlike Preobrazhensky, he does little to enlighten or guide Prisypkin back to the right path. Rather, he lyricizes Prisypkin’s behavior and mockingly validates his flawed, literal interpretations of Soviet rhetoric, thereby further undercutting Prisypkin in the context of the play. Bard pokes fun at Prisypkin’s simplistic notions of what an ideal class-conscious wedding will entail. Its hallmarks are, not surprisingly, superficial and meaningless, but like Shvonder and the proletarian exemplars in *Heart of a Dog*, Prisypkin is content with the surface appearance of what he perceives as the classless Soviet ideal. Prisypkin giddily accepts Oleg Bard’s description of a literally Red wedding: “the bride is…all red…you are brought in by the red ushers, the table is covered with red hams, and the bottles all have red seals…your red spouse puts her red lips to yours.”

Bard thus undertakes the impossible Bulgakovian task to transform this proletarian specimen, whose delusions of grandeur he humors, into a creature suitable for moving in “smart society.” Of course, Bard is concerned only with the surface-level appearance of transformation; he aims to help Prisypkin pass in elite society, not to instill genuinely in him the values and social mores that Bulgakov idealizes in Preobrazhensky. As Mayakovsky satirizes NEP concessions of party principles, Oleg Bard manipulates his repertoire of party rhetoric to bless Prisypkin’s every move, simultaneously undermining not only Prisypkin, but also Mayakovsky’s own stated function as a poet of the people. He resolves that “we have succeeded in reconciling, in coordinating the couple’s class and other contradictions. We

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12 Ibid., 13, “…красная невеста…вся красная…вводят это вас красные шафера, весь стол в красной ветчине и бутылки с красными головками.”

13 Ibid., 22, “…в фешенебельном обществе….”
who are armed with the Marxist vision cannot fail to see…the future happiness of humanity – or as it is called in popular parlance: socialism.”

Oleg Bard is the vehicle both for Mayakovsky’s lament over the fall of the working class and the failure of the would-be revolutionary poet-transformer.

Bard recasts the union of a proletarian sellout and a bourgeois class enemy as evidence of the socialist transcendence of class boundaries, an accomplishment even he notes would be beyond the wildest dreams of Marx and Engels. This sarcastic endorsement of humorously misapplied party rhetoric highlights Mayakovsky’s own disdain for Prisypkin and his NEP-style behavior. Oleg Bard’s cynical manipulation and veiled mockery of Prisypkin’s misguided bourgeois ideals and aspirations parallel Preobrazhensky’s coaxing disapproval of the housing committee’s conduct in Heart of a Dog; ironically they function as similar models of bourgeois mentality, although there is no self-mocking humor in Preobrazhensky’s ideal. The proletariat’s willingness to invest meaning in superficial manifestations of progress is, for Mayakovsky, proof of the fundamental foundering of the Soviet Revolution. The pretense of culture and manners that Oleg Bard attempts to impart to Prisypkin might appease Preobrazhensky, but the ideology is still completely backward. Prisypkin’s sense of entitlement is at the core of the problem for both authors.

Mayakovsky’s judgment, however, is not voiced by a single authoritative source, as is Bulgakov’s. Prisypkin faces the resentment of his peers in the hostel as well as a chorus of poetic judges who indict him from every direction and on every level. Indeed, when the wedding party is burned to the ground, the firemen voice Mayakovsky’s lyric condemnation:

14 Ibid., 27, “Нам удалось согласовать и увязать их классовые и прочие противоречия, в чем нельзя не видеть вооруженному марксистским взглядом...будущее счастье человечества, именуемое в простонародье социализмом.”
“You can start a fire if you chance to doze off / So no bedside reading of Nadson and Zharov.”

Importantly, their lyrical criticisms are impersonal and modeled on Mayakovsky’s Soviet propaganda ads. In a foreshadowing of Prisypkin’s eventual call to self- indictment, the firemen include the audience in their prescriptive warnings. Urged to steer away from the misleading sentimental poetry of Nadson and the dangerous militaristic verse of Zharov, viewers are simultaneously compelled to ask if they themselves are not vulnerable to the same ideological weaknesses and regression that they have just mocked in Prisypkin. This reminder affirms that, at the end of the first part of the play, hope still remains for the proletariat in general and the audience in particular. Mayakovsky suggests that, through careful attention, ideological focus, and self-restraint, the viewers can attain the imagined heights of the new Soviet man. Recalling Prisypkin’s misplaced desire to take a rest after his class struggle to forge the bridge of socialism, the workers’ chorus’s warning to stand watch in the battle to forge the ideological foundations of socialism lays the groundwork for Mayakovsky’s critical vision of the Soviet future that is presented in the second half of the play.

**Prisypkin Recast by the Future**

The first half of Mayakovsky’s play features a Prisypkin who is literally drunk with his new privileged worker status. The first three scenes are brimming with his comically applied misunderstandings and misinterpretations of new Soviet doctrines and rhetoric. He is the clear target of Mayakovsky’s satire. In the context of Mayakovsky’s imagined Soviet state of the future, however, Prisypkin functions very differently, and the focus of the play

15 Ibid., 32, “Случайный сон – причина пожаров, - / на сон не читайте Надсона и Жарова.”
shifts. Prisypkin’s judges are no longer his peers. Rather, he is judged first by the authorities, who control and restrict every facet of life in the 1979 future, and then by the ideologically perfected Soviet workers, who no longer conceive of themselves as his comrades on even a most basic human level. Indeed, in the context of this fantastic future, the Soviet experiment appears successful, at least on the surface. The 1979 Soviets are living the dream; there is no longer any need for Bard’s petty poetry or explicit rhetoric, but Mayakovsky’s assessment of this future is equivocal at best. Prisypkin was undermined in the first scenes of the play as a class traitor, but in the context of the 1979 future his presentation is more ambiguous. Indeed, the promise of a bright and radiant future that is realized in the form of an automated, artless Soviet state is so disappointing and disillusioning that Prisypkin’s NEP-era consumerism and ideological backwardness may seem a small price to pay for his humanity.

Prisypkin’s impressions of the future contradict the 1979 Soviet authorities at every turn, especially in their appraisal of their relative success. Socialist revolution has taken place on a worldwide scale, and science and technology have eradicated the functional and bureaucratic inefficiencies of the past. At least on the surface, these modern hyper-controlled Soviets appear to have resolved the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic. The new Soviet man has been created without any overt knowledge of his purposeful creation, and these Soviet workers seem to have adopted the goals of socialism unproblematically as their personal aspirations. On closer examination, however, Mayakovsky’s 1979 Soviet Republic is not at all utopian. The cost of creating order and socialist humanity has been the loss of human individuality, creativity, freedom, and feeling. In the course of streamlining procedural issues of state governance, the Soviets may have maximized the worker’s
productive potential, but Prisypkin’s arrival reveals, surprisingly, that something positive has been lost along with inefficiency.

The 1979 masses have overcome the ruthless proletarian morality embodied by Sharikov in the past and the ideological misdirection seen in Prisypkin, but they also have sacrificed the critical defining elements of humanity of which even Prisypkin’s flaws are a part. Thus, these Soviets regard the past of fifty years ago as an unambiguously evil time of disease, uncleanliness, useless sentimentality, bureaucratic inefficiency, and social backwardness. They are no longer even familiar with the word “alcoholic” or “suicide,” not to mention “Bulgakov” or “bureaucracy.” Thus, when Prisypkin’s frozen corpse is uncovered in his now “former town of Tambov” and subsequently defrosted, he does not fit the strict mold of the new Soviet man; he is no better than a parasite. Ultimately, his sojourn in the future redeems the already undermined protagonist, and Mayakovsky seems resigned to Bulgakov’s foregone conclusion: the proletarian raw material has reached its maximum potential in the 1920s NEP present. The future of the Soviet experiment is, if not impossible, not without severe drawbacks that call its value into question. How much humanity will the Soviets sacrifice in their new Soviet man to provide for the construction of the ideal socialist state? Mayakovsky’s 1979 future has reached critical mass; in this context Prisypkin is surprisingly and comparatively validated and the new Soviet man is rejected in favor of his flawed NEP predecessor.

As in the past, Prisypkin’s working class origins remain the source of his power. The 1979 Soviet authorities justify their experiment based on “X-ray examination” showing his “callused” hands, which confirm that Prisypkin is not merely a lowly “representative of homo

16 Ibid., 35, “…бывшего Тамбова….”
sapiens…but a member of the highest group of the species – the working class” from fifty years ago and, therefore, must be defrosted in order to maximize his productive potential.17 While these Soviet authorities control and speak for the Soviet state and its people at every level, when they presume to dictate the appropriate reaction to Prisypkin, they are stymied by his unscripted behavior. Their unfeeling rationality and clinical mysophobia contrast negatively with Prisypkin’s organic misunderstanding and sentimentality. Their supremely logical ideology-driven behavior draws positive attention to Prisypkin’s emotive outbursts and superficial understanding of socialist ideology. Even the scientific defrosting process immediately appears ridiculous to the 1929 Prisypkin who, upon being informed that he, in actuality, has just been derefrigerated, accuses the doctors themselves of being intoxicated.18 They ignore this implausible attack as they continue to observe and dismiss his backward antiquated behaviors as evidence of their own ideological progress and social improvement.

Prisypkin’s concern for basic party regulations seems somewhat improved, but his characteristically proletarian manners and morality remain intact. Indeed, he is remarkably well preserved in his NEP form, still recovering from his night of revelry with guitar in hand. His first concerns are typically egocentric. Confused by his current surroundings, he quickly produces his documents, including registration in all of the appropriate Soviet organizations. Espying the calendar showing 1979, his first reaction is similarly superficial: sheer terror that

17 Ibid., 35, “Просвечивание показало на руках существа мозоли, бывшие полстолетия назад признаком трудящегося.”; 60, “…к «гомо сапиенс» и к его высшему виду – к классу рабочих.” Notably, these trademarks are later dismissed as shams as the Soviet authorities attempt to re-label Prisypkin in an attempt to segregate his corrosive personality by denying any commonalities with the future 1979 working class.

18 Ibid., 44, “- Это какое отделение милиции? - Нет, это совсем другое отделение! Это – отделение ото льда кожных покровов, которые вы отморозили… - …Еще посмотрим, кто из нас были пьяные.”
he is fifty years behind in his “union dues…for the district committee…the central Committee.”

Prisypkin’s bourgeois aspirations, for the moment, are superseded by his concern with keeping up good party appearances. Just as in 1929, so in 1979, Prisypkin is keenly aware that his membership in the working class must be maintained for only this guarantees his new privileges. The scientists are unresponsive to his antics and repulsed by his antihygienic handshaking. Prisypkin’s proletarian manners already exhibit an innocent fallibility and emotional irrationality that betoken a humanity noticeably lacking in the unfeeling Soviet scientists; and the same Prisypkin, who was the object of ridicule for his own class in 1929, figures here as a comparatively positive model of genuine, uncalculated, and therefore more meaningful human interaction. Prisypkin’s individualism proves redeeming in this future context in spite of his ideological misunderstandings, which appear only an afterthought in the 1979 future; these ideologically programmed Soviets are so disturbed by Prisypkin’s humanity that they dare not probe any deeper than the surface.

Prisypkin’s comparative reevaluation continues as he emerges from the confines of the laboratory into the automatized, regulated Soviet society of 1979. Even though the setting is geographically the same, he recognizes neither his own city nor his former love Zoya Beryozkina. The free-market concessions of NEP are gone; in fact, the 1979 future appears to have transcended all free-market-style purchasing relationships and even nature itself. Fruit is ready for the taking, not peddled in kiosks of the state-run department store. The trees are artificial and every day bear a different kind of fruit served up on individual paper plates based on the determination of the municipality.  

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19 Ibid., 44, “Это же за сколько у меня в профсоюз не плочено!”

20 Ibid., 46.
aggressively scientifically engineered, a testament to the Soviets’ sheer force of will to reach new heights through science and determination, especially in the realm of genetic engineering. The people themselves have been similarly engineered and molded into model new Soviets, but the result is much less successful; after all, individuality, while not a desirable attribute in the mechanized production of single-serving fruit, proves to be an integral part of humanity that has been forcibly suppressed in the 1979 Soviets. The resulting Soviet citizens, however, are delicate and dangerously susceptible to outside influence, betraying their natural evolutionary weaknesses. Their 1979 atmosphere is carefully monitored and must be aggressively protected from corrosive outside influence by the same unquestioned Soviet authorities who decide what words are permissible for use and whether the trees produce peaches or pears.

The reemergence of the 1929 NEP man wrecks havoc throughout the town; the uncouth conduct of the NEP proletarian, modeled in both Prisypkin and Sharikov to differing extents, no longer fits in the clean, ordered, morally and ideologically upstanding 1979 Soviet society. While the future Soviet state has managed to remove all of the bourgeois temptations of NEP and purify the morals of its population, Prisypkin’s arrival calls into question the extent to which they have actually succeeded in transforming human nature. These new Soviets have mechanized fruit production but have been less successful in standardizing humans. The 1979 Soviets have not truly transcended their base urges and desires; rather their society has merely been sanitized. Thus, Prisypkin’s influence is presented as a threat and a contagion that must be quarantined. His 1929 proletarian behaviors and amusements have repercussions throughout the city: “all the dogs have gone
mad” and have begun to spread “epidemic sycophancy” among the population.21 Prisypkin’s “‘love’ microbes are infecting the air,” and the “epidemic is spreading as wide as the ocean” as the Soviets contract his contagious, saccharine form of love.22 The authorities treat every element of Prisypkin’s personality as a sort of infectious disease. Prisypkin is resurrected without his poet-guide Oleg Bard, but he no longer needs this mocking voice of mutilated party rhetoric because he is no longer the prime target of Mayakovsky’s satire. Rather, as Prisypkin is redeemed by comparison to his 1979 comrades, he naturally begins to judge his surroundings based not on his flawed ideology but on his irrepressible, uncalculating humanity.

Mayakovsky’s presentation of Prisypkin’s influence on the future is not entirely negative. While he reintroduces the 1979 Soviets to drinking, spitting, smoking, and cursing, he also revives music, poetry, art, dancing, emotion, and the “ancient disease they called ‘love’.”23 The 1979 Soviet World Federation has reached another extreme, and Mayakovsky’s satire homes in on this conception of the ideal Soviet man, who is part of a supremely rational, moralistic, utopian vision devoid of individual deviation, weakness, and even emotion, art, and compassion. Brown argues further that this smothering of Prisypkin’s humanity and his eventual caging reflect Mayakovsky’s own growing disillusionment and sense of entrapment in the “cage of the futurist world that he and his comrades were so busily

21 Ibid., 47, “Эпидемия распространяется…все собаки взбесились. …люди, покусанные подобными животными, приобретут все первичные признаки эпидемического подхалимства.”

22 Ibid., 48, “…по воздуху разносятся эти ужасные влюбленные микробы.”; “Эпидемия окунется…..”

23 Ibid., 48, “…«влюбленности», - так называлась древняя болезнь…..”
building.” The close linkage between Mayakovsky and the characters in *The Bedbug*, as Brown notes, thus, becomes increasingly problematic because the poet simultaneously disparages the “tawdry values that survive” in Prisypkin and “the hardening scientific utopia that threatens to crush Prisypkin – and Mayakovsky.”

Prisypkin is uncomfortable in the regulated prescriptive 1979 Soviet state, and he asserts his own judgment: “you resurrect me and now you make fun of me!” Echoing Bormenthal’s excessively idealistic desire to “develop Sharik into a personality of high psychic order,” the 1979 laboratory director explains that “society hopes to raise [him] up to a human level.” In response, and marking a distinct departure from Sharikov’s embrace of life as a proletarian, Prisypkin demands, “Freeze me back…I didn’t unfreeze just so that you could dry me up!” Prisypkin himself points out the apparent incongruity: he the worker is “supposed to be a leader of the new society” but in this 1979 Soviet state he is not free even to “dance to [his] heart’s content.” Indeed, the only dancing the 1979 workers know is, not surprisingly, staged mass public spectacle of workers’ triumph: “a gay rehearsal of a new

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24 Brown, 331.
25 Ibid., 332.
29 Ibid., 53, “За что мы старались, кровь проливали, когда мне, гегемону, значит, в своем обществе в новоизученном танце и растанцеваться нельзя.”
work-system on the farms.” The 1979 professor’s goals are the same as the preexisting Soviet endeavor to create the new Soviet man, but his 1979 success story is quickly exposed as a merely superficial change predicated on absolute authoritarian control and regulation.

Order, efficiency, cleanliness, and philistine morality are foregrounded and forcibly maintained in the 1979 Soviet state, repressing humanity both in the Bulgakovian sense of human kindness, respect, and bourgeois morality and the Mayakovskian sense of mythopoetic creative freedom, feeling, suffering, and individualism. The future Soviets’ state-dictated prioritization is backward; they elevate the parasite and dehumanize the man. Ultimately, though, Prisypkin is so dissatisfied with his rebirth into the Soviet 1979 that he volunteers to serve as host to the zoo’s new parasitic treasure. The scientists aggressively censor Prisypkin; they need to protect the public from his corrosive influences when he is on display at the zoo. They are able to restrain him by controlling the environment in a way that Philip Philippovich neither desired nor could cage Sharikov. The 1979 scientists filter his incessant profanity out of the air, regulate his alcohol intake, and limit his access to cigarettes. Even so, throngs of obedient but fascinated Soviets gawk at their unhealthy, degenerate predecessor.

The 1979 Soviet authorities go to painstaking lengths to dehumanize Prisypkin. They need him to be equally as unrecognizable to his viewers as they at first seem to him. In an era when language is highly regulated and labels are important, the director further alienates Prisypkin by using reductive scientific descriptors to deprive him of any genuine humanity. He describes Prisypkin as little more than an “anthropoid simulator…the most remarkable of

\[\text{30 Ibid., 54, “…танец десяти тысяч рабочих и работниц…будет веселая репетиция новой системы полевых работ.”}\]
parasites.”31 In an attempt to keep the modern Soviets on their straight and narrow path, the Chairman of the City Soviet labels both Prisypkin and the bedbug parasites and confirms that they only “underscore the horrors of a bygone age and the might and difficulty of the world proletariat in its struggle for culture.”32 The director exclaims that bedbugus normalis and Prisypkin, the bourgeoisius vulgaris, are “different in size, but identical in essence.”33 To avoid identifying themselves with their undesirable but undeniable forebear, the Soviet authorities of the future are content to mislabel him, satisfied, once again, by a veneer of revolutionary change. Clearly, the authorities intend to reduce Prisypkin to a sheer spectacle to steel the hearts and souls of the town’s young people, but these efforts reveal their underlying fear that these 1979 Soviets are equally as vulnerable to impure ideology and immoral temptation as Prisypkin was in 1929.34

The Mayakovskiian I and the Rotating Role of Judge in The Bedbug

While in Bulgakov’s Heart of a Dog the narrative maintains Preobrazhensky as an arbiter of morality and social conduct, the role of judge is less clearly assigned in The Bedbug and never unequivocally invested in a single character. A work of prose more evidently privileges or unprivileges character voices and mentalities, and the independent voices of Sharik and Bormenthal serve to validate the professor’s perspective. Drama, by

31 Ibid., 60, “мы имеем дело со страшным человекообразным симулянтом … самый поразительный паразит.”

32 Ibid., 59, “Однако эти случаи…подчеркивают ужас поверженного времени и мощь и трудность культурной борьбы рабочего человечества.”

33 Ibid., 60, “Их двое – разных размеров, но одинаковых по существу.”

34 Ibid., 59, “Да закалятся души и сердца нашей молодежи на этих зловещих примерах!”
nature, allows for more ambiguous voicing because there can be no all-encompassing narrative structure. In Mayakovsky’s drama *Bedbug*, the question of narrative authority is even more complicated because of Mayakovsky’s reluctance to cede moral authority to any of these characters and the generic restraints of drama which demand the absence of a poetic I. In the second half of the play, however, the shifting speaking authority is awarded more and more frequently to Prisypkin; and, in the play’s final scene, he casts final judgment on the Soviets of 1979 and the relative success of the Soviet experiment.

*The Bedbug* also represents a unique reversal of the present and future when considered in the broader scope of Mayakovsky’s oeuvre. In *The Bedbug* the future validates the present and not vice versa. This inversion is further underscored by the complex interplay of the poetic I with the unlikely conduit of Prisypkin in the 1979 context. The Mayakovskian I that is the topic of much scholarship (beginning with his contemporaries Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Roman Jakobson) is reflected not in a typically larger-than-life, declamatory poetic persona but, if only periodically, in the unlikely character of Prisypkin. In Mayakovsky’s earlier works, including *Я!* (1913) and his eponymous drama in verse, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* (1913), the poetic I is not only the embodiment of the hyperbolically skilled, powerful, and persuasive poet but also almost a self-sustaining voice and entity. A hallmark of Mayakovsky’s work, the poetic I is notably absent in *The Bedbug*. In *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, Mayakovsky authors, directs, and stars as himself, “perhaps the last poet” and the voice of socialist revolution, and the poetic I and its aspirations are physically and 

35 Jacob Edmond presents a compelling analysis of the symbolic tensions evoked in *Я!* between the realized metaphor of the book, its title, and the poet Mayakovsky in his article “The I as Such: Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *Я!*” *Australian Slavonic East European Studies*, (16: 1-20), 2002, 41-54.
metaphorically larger than life. Mayakovsky deems himself the “king of lights,” a poet of and for the people, whose sheer words will reveal to the assembled audience “our” new souls “glowing like the arcs of a streetlight.” The role of the revolutionary Poet is immense and transformative, and Mayakovsky assumes this role eagerly and appears willing even to sacrifice himself physically for the sake of the revolution. In fact, Victor Shklovsky and Edward Brown agree that *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* can best be described as a monodrama in which Mayakovsky is represented in all of the characters.

Brown argues that the second act of the tragedy takes place in a “post-revolutionary city.” This argument is especially interesting because it sets up a parallel with the latter half of *Bedbug*, which is similarly located in the future. In the second act of the tragedy, the Poet Mayakovsky, bedecked in a toga, is praised and venerated in the style of a Greek god. The worshipers bring offerings of tears and kisses and beseech him to take up their burdens and sufferings. The Poet Mayakovsky conceives of a revolutionary role for himself that seems to exceed the constraints of reality, and he longs to assume the burden that will ultimately crush

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37 Ibid., 137 “Я царь ламп;” ; 138,

Придите все ко мне кто рвал молчание  
Кто выл оттого что петли полдней туги  
Я вам открою словами простыми как мычание  
Наши новья души гудящия как фонарная дуги.

38 Brown, 99; Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Pres, 1991), 130. As Boym notes, this reading is further supported by the first performance of the play in which the well-known painter and costume designer, Pavel Filonov, attempted to emphasize “the flatness” of all of the motley, dismembered characters surrounding the immense poet by equipping each with enormous cardboard masks.

39 Brown, 103.
him physically. Accepting the audience’s assertion that he alone is gifted “to sing songs,” the Poet gathers up their tears and heaves the physical load onto his back and leaves the city lamenting his plight and leaving the shreds of his soul in his wake.40 The role of the poet in this work is immense, and, as is often the case with Mayakovsky’s conception of his own calling, perhaps too much for the poet to bear. A similarly dominant poetic persona appears in his long poems Backbone Flute and Cloud in Trousers, where Mayakovsky repeatedly notes the incongruity between the immensity of his emotions and feelings and his inadequate physical body.

This immense, confident, revolutionary poetic I is absent in Bedbug. The eye of the poet, however, is not missing and remains focused on the course of revolution, but the traditionally imposing self-confident Mayakovskiian poetic I is at best disembodied and divided among several characters – chiefly Oleg Bard and the firemen in the first half and Prisypkin in the second. The lack of a prominent Mayakovsky figure in this play supports the notion of the author’s abrupt ideological departure from the past and loss of self-confidence in the late 1920s.

As Prisypkin finally emerges from his cage, on parade under the watchful eye of the director who is armed with a revolver, he is ceded, at least temporarily, the role of social arbiter so central to Bulgakov’s Preobrazhensky. He is not a vindictive judge; rather, he is pleasantly surprised to discover that the audience is composed of his “own people.” He immediately embraces the crowd as “citizens” and “brothers.”41 In fact, he mistakenly presumes that they too have recently been defrosted. Recalling Gogol’s apostrophic

40 Maiakovskii, Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia, 177, “Ты один только умеешь песни петь.”

41 Maiakovskii, Klop, 62, “Граждане! Братцы! Свои! Родные!”
challenge of self-examination issued to readers of *Dead Souls* who condemn Chichikov. Prisypkin urges the audience toward their own self-indictment, asking, “Why am I alone in the cage?” and then inviting the 1979 proletarians to join him. Prisypkin easily identifies the unchanged proletarian nature under the pristine veneer of the 1979 workers. While they peer at him with the same fascination as at a vile insect, they are, at their core, the same as he; only their behavior has changed in response to a sanitized and routinized environment. Prisypkin’s flaws finally render him ironically preferable to the carefully regimented and purposefully designed inhabitants of the 1979 Soviet state. Ultimately, his ideological backwardness, which is somewhat less visible during his reawakened period, seems a better lot than the monotonous obedience of the 1979 Soviets.

The 1979 Soviet authorities insist that Prisypkin is subhuman, but this deliberately inaccurate designation highlights their inability to perceive humanity rather than Prisypkin’s relative development as a Soviet citizen. His exuberant embrace of the viewers and the ease with which he identifies with the 1979 Soviets, who fancy themselves infinitely superior to their trapped insect, evoke sheer terror from the onlookers who rush to shield their children from such blasphemy and beg the professor to “muzzle” Prisypkin and “put a stop to it.” Whether they recognize that they are vulnerable to recidivism under Prisypkin’s influence is dubious, but they certainly fail to identify explicitly any points of similarity. Instead, they

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42 This scene resonates with Gogolian literary precursors, including *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls*, where the narrator addresses the audience after recounting Chichikov’s prehistory: “And who among you, filled with Christian humility, not publicly, but in quiet, alone, in moments of solitary converse with himself, will point deeply into his own soul this painful question: ‘And isn’t there a bit of Chichikov in me, too?’” (251).


44 Ibid., 62-63, “- Намордник…намордник ему… - Профессор, прекратите!”
are insulted and disturbed; they recoil at the shocking implication that they too could possess such subhuman qualities. Before the scene can get out of hand, the Soviet authorities quickly reassert their absolute control over the creature from the past; the director suddenly decrees that the “insect (Prisypkin) is tired,” dismisses his claims as “hallucinations” induced by the “noise and bright lights,” and closes the exhibit until tomorrow.\footnote{Ibid., 63, “Насекомое утомилось… Шум и освещение ввергли его в состояние галлюцинации.”} The Soviet authorities simply ignore and eliminate any element that does not fit their desired model linguistically, behaviorally, or ethically. Even the modern scientist, who controls Prisypkin’s exhibition, does not demonstrate respect for the empirical fact that consistently legitimizes Preobrazhensky’s way of thinking in *Heart of a Dog*.

With its almost unbelievable advances in science, the Soviet state by 1979 has already managed to engineer an army of ideal Soviet citizens on a universal scale in a way that Preobrazhensky’s experiment seemed to suggest was impossible. The 1979 Soviet republic is a modicum of the Soviet ideal; they have constructed a mechanistic socialist state that seems indeed to be classless and free from bureaucratic redundancy. In the estimation of the 1979 Soviets, their system runs supremely efficiently and they have transcended their lingering NEP capitalistic urges; they are well behaved and socially educated. Would these 1979 proletarians have satisfied Preobrazhensky’s demands for a well-behaved working class with bourgeois morals? Perhaps they would, but this indulgence in conjecture and the Mayakovskiiian imaginings of the future presuppose a malleable quality of human nature that is somewhat antithetical to the Bulgakovian conception of humanity. Bulgakov’s own utopian drama *Bliss* [*Блаженство*] describes a future set in 2222 that references the past in terms of human nature but resembles Mayakovsky’s 1979 in its virtuousness; i.e., the time
travelers are impressed by the absence of police forces to maintain order in the future Soviet state. Interestingly, in contrast to Mayakovsky’s play in verse *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* and many of his other works where the enormous poetic persona is so clearly visible or shared among many characters, the poetic authority in *The Bedbug* is scattered and given, somewhat confusingly, largely to Prisypkin.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS

In both Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug* and Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*, the Soviet experiment to create a new Soviet man in forging a new Soviet utopian socialist society is called into question. In both works, the Soviet religion of science serves as a platform for examining the impact of these human experiments up close. Despite the lifelong ideological dissimilarities between these two authors, both arrive at an unequivocal rejection of the future of the Soviet experiment and an ambivalent valorization of the present in 1925 and 1929 respectively. This unexpected convergence can be explained firstly by the two authors’ different interpretations of the social and ideological implications of NEP and secondly by the specter of Stalinism, which drained the revolution of its fever-pitch iconoclastic momentum for Mayakovsky. In both works the Soviet experiment demands that some part of one’s humanity be sacrificed for the achievement of the Soviet goal. For Bulgakov, the critical loss is that of manners, ethics, and morality, i.e., what he deems pre-revolutionary normalcy. Bulgakov thus holds up Preobrazhensky and his pre-revolutionary ethical standards and code of conduct as models. Preobrazhensky’s anthropomorphization experiment confirms that the qualities of kindness, respect, and compassion demonstrated even by a dog are somehow sacrificed in the pursuit of the Soviet ideal, which empowers a working class and its ruthless proletarian morality to destroy the intellectual and literary elite. Sharik is made into a man, but though he seems to have progressed along the evolutionary
scale, he has regressed on the scale of humanity. Preobrazhensky sees that the experiment offers no hope of producing any positive results, and he wisely restores Sharikov to his canine form.

For Mayakovsky, the sacrifices are different, but the resolution is the same. While Prisypkin, like Sharikov, unquestionably illustrates the inherent moral and behavioral shortcomings of the NEP-era proletariat, Prisypkin’s reception in 1979 renders his 1929 behavior more ambiguous and less wholly negative. Both portrayals, though, challenge the potential of the proletariat to be truly transformed into the ideal new Soviet man. Prisypkin and Sharikov seem to represent the height of the proletariat’s natural development. If the humanity of the proletariat must be repressed and controlled to produce the new Soviet man, then the value of the new Soviet man is inherently cheapened. Thus, the 1979 model Soviet is even more repulsive than Prisypkin in 1929, and Mayakovksy retrospectively elevates the present NEP reality as a default fallback. Prisypkin and NEP can hardly be considered ideals. Indeed, they are derided and mocked by Mayakovsky in the first acts of the play. Prisypkin’s reawakening in the future, however, casts a new light on this characterization. Prisypkin is redeemed in reference to a future that is populated by what the literary critic and science fiction writer Evgeny Zamyatin described as alive-dead people. As Zamyatin observed in his 1923 essay “On Literature, Revolution, and Entropy”:

Although organic chemistry has already erased the line between living and dead matter, it is a mistake to divide people into the living and dead: there are alive-dead people and alive-alive people. The alive-dead people also write, walk, speak, and act. But they do not make mistakes; only machines do not make mistakes, and they produce only dead things. The quality of being alive-alive lies in mistakes, in searching, in questions, and in torment.  

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Mayakovsky’s 1979 Soviets clearly belong to the ranks of the alive-dead, as does Bulgakov’s Preobrazhensky. In approaching the Soviet ideal, in resolving the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic, they have given up questioning and searching, except, perhaps, in scientific pursuits which are relegated to the intellectual elite. Prisypkin is alive-alive, but he does not embody the Soviet or even Mayakovskian ideal. By the end of Mayakovsky’s life, however, as the I became less influential and subsumed by the overarching trajectory of the Soviet experiment, perhaps preserving the humanity of being alive-alive became more important than attaining a Soviet ideal that was increasingly deindividualized, orchestrated, unthinking, uncreative, and free from torment. Thus, the critical loss for Mayakovsky lies in the sacrifice of individualism and creative freedom to the state machine. His vision of the future redeems Prisypkin in spite of his character flaws and ideological shortcomings, and in these works Mayakovsky and Bulgakov agree that the NEP present is the end point of the current iteration of the Soviet grand experiment, at least in terms of the creation of the new Soviet man. Importantly, Bulgakov’s resignation is a product of his backward looking ideals, while Mayakovsky acquiesces in the face of a future dictated by ruthlessly authoritarian ideology; for Mayakovsky NEP is unequivocally preferable to the specter of his 1979 dystopia, which he posits as the inevitable successor to the current Soviet ideology, which by 1929 was already shifting toward Stalinism.

Both works conclude with the resigned acknowledgement that the working-class raw material from which the ideologically motivated, politically self-aware, patriotic, proactive working class is supposed to emerge is fundamentally ill-prepared and incapable of achieving

ходят, говорят, делают. Но они не ошибаются; не ошибаясь – делают только машины, но они делают только мертвое. Живые-живые – в ошибках, в поисках, в вопросах, в муках.”
this lofty goal. Both Mayakovsky and Bulgakov imply that the course of the Soviet experiment already suggests that it will yield no positive results. Mayakovsky carries the experiment further than Bulgakov, but the results in the future are also disheartening. For all of the ways in which the 1979 Soviets of Mayakovsky’s imagination have fulfilled the Soviet model, they have lost a crucial part of their humanity and are no longer willing or able to even recognize those forsaken qualities in Prisypkin.

The conclusions of these two works are similarly ambivalent, but their fates in the Soviet Union were very different. While Bulgakov’s novella was not published until 1985 in the Soviet Union, and then only with major alterations, and appeared in Russian abroad only in 1968, Mayakovsky’s play was staged the same year it was written. When Heart of a Dog was written in 1925, however, both Bulgakov and the editor of Nedra, N. S. Angarsky (pseudonym of Klestov, 1873-1943), thought the work was publishable. After all, Angarsky had published Bulgakov’s D’iavoliada collection, including The Fatal Eggs the year before. Proffer suggests that perhaps Angarsky and Bulgakov were convinced that “the censors were extremely stupid” after the publication of that caustic bit of satire.² By her own admission, however, this seems unlikely; and, even if they had agreed to extensive revisions to the text, the affairs of the Kalabukhov house were not acceptable literary fare. As an intellectual endowed with the ability to carry out scientific experiments of increasingly intrinsic value in the Soviet state and a literary authority to judge, Preobrazhensky could not be allowed to make an enemy of Shvonder and condemn his own proletarian creation, and Bulgakov’s ideologically adversarial relationship with the Soviet authorities afforded him no room for doubt. By contrast, although Mayakovsky’s play offers a similarly discouraging vision of the

² Proffer, 133.
prospects of the Soviet experiment, his reputation as the crowned Poet of Revolution surely helped smooth the way for a production of *The Bedbug*. Nonetheless, the performance of *The Bedbug* is difficult to explain, as even Brown characterizes it chiefly as a work of “propaganda” aimed directly “against the Stalinist bureaucracy that was taking form at the time… [and] against the abuse of power at high levels.”

Were the censors really so obtuse as to have not understood the implications of *The Bedbug* or did Mayakovsky’s 1979 Soviet utopia demonstrate enough promise in terms of scientific and technological progress that his criticism of NEP and his negative prognosis for the new Soviet man could be overlooked? Likely, in addition to Mayakovsky’s lingering cachet as the poet of the Bolshevik Revolution, the absolute ideological purity and indisputable technological and scientific progress reflected in Mayakovsky’s fictional future Soviet state sufficed to validate the current course and inspiring promise of the general Soviet endeavor. After all, even Lenin saw NEP as a necessary, albeit not ideal, transition phase toward the bright and radiant future. Mayakovsky’s 1979 future in *The Bedbug* is not the ideal he envisioned as the Poet of Revolution, but it seems to have been adequate to satisfy the Soviet authorities in 1929. Even this almost counterintuitive official acceptance of Mayakovsky’s 1979 Soviet state as an ideal confirms Mayakovsky’s underlying fear, implicit in *The Bedbug*, of Soviet authorities who assume greater control in every realm of Soviet life while demonstrating an increasingly flagrant disregard for humanity. Neither censors nor audiences were moved to the self-indictment Mayakovsky knew *Bedbug* begged from them. As his own promotional flier for *Bedbug* attests, Mayakovsky was keenly aware of the play’s capacity to evoke the audience’s self-indictment. Thus, in his poetic advertisement, he

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3 Brown, 333.
reminds prospective viewers, “Only don’t be upset by the antics of an insect. / It’s not about you, but about your acquaintance.”

Although *Bedbug* was undoubtedly intended as a work of agitprop, the emotional uncertainty of a pathetic, philistine proletarian unexpectedly thrust into a regimented Soviet world he does not understand does not succeed as clear-cut propaganda. Mayakovsky’s attempts to satirize the NEP Soviet bureaucracy and call into question the overarching bent of the current Soviet direction and the implications of a fledgling Stalinism are undermined by the creative emotional complexity he cannot resist and his own growing doubts. The characters are too real and too complicated to appear comedic. By this same token, Bulgakov’s Preobrazhensky’s position of intellectual authority as a NEP specialist assured that he could not be easily dismissed in his condemnation of the proletariat and the Soviet endeavor. Bulgakov offered no redemptive vision of a Soviet future beyond NEP, and his demonization of the current proletarian model was clearly intolerable to Soviet authorities whom Mayakovsky saw already adopting an agenda of absolute moral authority implemented in the extreme in his 1979 dystopian Soviet World Federation.

As my comparative analysis has shown, the employment of the elite’s expertise and skill during NEP to serve the socialist ideal of proletarian cultural enlightenment is central to both Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* and Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug*. In both works the failure of these efforts is blamed not on the experts or their experimental subjects but on their misguided endeavor to improve the human design. The NEP specialist and hero Preobrazhensky’s accidental humanization experiment tests the hypothesis that underlies the grand Soviet experiment, but, as Preobrazhensky’s pre-revolutionary standpoint anticipates

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4 Vladimir Maiakovskii, “Reklamnaia letuchka k spektakliu ‘Klop’,” *Sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh*, Tom 10, (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Pravda, 1979), 64.
and the NEP present confirms, the proletariat proves inadequate source material for the grandiose Soviet undertaking. The 1979 Soviet state is the imagined end product of a quasi-successful implementation of the current Soviet experiment in *Bedbug*. Prisypkin, like Preobrazhensky’s NEP patients, evidences the dangers of ideological compromise, but the 1979 future only confirms that the proletariat is still constitutionally too feeble to internalize the ideology of socialism effectively, much less spontaneously. Bulgakov’s scientist and Mayakovsky’s poet prove equally qualified but unable to facilitate the necessary reacculturation and self-actualization of the proletariat. For Bulgakov this resignation is nothing new, but for Mayakovsky it signifies the author’s downward spiral of ideological disillusionment that undoubtedly contributed to his suicide in 1930. Bulgakov did not need the looming specter of Stalinism to arrive at his bleak prognosis of the Soviet experiment. In *Heart of a Dog*, as in all of Bulgakov’s work, the working class is never redeemed or elevated. Bulgakov’s gifted elite protagonists never evince any sympathy for the unwashed proletarian masses – not during the Revolution, the Civil War, NEP, or beyond. Even at the end of the novella, the avid young Soviets are the butt of Preobrazhensky’s acid commentary and overt mockery; ultimately, they appear socially and morally inferior even to the stray dog Sharik. Contrastingly, by the conclusion of Mayakovsky’s *Bedbug*, Prisypkin is raised at least to an ambiguous value. Mayakovsky’s play harbors some sentiment for the ideologically disappointing and still underdeveloped revolutionary working class. There is still merit in the 1979 proletarian Prisypkin just as there was in his 1929 proletarian comrades, but in both there is evidence of the increasingly debased and threatened revolutionary Soviet ideals that Mayakovsky found utterly disillusioning.


