

Title: Narrative Agency and the Pituitary Gland: Metabolic Storytelling in Mikhail Bulgakov's "Heart of a Dog"

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Abstract:

In the wake of fin-de-siècle discoveries in the field of endocrinology, bodily glands, alongside the hormones they produced, featured prominently in the literary works, visual arts, and popular culture of early twentieth-century Europe. Experimental surgery, with gland transplantation and grafting, promised rejuvenation and intellectual vitality, while phenomena of all sorts began to be associated to hormone production in causal links—from bodily rhythms to behavioral patterns; from the pace of history to the trajectory of nations. In early Soviet Russia the increased interest in hormones went hand in hand with the experiments in eugenics. This paper analyzes Bulgakov's "Heart of a Dog" through the lens of thing theory, posthuman studies, and narratology, and it shows how the activity of the pituitary gland does not only affect bodily functions, but also dictates narrative time and raises questions of narrative agency.