



## CHALLENGING ANTHROPOCENTRISM: SAKI'S USE OF ANIMISM IN HIS "SREDNI VASHTAR"<sup>1</sup>

İNSAN-MERKEZCİLİĞE MEYDAN OKUMA: SAKI'NİN  
"SREDNI VASHTAR" ADLI ÖYKÜSÜNDE ANİMİZM KULLANIMI

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### Abstract

Despite their close relationships since the earliest times, human beings have always marginalised and exploited animals due to the anthropocentric mind-set. Derived from the Greek word *anthropos*, which stands for human, anthropocentrism privileges human beings as the centre of the universe by marginalising all other life forms. Since such an approach justifies itself by privileging human beings due to their agentic capabilities, and by denying the agency of more-than-humans, anthropocentrism legitimises the ruthless use of natural resources and animal species as a means to human needs. Contrary to anthropocentrism, however, an animistic belief acknowledges soul and agency not only in human beings but also in more-than-humans; and therefore, appreciates their intrinsic values. Despite the dominant anthropocentric ideology of his time, the Edwardian short story writer Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916), who writes his work with the penname Saki, evinces his sensitivities to the exploitation of animals in most of his short stories by challenging the anthropocentric viewpoint. Saki's direct challenge to anthropocentrism manifests itself with his use of animism in his "Sredni Vashtar," where the author problematises the notions of human and animal by blurring the boundaries between them through the child protagonist Conradin's formulation of an animistic religion with an animal god. Accordingly, the main objective of this article is to discuss how Saki challenge anthropocentrism, and tends to step outside of the traditions and dominant norms of his society by incorporating an animistic view into his "Sredni Vashtar."

### Öz

Çok eski zamanlara dayanan yakın ilişkilerine rağmen, insanmerkezci yaklaşımın bir sonucu olarak insanlar her zaman hayvanları ötekileştirmiş ve kendi menfaatleri uğruna kullanmıştır. İnsan anlamına gelen Yunanca kelime *anthropos*'tan türetilmiş olan insanmerkezçilik (anthropocentrism), insan dışındaki varlıkların eyleyici özelliklerini inkâr ederek evrenin merkezinde gördüğü insanı ayrıcalıklı kılmaktadır. Fakat insanmerkezçiliğin aksine, animist bir inanış ruhun ve eyleyiciliğin sadece insanlarda değil, hayvanlarda ve diğer varlıklarda da olduğunu kabul ederek bu varlıkların da içsel değerlerini takdir eder. Eserlerini genellikle Saki mahlası ile yazan Edward dönemi öykü yazarı Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916), kendi zamanının insanmerkezci ideolojisine rağmen, bir çok eserinde bu yaklaşımı sorgulayarak hayvanlara yapılan zulme karşı hassasiyetini göstermektedir. Çocuk başkarakter Conradin'in hayvan tanrısına yüklediği bir takım animistik özellikler sayesinde hayvan ve insan arasındaki sınırları iyice belirsizleştirerek bu iki kavramı sorunsallaştırdığı "Sredni Vashtar" adlı öyküsünde Saki'nin animizm kullanarak insanmerkezçiliğe meydan okuduğu görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı animistik bir görüşle yazdığı "Sredni Vashtar" öyküsünde Saki'nin kendi toplumunun gelenekleri ve baskın normlarının dışına çıkarak insanmerkezçiliğe meydan okuyuşunu incelemektir.

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Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916), who writes his work with the penname Saki,<sup>2</sup> is generally categorised as a master of the short story. However, interestingly enough, despite his success as a short story writer, “Munro has hitherto never served as the subject of a serious study” (Spears 7). As “[h]is sister Ethel destroyed all of his papers after his death” (Waugh vii), and wrote her own account of his biography, many things are sketchy about Saki. Due to this vagueness, “Saki has attracted [only] a few critics’ attention” and therefore, “[f]ew writers of the twentieth century who have brought so much pleasure to discriminating readers have suffered the same critical neglect as Saki (Hector Hugh Munro). No books have been written about him, and the serious critical essays on his work may be numbered on the fingers of two hands” (Drake 6). Extant studies about Saki deem him a bitter satirist, penning his short stories with a bleak sense of humour to criticise the hypocrisies and pretensions of the middle and upper-middle class Edwardian society.<sup>3</sup> However, besides Saki’s dark humour and critical stance to the pretensions of his society, one of the most prominent features of his short stories is that they are imbued with innumerable animal characters. In most of his short stories in his collections, namely *Not So Stories* (1902), *Reginald* (1904), *Reginald in Russia* (1910), *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911), *Beasts and Super-Beasts* (1914), *The Toys of Peace* (1919), and *The Square Egg and Other Sketches* (1924), Saki’s interest in animals is apparent. Since he is known to have some pets during his childhood,<sup>4</sup> the central positioning of the animal characters in most of his short stories is generally believed to be the repercussions of Saki’s childhood affection for animals.

<sup>2</sup> When the author is referred to, his penname “Saki” will be used.

<sup>3</sup> See Brian Gibson’s “Beastly Humans: Ambivalence, Dependent Dissidence and Metamorphosis in the Fiction of Saki” and George James Spears’s “The Satiric Art of H.H. Munro(‘Saki’).”

<sup>4</sup> After their mother’s tragic death at an early age, Hector Hugh Munro and his siblings Charles Arthur and Mary Ethel were made to live with their two aunts since their father Colonel Munro was working as the inspector general in the Burma Police force. However, sadly enough, the aunts, “two spinster sisters, Aunt Charlotte (‘Tom’) and Aunt Augusta” (Carey ix), as “strong characters[,] [...] dominated the children’s lives,” and prohibited them almost everything except readings and church goings (Byrne, “The Short Stories...” 157). Therefore, the Munro children found peace in animals:

Persecution drove them in on themselves. Forbidden to play with other children, they formed an unusually close comradeship against the outer world, seeking in animals the love that adults denied them. Cats, cocks, hens, tortoises, rabbits, doves, and guinea pigs were their pets and allies, also a retriever which the aunts kept chained in an outhouse and exercised (Ethel alleges) ‘perhaps twice in the year.’ (Carey x).

Especially Hector was rather fond of animals, and had some pets. Yet, Munro’s interest in animals does not remain as a childhood affection, but turns into a life-long love for them. During his short period of duty in the Burma Police force, which ended up when he got malaria, Munro “spent most of his time investigating, and adopting, the flora and fauna of his district” (Byrne, “Saki” 366) as well as petting exotic animals: “The opportunities for extending his pet collection engage much of his spare time. He acquires a silver-grey squirrel and a tiger kitten, whose endearing combination of tameness and wildness, quite on the Saki model, yields endless amusement” (Carey xiv-xv).

Although his affinity for animals is undeniably clear, the predominance of witty animals in most of his short stories as the central characters that become victorious at the end of the stories as opposed to the manipulative and vicious human characters that are punished for their manipulation of the animals is certainly much more than mere reflections of the author's childhood love for animals. It can definitely be evaluated as Saki's direct criticism of the dominant anthropocentric mind-set of his time. Born in Akyab, Burma in 1870 "to a family with strong military and imperial connections" (Byrne, *The Unbearable Saki* 5) and having worked in the Burma Police force for a very short time, Munro was well aware of the ills of imperialism, which was very much in tune with anthropocentrism, and caused the destruction of animals, nature and natural resources as well as manipulation and exploitation of the colonised people.

Anthropocentrism, which is simply "the belief that the human (anthropos is the Greek word for human) is the center of all things" (Fudge 15), privileges human beings while marginalising all other life forms. Due to this juxtaposition of human beings and nonhuman others, anthropocentrism justifies and legitimises the ruthless use of natural resources and animal species as a means to human needs. Herewith, owing to the assumed superiority of human beings over all other life forms, despite their close relationships since the dawn of the universe, animals have always been exploited extensively by human beings as the "relatively powerless and marginalised 'other' partner" (Philo and Wilbert 4). However, contrary to the general anthropocentric discourse and ideology of his time, Saki tends to step outside of the traditions, and question the dominant norms and values of the society that he was a part of by privileging his animal characters over vicious human characters. With this in mind, it is possible to observe Saki's direct challenge to anthropocentrism in his "Sredni Vashtar," where he problematises the clear-cut boundaries between human and animal by attributing animistic features to the eponymous polecat ferret as the animal god of the story. An animistic belief, as opposed to the anthropocentric viewpoint, acknowledges soul and agency not only in human beings, but also in more-than-humans to offer a holistic view of nature with a sense of respect to all of them due to their intrinsic values. Accordingly, this article attempts to discuss how Saki challenges the anthropocentric premises of his time and the dominant norms of his society by incorporating an animistic view into his short story "Sredni Vashtar."

The root cause of anthropocentrism is the clear-cut divisions of the realms belonging to humans and animals. In the Western context, this division is deeply entrenched, and the marginalisation of animals is “*supported by more than twenty centuries of philosophical tradition*” (Cavalieri 3). The earliest discussions about the distinction between human beings and animals go back to the Greek Antiquity, to Aristotle. Although Aristotle refers to human beings as animals, he nevertheless distinguishes humans from animals by referring to the former as “*a political animal*” (11) with the claim that they are endowed with the abilities of reasoning and speaking. Since he attributes reasoning only to human beings, Aristotle claims that they have the capacity to govern and use animals to their own ends: “*If therefore nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of men*” (37). As speaking is associated with reasoning, and consequently reasoning with consciousness, beginning with Aristotle, most of the significant philosophers in the Western philosophy have claimed that animals lack an immortal soul. Due to this understanding, they have excluded animals from the ethical and moral spheres. Although such a discriminative approach to animals is observed in the discourses of most of the philosophers, the seventeenth century French philosopher René Descartes’ comments about them seem to be the sharpest. Distinguishing animals and humans thoroughly, Descartes refers to the former as “*bête machines,*” that is nature’s automata, which act mechanically without any thought or feeling. In one of his letters written to Henry More, he avers that

since art copies nature, and people can make various automatons which move without thought, it seems reasonable that nature should even produce its own automatons, which are much more splendid than artificial ones — namely the animals. This is especially likely since we know no reason why thought should always accompany the sort of arrangement of organs that we find in animals. It is much more wonderful that a mind should be found in every human body than that one should be lacking in every animal. (*The Philosophical Writings...* 366)

Not surprisingly, Descartes’ reason in likening animals to automata is the direct result of the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body, and human and animal. His *cogito*, that is, “*I think therefore I am*” not only creates a chasm between body and mind by privileging the former over latter, but also brings about an abyss between human beings and animals by marginalising the latter due to lack of consciousness. According to his line of argument, existence is directly associated

with one's awareness of it. Moreover, this awareness is inextricably linked with one's utterance of it through language. Since it is only human beings who can speak the language, and language is associated with rationality, Descartes reduces animals to the status of machines. He supports his idea on the lack of rationality in animals by claiming that although animals have all the necessary organs to speak, they cannot manage to do so due to lack of consciousness in them. Hence, he states that lack of language in animals "*does not merely show that the brutes [animals] do have less reason than men, but that they have none at all, since it is clear that very little is required in order to be able to talk*" (*Discourse on Method...* 39). However, ironically enough, Descartes' denial of soul to animals is rather contradictory when the roots of the word "animal" are taken into consideration. As John Cottingham states in his *A Descartes Dictionary*, the word "animal" is "*etymologically connected with the Latin anima ('soul'), and hence bears traces of the scholastic idea that living creatures differ from non-living things in virtue of their being 'animated' or 'ensouled'*" (15). At this juncture, contrary to Descartes' claims about them, when the roots of the word are at stake, it undoubtedly suggests that animals also have souls. For Cottingham, Descartes' denial of soul to animals is the direct result of the fact that "*he avoids the word animal to describe creatures like dogs, cats and monkeys, preferring the more down-to-earth label bête ('beast'), or in Latin brutum ('brute')*" (15).

However, an animistic belief premediates the idea that not only humans, but also more-than-humans have souls, and they are valuable for their intrinsic values. Similar to Cottingham's definition of the word "animal," animism, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is also etymologically derived from the Latin word *anima*, meaning "*life and soul.*" In this respect, it means "*[t]he attribution of a living soul to inanimate objects and natural phenomena*" (OED). Yet, such a definition of the word seems rather problematic since it ascribes agency only to human beings who attribute a living soul to inanimate objects and more-than-humans by disregarding their intrinsic values and agency. Such an approach to animism is directly related with the definition of the word with reference to the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor's theory of animism as a "*pre-religious state*" as he discusses in his *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (1871). According to Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, "*[a]nimism, as Tylor defined it, was a savage stage of development, the very purpose of which was to be outgrown*" (138). For Edward Tylor, as he contends in his *Primitive Culture*, "*[a]nimism is, in fact, the groundwork of the Philosophy of Religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men. Although it may at first sight seem to afford but*

*a bare and meagre definition of a minimum of religion, it will be found practically sufficient; for, where the root is, the branches will generally be produced*" (385). This older usage of the term is mostly related with the religious beliefs. In this respect, the definition of "old animism," as Graham Harvey posits,

refers to a putative concern with knowing what is alive and what makes a being alive. It alleges a 'belief in spirits' or 'non-empirical beings,' and/or a confusion about life and death among some indigenous people, young children or all religious people. Sometimes it is party to the assertion of a confusion between persons and objects, or between humans and other-than-human beings. It may also be part of a theory about the origins of religions and/or the nature of religion of religion itself. (xi)

However, another definition of the word "animism" as defined in the *OED* is totally different from that of the first one, and similar to the definition of the term as it is used by the critics as "new animism": "*the belief in the existence of soul or spirit apart from matter, and in a spiritual world generally; spiritualism as opposed to materialism*" ("Animism"). In this respect, the term animism, briefly, refers to the acknowledgement of soul in all entities beyond human intentionality; and therefore, paves the way for the idea of respecting all life forms, and adopting a holistic worldview as opposed to the anthropocentric one, which always privileges human beings over others due to the dualistic viewpoint. In this sense, as Harvey posits,

*[a]nimism is lived out in various ways that are all about learning to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) towards and among other persons. Persons are beings, rather than objects, who are animated and social towards others (even if they are not always sociable). Animism may involve learning how to recognise who is a person and what is not – because it is not always obvious not all animists agree that everything that exists is alive or personal. However, animism is more accurately understood as being concerned with learning how to be a good person in respectful relationships with other persons. (xi, italics mine)*

In this regard, as it is based on the idea of respecting the living world, central to the theme of animism is to "*understand worldviews and life ways that are different in various ways from those typically inculcated and more or less taken for granted in Western modernity*" (Harvey xi-xii). As respecting all life forms is the central idea, contrary to the dualistic view in the anthropocentric approach, there are pluralities

in the animistic belief. Thus, *“[i]nstead of crying ‘One!’ or ‘Two!,’ animists celebrate plurality, multiplicity, the many and their entwined passionate entanglements. Instead of the hero who struggles against one or other side of things in an attempt to discern the underlying truth, animist stories present tricksters who multiply possibilities in increasingly amusing ways”* (Harvey xv).

At this juncture, contrary to the anthropocentric worldview, which disregards nonhuman others, as personhood is recognised not only in humans, but also in more-than-humans in animistic beliefs, they are respected. Therefore, by turning away from the anthropocentric discourses and projects of his time, Saki creates a world of his own in which there are more-than-human entities that have been attributed animistic features. Consequently, by ascribing such characteristics to his unusual characters, he not only actually steps out of the traditional stereotypes of his time, but also criticises them by deconstructing the dominant Western notions, which has always privileged the human subject while subjugating the rest of beings to him. On this background, it can be claimed that Saki’s “Sredni Vashtar” is one of the short stories in which the author promotes an animistic worldview and thereby scrutinises the limits of anthropocentrism by blurring the established boundaries between human and animal through the animal god Sredni Vashtar. Being one of Saki’s most famous and most anthologised short stories, “Sredni Vashtar” is a revenge story, centred on a ten-year-old ill boy Conradin’s problematic relationship with his cousin and guardian Mrs. de Ropp, and the boy’s consequent formulation of an animistic religion with the polecat ferret Sredni Vashtar as his animal god. As a very strict character, Mrs. de Ropp, besides showing no sign of affection to the boy, does not allow Conradin to do anything and to play with other children. Therefore, to amuse himself, Conradin formulates an animistic pagan religion and begins to secretly worship his ferret god in the toolshed of Mrs. de Ropp’s dull garden. Not surprisingly, when she realises the presence of animals in her toolshed, Mrs. de Ropp immediately decides to kill them. However, contrary to her expectations, the story ends with the victory of the animal, who comes out of the toolshed in a grotesque manner with wet stains around its throat, assumedly suggesting Mrs. de Ropp’s tragic doom. In this critical moment in the plot, Saki seems to be privileging the child and the animal, and their agency as a victorious response to the anthropocentric adult cousin.

Most probably modelled on Saki's aunts, who were rather distant towards the Munro children, and prohibited them almost everything except drawings, readings and church goings (Byrne, *"The Short Stories..."*157), Conradin's guardian Mrs. de Ropp is a rather strict woman towards him and the animals as the reader realises when the plot unfolds through the end of the story. Mrs. de Ropp's each and every behaviour, be it being rather distant towards him or not allowing him to go outside and to play with other children, reveals that she dislikes Conradin for an unknown reason. Yet still, she hypocritically uses his illness as a means to forbid everything to him seemingly *"for his good"* (Munro 136). Though not mentioned in detail, the third person narrator tells the reader that Conradin is an ill boy; and, according to the doctor, he *"would not live another five years"* (Munro 136). Other than this remark just mentioned at the beginning of the story, there is no detail about his illness. Since his guardian Mrs. de Ropp is rather distant towards Conradin and does not allow him to leave the house, the boy's illness, apparently, stems from lack of affection at the hands of such an authoritative guardian in such a boring house. That is why, as Auberon Waugh remarks, *"[t]he boy in [...] [the] story is dying [...] and we are given to understand that he is dying because his imaginative life is being stifled by the pestering boredom and domination of his terrible female guardian"* (viii). Similar to the childhood experiences of the three Munro children, Charlie, Hector and Ethel, who were just confined in their house, Conradin leads a very boring life in this house, away from all other people. Worse still, besides Mrs. de Ropp's domination, the sterility and dullness of the house contributes to Conradin's boredom and illness. Saki delineates Conradin's boredom in such a dull garden as follows:

In the dull, cheerless garden, overlooked by so many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that, or a reminder that medicines were due, he found little attraction. The few fruit-trees that it contained were set jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste; it would probably have been difficult to find a market-gardener who would have offered ten shillings for their entire yearly produce. (Munro 137)

However, interestingly enough, despite the dullness of the garden, *"a disused toolshed of respectable proportions"* in a forgotten corner soon attracts Conradin's attention, and he manages to turn it into a *"haven"* that is populated with *"a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen"* and *"a large polecat-ferret"* (Munro 137). Since he is



suffocated in the sterility of the house with his wicked cousin Mrs. de Ropp monitoring his every single behaviour, Conradin begins to experience different feelings in this forgotten toolshed. Soon enough, the toolshed turns into a sacred place, where he formulates an animistic religion just after naming the polecat ferret “Sredni Vashtar.” In fact, Conradin initially fears *“the lithe, sharp-fanged beast;”* but, its awesome presence gradually turns into *“a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin”* (Munro 137). Conradin’s animistic religion appears here as opposed to the cousin’s Christian belief. As Lynn White aptly puts it, *“Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen”* (9) since God tells Adam to *“[b]e fruitful, and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living that moves upon the earth”* (Gen. 1:28). With this authority given to him by God, Adam (that is, the *anthropos*) begins his dominion over animals by naming them. However, unlike the anthropocentric Christian faith which privileges human beings as superior to animals, the animal god in the story refutes the idea of man’s superiority to animals. Resonating Graham Harvey’s comments with regard to celebration of multiplicities and pluralities in animistic beliefs, Saki demonstrates his overt sympathy towards an animistic worldview that acknowledges and celebrates multiplicities of religion by formulating an animistic religion with an animal god as opposed to Mrs. de Ropp’s anthropocentric Christian belief. Hence, Conradin is very happy with his pagan religion and celebrates this plurality of religions and *“entwined passionate entanglements”* (Harvey xv) by paying ritual visits to his god, the polecat ferret, on Thursdays: *“Every Thursday, in the dim and musty silence of the toolshed, he worshipped with mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch where dwelt Sredni Vashtar, the great ferret”* (Munro 137).

By defying the anthropocentric view of animals as deprived of souls and thereby agency, Saki not only acknowledges the polecat ferret’s soul and agency, but also makes it a god. As Harvey argues in his *Animism*, *“[a]nimists are people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others”* (xi). In this respect, for the animists, personhood is not only ascribed to human beings, but also to more-than-humans. That is why, in this story, Conradin recognises the personhood of the polecat ferret and begins to respect it by making the ferret his god. Although animism is basically centred around the idea of respecting all entities and looking for ways of living in harmony with them, Conradin’s worshipping of the ferret finally

leads to the destruction of Mrs. de Ropp at the end of the story since she ignores the intrinsic values of the animals in the toolshed, and therefore appears as a threat to their survival. Contrary to Mrs. de Ropp's entrenched hypocritical approach, however, Conradin is very sincere in his feelings and in his approach to religion and his ferret god. Echoing Harvey's comments that animist stories include "tricksters," Conradin's animal god appears as a trickster pagan god who accepts "powdered nutmeg" on great festivals on condition that the nutmeg is "stolen" as well as "[r]ed flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the winter-time" (Munro 138), which is totally different from the cousin's routine rituals at the church. Conradin believes in the agentic capacity of his animal god so much that when Mrs. de Ropp suffers from an acute toothache for three days, he keeps up the festival for three days believing that Sredni Vashtar is responsible for her toothache. As can be deduced from this event, the agency of the animal is not only stated at the very end of the story when the animal kills the woman.

However, the frequency of Conradin's visits to the toolshed gradually attracts Mrs. de Ropp's attention, and she learns the presence of the Houdan hen there, and again ostensibly "for Conradin's health," she says: "It is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers" (Munro138). Soon enough, she announces that she has sold the Houdan hen. Contrary to Conradin's strong affinity for both of the animals in the toolshed, be it his animal god Sredni Vashtar or the Houdan hen, and his sincere feelings towards his animistic religion, Mrs. de Ropp disrespectfully decides to sell the animal by hypocritically pretending to care about Conradin's health. After this event, Conradin begins to say the same thing to his ferret god, believing that Sredni Vashtar, as an omniscient god, will do what he wants: "Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar" (Munro 138). As animal agency is central to the animistic beliefs, Conradin expects Sredni Vashtar to know what he wants at his heart. To this end, he perpetually chants the same lines:

Sredni Vashtar went forth,  
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white.  
His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.  
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful. (Munro 139)

Since Conradin's frequent visits to the toolshed continue even after Mrs. de Ropp has sold the Houdan hen, she grows suspicious and says: "What are you keeping in that locked hutch?' [...] 'I believe it's guinea-pigs. I'll have them all cleared away.'" (Munro 139). As the overt manifestation of her anthropocentric stance, Mrs.

de Ropp immediately decides to slaughter the animal in the toolshed by disregarding its intrinsic value. Contrary to what Mrs. de Ropp believes, however, what Conradin feeds there is his ferret god. Unaware of Conradin's animal god, Mrs. de Ropp goes to the toolshed to remove the guinea pigs; yet she is unexpectedly attacked by the polecat ferret. Thus, Conradin's chanting comes to an end when his wishes come true with the appearance of the victorious polecat ferret out of the toolshed with "*dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat*" (Munro 140). Hence, as in Saki's many other stories, "*it is the intelligent animal who triumphs, and there is always the supposition that, if humans behaved like animals, the world would certainly order its ways more sensibly. [...] Saki was demonstrating a preference for animal behaviour with a refreshing lack of sentimentality*" (Sharpe 8). Undoubtedly, the polecat ferret's destruction of the woman and Conradin's wishes for her death might seem paradoxical at first sight with respect to the premises of animism, which suggests respecting other persons. Yet still, Sredni Vashtar and Conradin have justifiable reasons for the destruction of Mrs. de Ropp in that Sredni Vashtar kills her to protect itself. That is why, Sredni Vashtar's murder and Conradin's appreciation of it do not necessarily mean that they are disrespecting other persons. On the contrary, Conradin is rewarded for his innocence and respect to the living world, while the woman is punished for her hypocrisy. Therefore, when his wild god Sredni Vashtar meets his expectations by bringing Mrs. de Ropp's catastrophe, Conradin immediately begins to prepare a toast for himself, which has always been forbidden to him by his guardian. Toast, though used here as a food, is also used to refer "*to drink in honor of (a person or thing)*" (OED). Through the use of this pun, Conradin, indeed, celebrates the success of his ferret god; and thus, the toast is in honour of Sredni Vashtar.

In conclusion, as anthropocentrism is the main reason for the marginalisation and oppression of animals, in "Sredni Vashtar" and some other stories, Saki's inclination to animism is clearly seen. As opposed to the dualistic view of the universe in the anthropocentric mind-set, in animism, there are pluralities, and these pluralities are celebrated. Besides, personhood is attributed in animism not only to human beings, but also to all entities in the universe. Thus, as animals are accepted to be "persons" in the animistic beliefs, they are also respected. Within this framework, not only does the story explore the juxtaposition of two religious beliefs, but also two worldviews one being deeply rooted in the anthropocentric tradition, the other being an animistic one that respects all life forms. In this regard, Saki's specific aim in using these animistic features in "Sredni Vashtar"

seems to be criticising the dominant anthropocentric ideology of his period, which reduces animals to the status of commodities that can be used by human beings. Thus, through animistic features, the animal in the story manages to triumph over the tyrannical human being, that is Mrs. de Ropp, who tries to abuse animals. Consequently, by incorporating an animistic viewpoint into “Sredni Vashtar,” Saki not only acknowledges the agency and intrinsic value of animals, but also challenges the dominant anthropocentric ideology of his time by criticising the inhumane oppression and manipulation of animals.

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