Merton, Thomas. Spiritual Implications. 1960. – The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton. New Directions. 1985

3. *Spiritual Implication*

Boris Pasternak established himself in 1958 as one of the very few unquestionably great writers of our century. For forty years this deeply sensitive and original poet had remained hidden and practically unknown in a Russia that seemed entirely alien to his genius. It would be an understatement to say that Soviet official criticism relegated him to oblivion, scorning him as a bourgeois individualist and an internal émigré. But the events of October and November 1958 were to bring out the fact that Pasternak had remained one of the most admired and loved Russian poets, even in Russia itself. It is true, both in Russia and outside it he was a poet's poet. But that was precisely his importance. He was a rare, almost miraculous being, who had survived the Stalin purges not only with his life but with his full spiritual independence: a kind of symbol of freedom and creativity in the midst of an alienated society—an alienated world.

The fact that the prize award followed closely on the publication and the world-wide success of *Dr. Zhivago* made it easy for politicians to say that the whole thing was a plot, a new gambit in the Cold War. This popular oversimplification obscured the literary importance of the novel which represented the final maturing of a great talent that had been waiting in silence for many years, unable to express itself. A long discipline of sorrowful gestation had given the book a kind of unruly, explosive sincerity that demanded to be heard. And it was heard, in spite of the fact that critics took occasion to complain of many things in it. Was the story too involved? Were the characters really characters? Did the book really have a structure? Was it absurd to compare such a writer to Tolstoy? And above all, why so many curious and arbitrary coincidences? When all these things were said, it was still evident that the people who said them were wasting their time in doing so. It was somehow clear to anyone who had really penetrated the meaning of *Dr. Zhivago* that all these questions were really irrelevant. The book was much too big and too vital a creation for such criticisms to have much meaning. It swept them all away by its own overwhelming strength and conviction. The story was involved because life is involved: and what mattered was that the book was alive. You could not only forgive the

complexity of the plot, but you were drawn to lose yourself in it, and to retrace with untiring interest the crossing paths of the different characters. *Dr. Zhivago* is one of those books which are greater than the rules by which critics seek to condemn them: and we must remember that it is precisely with such books as this that literature advances.

In the end, when everyone had had his say, and the first pronouncements on the book could be evaluated and summed up, it was clear that the deeper and more original critical minds were sold on it. They were obviously preparing to undertake a deeper and more detailed study of the work. This was the case with Edmund Wilson, for example, who came out with one of the most serious and favorable studies of the novel (*The New Yorker*, November 15, 1958) and who later plunged more deeply into what he believed to be the book's symbolism (*The Nation*, April 25, 1959). It is interesting that Wilson's enthusiasm led him into a kind of Joycean labyrinth of allegory which he imagined he had discovered in the book, and this evoked an immediate protest on the part of the author. Pasternak emphatically denied any intention of creating the allegorical structure Wilson had "discovered." But the effect of this protest was to increase one's respect for *Dr. Zhivago*. It is not by any means another *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. The genius of Pasternak is quite other than the genius of Joyce, and to imagine him plotting out and landscaping his symbolism is to miss what he is really doing.

In any case, it is quite clear that the publication of *Zhivago* was one of the most significant literary events of the century. This is confirmed by the fact that every scrap of poetry or prose Pasternak ever published is being dug up, translated, and printed in every language and that his great novel is already beginning to be the object of exhaustive study. We shall now undoubtedly have a lush crop of doctoral dissertations on every aspect of Pasternak's life and work, and this is certainly no cause for rejoicing. The perfectionistic critics, the group who have been turning over and over the least relics of Melville and Henry James will probably leave Pasternak alone, which is fortunate for everyone concerned. But a great many sensitive and alert writers are going to dive into Pasternak and come up with wonderful things for the rest of us, because Pasternak is a great sea full of sunken treasures and in him we have, for once, riches that are not fully expended in a column and a half of the Sunday Book Section.

It is not out of place to start by this affirmation that the award of the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature was a *literary* event. Last year it was treated almost exclusively, both in Russia and out of it, as political event.

It was to be expected that Soviet officialdom would react a little hysterically to the prize award. Since Marxists think entirely in political categories, their hysteria was necessarily political. The publication of the book was a vile and sweeping attack on the revolution. The prize award was a direct blow at the Soviet Union. The whole thing was a reactionary plot cooked up on Wall Street. Pasternak was an unregenerate relic of the bourgeois past who had somehow been suffered to survive and to pollute the pure air of a new Soviet world. The capitalist wolves had taken advantage of this occasion to howl for Soviet blood. One mixed metaphor after another denounced the shameless author.

No one was or should have been surprised at this mechanical routine. It was inevitable, and so familiar as to have been supremely boring to everyone except the author and to those who appreciated his talent and personality enough to fear for his life. Nor was it entirely surprising that our side picked up the ball and got into the same game without a moment's delay. To the Western journalists, Pasternak at once became a martyr, a symbol of democracy fighting for recognition under Red tyranny, another proof of the arbitrary perversity of Soviet dictatorship. And of course all this was partly true. But it was slanted and given a political emphasis that was not really there, because *Dr. Zhivago* is in no sense a defense of Western democracy or of the political and economic systems that prevail here. The liberty that Pasternak defends is a liberty of the spirit which is almost as dead in the West as it is behind the Iron Curtain. Perhaps, in a certain way, it is *more* dead in those situations where men fondly believe that the spirit can continue to live in an atmosphere of crass materialism. Let us remember that the vilest character in *Dr. Zhivago* is not one of the Communist automatons but the shrewd, lecherous businessman, Komarovsky.

The fact that Christ is mentioned with sympathetic approval in all parts of the book and that there are quotations from the Bible and from the liturgy was perhaps overstressed by those who were too eager to find in *Dr. Zhivago* an apologia for a vague and superficial Christianity. Here too, Pasternak does not lend himself so easily to exploitation in favor of a cause. This is not a book that can be used to prove something or to sell something, even if that something happens to be the Christian faith. The dogmatic ambiguity of Pasternak's religious statements takes good care of that. Pasternak himself denies that there is an explicitly religious "message" in his book. But this does not mean that the book is not deeply religious and even definitely Christian. The sincerity of the author's own religious feeling is overpoweringly evident, even though it is not always

easy to see how that feeling is to be translated into clear theological propositions. But can we not believe that this too is not only understandable, but much to be desired? Who would think of asking a citizen of the Soviet Union today to burst out periodically with a little homily, couched in the exact technical language of a manual of Catholic moral or dogma? Is it not perhaps all too evident that to demand such a thing would be to put ourselves unconsciously on the same footing as the Soviet Writers' Union, who insisted that Pasternak must have secret connections in the West, and must be engaged in an ideological plot?

To me, on the contrary, one of the most persuasive and moving aspects of Pasternak's religious mood is its slightly off-beat spontaneity. It is precisely because he says practically nothing that he has not discovered on his own that he convinces me of the authenticity of his religious experience. When one is immersed in a wide and free-flowing stream of articulate tradition, he can easily say more than he knows and more than he means, and get away with it. One can be content to tell his brethren in Christ what they devoutly desire and expect, no more and no less. But *Dr. Zhivago,* and the deeply religious poems printed in its final section, is the work of a man who, in a society belligerently hostile to religion, has discovered for himself the marvels of the Byzantine liturgy, the great mystery of the Church, and the revelation of God in His word, the Sacred Scriptures. The newspapermen who interviewed Pasternak in his *dacha* were all struck by the big Russian Bible that lay on his desk and gave evidence of constant use.

Pasternak's Christianity is, then, something very simple, very rudimentary, deeply sincere, utterly personal and yet for all its questionable expressions, obviously impregnated with the true spirit of the Gospels and the liturgy. Pasternak has no Christian message. He is not enough of a Christian "officially" to pretend to such a thing. And this is the secret to the peculiar religious strength that is in his book. This strength may not be at all evident to most of us who are formally and "officially" members of the visible Church. But it is certainly calculated to make a very profound impression on those who think themselves unable to believe because they are frightened at the forbiddingly "official" aspects our faith sometimes assumes. *Dr. Zhivago* is, then, a deeply spiritual event, a kind of miracle, a humble but inescapable portent.

It is my purpose to bring out and to emphasize the essentially spiritual character of the Pasternak affair. That is precisely its greatest importance for it is one of the few headline-making incidents of our day that has a clearly spiritual bearing. The literary significance of *Dr. Zhivago* and

of Pasternak's verse would never have accounted for the effect they have had on our world. On the other hand, the real political content of Pasternak's work is negligible, and the brief political upheaval that accompanied his prominence in the news was quite accidental, except insofar as it was a tacit recognition of Pasternak as a *spiritual* influence in the world. Those who have been struck by the religious content of his work have been responding, consciously or otherwise, not so much to a formal Christian witness as to a deep and uncompromising *spirituality*.

Pasternak stands first of all for the great spiritual values that are under attack in our materialistic world. He stands for the freedom and nobility of the individual person, for man the image of God, for man in whom God dwells. For Pasternak, the person is and must always remain prior to the collectivity. He stands for courageous, independent loyalty to his own conscience, and for the refusal to compromise with slogans and rationalizations imposed by compulsion. Pasternak is fighting for man's true freedom, his true creativity, against the false and empty humanism of the Marxists—for whom man does not yet truly exist. Over against the technological jargon and the empty scientism of modern man, Pasternak sets creative symbolism, the power of imagination and of intuition, the glory of liturgy, and the fire of contemplation. But he does so in new words, in a new way. He speaks for all that is sanest and most permanently vital in religious and cultural tradition, but with the voice of a man of our own time.

This is precisely what makes him dangerous to the Marxists, and this is why the more intelligent and damning pro-Soviet critics (for instance Isaac Deutscher) have done all they could to prove that *Dr. Zhivago* is nothing but a final, despairing outburst of romantic individualism—a voice from the dead past.

On the contrary, however, the fervor with which writers and thinkers everywhere, both in the West and in Russia, have praised the work and the person of Pasternak, quickly made him the center of a kind of spontaneous spiritual movement. This has not received much publicity in the press, but it still goes on. Pasternak became the friend of scores of men still capable of sharing his hopes and fighting for the same ideal. The beauty of this "movement" is that it has been perfectly spontaneous and has had nothing to do with any form of organized endeavor: it has simply been a matter of admiration and friendship for Pasternak. In a word, it is not a "movement" at all. There were none of the "secret connections" the Soviet Police are always hopefully looking for. There was no planned attempt to make a systematic fuss about anything. The

protests of Western writers like Camus, T. S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell, and so on were perfectly spontaneous. And at the same time, it is not generally known that in Moscow several of the leading members of the Writers' Union conspicuously refused to take part in the moral lynching of Pasternak. The most important of these was Ilya Ehrenburg.

The peculiar strength of Pasternak lies then not only in his own literary genius and in his superb moral courage, but in the depth and genuineness of his spirituality. He is a witness to the spirituality of man, the image of God. He is a defender of everything that can be called a spiritual value, but especially in the aesthetic and religious spheres. He is a thinker, an artist, a contemplative. If at times he seems to underestimate the organized ethical aspect of man's spiritual life it is for two reasons: first because he is portraying a world that has become an ethical chaos, and secondly because in that chaos ethics have been perverted into a nonsensically puritanical system of arbitrary prohibitions and commands. There are moments when *Dr. Zhivago* seems so much a creature of impulse as to have lost his ethical orientation. But this is deliberate: and we shall see that it is part of a protest against the synthetically false "moralism" that is inseparable from the totalitarian mentality today.

In order to understand the events of 1958, it is necessary to review briefly Pasternak's own career and the part played by him in the literary history of twentieth-century Russia. In particular we must examine his real attitude toward the Russian revolution which has been by no means simple. For Pasternak was one of those poets who, in 1917, received the revolution with hopeful, though perhaps not unmixed, enthusiasm and who, though he never succeeded in confining his genius within the paralyzing limitations of the Communist literary formulary, at times attempted to write in praise of the revolution. There are in fact many passages in *Dr. Zhivago* itself which favor the revolution in its early stages. In a word, Pasternak was one of that legion of writers, artists, and intellectuals who, though they began by a more or less fervent acceptance of the revolution, were forced sooner or later to reject it as a criminal perversion of man's ideals—when they did not pay with life itself for their fidelity to it. The special importance of Pasternak lies in the symbolic greatness of the protest of one who, having survived the worst of the purges conducted under Stalin, emerged after Stalin's death to say exactly what he thought of Stalinism and to say it not in France, or in England, or in America, but in the heart of Soviet Russia.

Everyone is familiar by now with the salient facts of Pasternak's life. He was born in 1890, in Moscow, the son of a painter, Leonid Pasternak,

who was the friend and illustrator of Tolstoy. His mother was a concert pianist. In his early years, young Pasternak conceived a great admiration for two friends of his father—the poet Rilke and the musician Scriabin, and at first the boy planned to become a musician. He wrote: "I love music more than anything else, and I loved Scriabin more than anyone else in the world of music. I began to lisp in music not long before my first acquaintance with him. . . ." In other words, he had already begun to compose, and he soon played some of his compositions for Scriabin, who "immediately began to assure me that it was clumsy to speak of talent for music when something incomparably bigger was on hand and it was open to me to say my word in music" (*Safe Conduct*).

In 1912 Pasternak studied Kantian philosophy under Cohen at the University of Marburg in Germany, and returning to Russia became involved in the Futurist movement, publishing poems in the review *Tsentrifuga*. He had already long since been under the spell of the Symbolist Alexander Blok, and Blok plays an important, though hardly noticeable part, in the symbolic structure of *Dr. Zhivago*. The crucial symbol of the candle in the window, which flashes out to illuminate a kind of knot in the crossing paths of the book's main characters, sets Zhivago to thinking about Blok. The connection of ideas is important, because the candle in the window is a kind of eye of God, or of the Logos (call it if you like *Tao*), but since it is the light in the window of the sophianic figure, Lara, and since Blok in those days (1905) was absorbed in the cult of Sophia he had inherited from Soloviev, the candle in the window suggests, among other things, the Personal and Feminine Wisdom Principle whose vision has inspired the most original Oriental Christian theologians of our day.

Among the Futurists, the one who seems to have made the greatest impression on Pasternak is Mayakovsky. In the early autobiographical sketch, *Safe Conduct,* Pasternak speaks of admiring Mayakovsky with all the burning fervor which he had devoted to Scriabin. Later, however, in his more recent memoir, *I Remember,* he has corrected the impressions created by his earlier sketch. "There was never any intimacy between us. His opinion of me has been exaggerated." The two had "quarreled" and Pasternak says that he found Mayakovsky's propagandist activities for the Communists "incomprehensible." Mayakovsky devoted a turbulent and powerful talent to the Bolshevist cause and turned out innumerable *agitkas* (political playlets) and a long propaganda poem in honor of Lenin. But Pasternak himself wrote a fine poem about the bleak days of the revolution, in which he traces a vigorous and sympathetic portrait of Lenin.

I remember his voice which pierced
The nape of my neck with flames
Like the rustle of globe-lightning.
Everyone stood. Everyone was vainly
Ransacking that distant table with his eyes:
And then he emerged on the tribune,
Emerged even before he entered the room,
And came sliding, leaving no wake
Through the barriers of helping hands and obstacles,
Like the leaping ball of a storm
Flying into a room without smoke.

(From *The High Malady,* trans. by Robert Payne)

This, however, is no propaganda poem. Nowhere in it does Pasternak betray the truth in order to conform to some preconceived idea about the revolution. His vision is direct and sincere: he says what he sees. He describes not what he thinks he feels or "ought to feel," but what he actually feels.

These facts are important since Pasternak, who has been accused, by the Communists, of having always been an inveterate reactionary, obviously felt sympathy and admiration for Lenin and for the October revolution. As for the 1905 revolution, his position is unequivocal. Lara, for instance, walks down the street listening to the guns in the distance and saying to herself, "How splendid. Blessed are the down trodden. Blessed are the deceived. God speed you, bullets, You and I are of one mind." Her exultation is symbolic. The revolution means that she is temporarily delivered from her captivity to Komarovsky, the smart lawyer, the opportunist and man of business who, all in all, is the most sinister figure in the whole book and who typifies the wealthy ruling class. It is significant of course that after the revolution Komarovsky remains a powerful, influential figure: he is the type that revolutions do not get rid of but only strengthen.

All that Pasternak has to say both for and against the Bolshevik revolution—and there is very much of it—is summed up in a paragraph spoken by Sima, in Yuriatin (a very minor character who nevertheless expresses the clear ideological substance of the whole book). She says:

> With respect to the care of the workers, the protection of the mother, the struggle against the power of money, our revolutionary era is a wonderful, unforgettable era of new, permanent achievements. But as regards the interpretation of life and the philosophy of happiness that is being propagated, it is simply impossible to believe that it is meant to be taken seri-

ously, it's such a comic survival of the past. If all this rhetoric about leaders and peoples had the power to reverse history it would set us back thousands of years to the Biblical times of shepherd tribes and patriarchs. But fortunately this is impossible.

Pasternak's writing in the twenties is by no means purely an evasion of contemporary reality. It is true that in the collection of stories by him printed in 1925 there is only one, "Aerial Ways," which has anything to do with the revolution and this is by no means a glorification of the new order. That is in fact the thing that Pasternak has never really been able to do. He has not been able to believe in Communism as any kind of an "order." He has not been able to accept the myth of its dialectical advance toward an ever saner and better world. Even in his most sanguine moments he always viewed the revolution as a chaotic surging of blind forces out of which, he hoped, something new and real might perhaps evolve. *Dr. Zhivago* by and large represents his judgment that the whole thing was a mountain that gave birth to a mouse. No new truth has been born, only a greater and more sinister falsity. It is this that the Communists cannot forgive him. They do not seem to realize that this very fact confirms his judgment. If Communism had really achieved what it claims to have achieved, surely by now it could tolerate the expression of such opinions as are to be found in *Dr. Zhivago*.

In 1926 Pasternak published a poem on the 1905 revolution and in 1927 he followed with another revolutionary poem, "Lieutenant Schmidt." The former of these received a lengthy and favorable exegesis from Prince Dimitry Mirsky, who had at that time returned to Russia and was temporarily in favor as a Marxist critic—prior to his exile and death in one of the far north camps of Siberia.

Pasternak's writings about the revolution never quite succeeded with the Party because he was always interested too much in man and not enough in policies and the party line. It cannot really be said that he ever seriously attempted to write about the revolution from a Communist viewpoint and it is certainly false to think that he ever sacrificed any of his integrity in order to "be a success." The fact remains that he has been consistently criticized for "individualism," "departure from reality" and "formalist refinement." In other words he remained an artist and refused to prostitute his writing to politics.

No original work from Pasternak's pen was to appear from 1930 until 1943, when "Aboard the Early Trains" appeared and was condemned by Zhdanov as "alien to socialism." During the rest of these years he worked at translations.

That Pasternak fell silent was not a matter of isolated significance. Blok had died in 1921, disillusioned by the revolution. The Party's literary authorities were discussing whether or not "The Twelve" was really a Communist poem. Gumilyov had been executed in 1922. Esenin had written his last poem in his own blood and killed himself in 1925. Mayakovsky, at the height of fame and success as a "proletarian poet," committed suicide at the precise moment when, in the words of a historian, he was considered "the embodiment of socialist optimism." The last remaining representatives of the poetic ferment of the war years and the early twenties disappeared into the background, and remained silent, if they were not liquidated in the thirties. Pasternak was one of the few to survive. He was able to find support and expression for his genius by publishing remarkable translations of Shakespeare, Rilke, Verlaine, Goethe, and other poets of the West.

One of the most mysterious aspects of the Pasternak story is his survival during the great purges of the 1930s. The current guesses as to how he escaped death are barely satisfactory. Some allege that since Pasternak was supposed to have been Mayakovsky's "best friend," and Mayakovsky was now canonized, Stalin allowed Pasternak to live. But anyone who knows anything of Stalin and the purges knows perfectly well that the fact of being the "best friend" of someone who had died might just as well have meant a one-way ticket to the far north camps. Others believe that because Pasternak had translated the Georgian poets so brilliantly, Stalin could not kill him. But Stalin found it no hardship to kill the Georgian poets themselves—like Pasternak's friend Tabidze. Why then should he spare a translator?

By all the laws of political logic, or lack of logic, Pasternak should have died in the thirties and in fact he nearly did so, for the strain of living through those times undermined his health. Not only was he obviously suspect as a nonpolitical, antipolitical, and therefore automatically reactionary poet, but also he distinguished himself by openly defying official literary dogmas in meetings and conferences. Not only that, but he refused to sign several official "petitions" for the death of "traitors," and his friends barely saved him by covering up his defection. The general opinion is that Pasternak could not possibly have survived the purges unless Stalin himself had given explicit orders that he was to be spared. Why?

There has been much speculation, and an article by Mr. Mikhail Koryakov, published in Russian in the *Novy Zhurnal* (in America) and quoted by Edmund Wilson (*The Nation, loc. cit.*) seriously lines up

some of the quasi-legendary possibilities. What they add up to is that because of some cryptic statement made by Pasternak in reference to the mysterious death of Stalin's wife, Alliluyeva, Stalin conceived a superstitious fear of the poet. The Georgian dictator is said to have imagined that Pasternak was endowed with prophetic gifts, was a kind of dervish, and had some kind of unearthly insight into the cause of Alliluyeva's death. Since Stalin himself has been credited with the murder of his wife, this does not make the mystery of Pasternak's survival any less mysterious.

The intolerably dreary history of art and literature under Stalin might have seemed hopeful to those who firmly believed that the Leader could really make Russia over and create a new, mass-produced Soviet man in his own image and likeness. But the death of Stalin and the "thaw" that followed showed on all sides that the need for originality, creative freedom, and spontaneity had not died. Even men like Ehrenburg and Simonov, successful Communist writers who could be relied upon to do exactly what the Party leaders wanted, discreetly began to suggest the possibility of a rebirth of initiative and even a certain frankness on the part of the writer. As if socialist realism might soon be replaced with something remotely related to real life!

The history of the "thaw" is well known. A few months proved that the slightest relaxation in favor of individual liberty and self-determination, in any field whatever, would bring about the collapse of everything that had been built up by Stalin. The events in Poland and Hungary in the fall of 1956 make this abundantly clear. In both these countries, outspoken writers had led the resistance against Moscow. There was no choice but a hasty and devout return to the principles used so effectively by Stalin. While notable ex-members of the Praesidium began to wend their way to places like Outer Mongolia, the millionaire novelist and editor, Simonov, became overnight a leading literary figure of Uzbekistan.

Yet no show of official severity has yet been able to discourage the determined resistance of a younger generation of writers. This resistance is in no sense overtly political; it takes the form of a dogged, largely passive protest against the dreariness and falsity of Communist life. It is a silent, indirect refusal to seek any further meaning in copybook formulas and in norms handed down from above by politicians. A young poet of today, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, has been publicly scolded by Khrushchev in person. Yevtushenko, as a kind of prophet of the New Generation, defies the limitations imposed on his spiritual and artistic freedom. He describes a friend returning from a forced labor camp

bursting with interest in everything new, listening to the radio, and seeking out all kinds of information: "everything in him breathes character." Yevtushenko himself cries out in protest at not being able to fraternize and speak with the people of Buenos Aires, New York, London, or Paris. He wants art, but not socialist realism. He wants to defy the directives of a dying generation and "speak new words." He actively resents the attempts of the Party to regiment his talent, and replies to official criticism with startling lines:

> Many do not like me
> Blaming me for many things
> And cast thunder and lightning at me.
> Sullen and tense they pour scorn on me
> And I feel their glares on my back.
> But I like all this
> I am proud that they cannot handle me,
> Can do nothing about me.[1]

One cannot help but admire the courage of this young poet—it is a fact of deep significance. It shows that the boots of the MVD have never succeeded in stamping out the fires of independent thought in Russia: and that these fires can, at any time, blaze out more brightly than ever.

We are reminded of the revolutionists of a century ago. But there is one significant difference: the resistance of Russian youth so far has been largely nonpolitical. It is not revolutionary in the nineteenth-century sense. It is moral and personal. Even when there is protest against the pharisaism and obscurantism of Soviet propaganda and censorship, it is not the protest of men who want to overthrow the regime. It is singularly free from attempts to exercise political pressure. It is this special innocence from political bias that strikes us most forcibly, for this is a resistance of people who have become *utterly fed up with everything that savors of politics*. This is the most significant thing about the protest, and it is the key to the Pasternak affair.

To try to place in a well-defined political category the moral rebellion of Russian youth against Communism is not only to misunderstand that rebellion: it is the very way by which the Communists themselves would try to frustrate it. Communism is not at home with nonpolitical categories, and it cannot deal with a phenomenon which is not in some way political. It is characteristic of the singular logic of Stalinist-Marxism that

[1] See "The Young Generation of Soviet Writers," by A. Gaev, in *Bulletin of the Institute for Study of the U.S.S.R.*, Munich, September 1958, pp. 38 ff.

when it incorrectly diagnoses some phenomenon as "political," it corrects the error by forcing the thing to *become* political. Hence the incessant cries of treachery and attack on all sides. Everything that happens that is unforeseen by Russia, or somehow does not fit in with Soviet plans, is an act of capitalist aggression on the Soviet Union. If a late frost ruins the fruit trees of the Ukraine, this is a political event, fomented by Wall Street. When Pasternak writes a great novel, which for political reasons cannot be printed in the USSR; and when this novel is hailed as a masterpiece outside the USSR—even though the novel is obviously not a political tract against the Soviet system, its success becomes an act of political betrayal on the part of the author. Reasons: for propaganda purposes, the USSR has to appear to be the home of all true literature and the only sound judge of what is and what is not a masterpiece. To produce a book that is hailed as a masterpiece after it has been rejected by the Soviet publishers is therefore an act of treachery, for which Pasternak was publicly and officially called "a pig who dirties the place where he sleeps and eats." No one thinks of admitting that it was a sign of weakness and impotency on the part of the Soviet publishers not to be able to print this great work themselves!

Dr. Zhivago was written in the early fifties and finished shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. In 1954, the Second Congress of Soviet writers, with its rehabilitation of condemned writers living and dead, seemed to offer hope for the future. *Dr. Zhivago* was offered for publication to *Novy Mir*. In 1954 some of the poems from *Dr. Zhivago* appeared in a literary magazine and the prospects for the publication of the entire book really seemed to be good. Ilya Ehrenburg had read it, apparently with enthusiasm, as had many other writers. Meanwhile the manuscript had been given personally by Pasternak to the publisher Feltrinelli, of Milan.

In 1956, *Dr. Zhivago* was rejected by *Novy Mir* with a long explanation which we shall discuss in a moment. But Feltrinelli refused to give up the manuscript and manifested his intention to go ahead and publish it. From that time on, guarded attacks on Pasternak were frequent in the Soviet literary magazines. He was reminded that though he might have talent he "had strayed from the true path" and one critic, Pertsov, accused him of a happy acceptance of "chaos" and of being in his element in confusion. Nevertheless in June 1958, a sympathetic discussion of *Dr. Zhivago* was held over Radio Warsaw. Meanwhile of course the book had appeared in Italy, France, and Germany and had taken Europe by storm. The English edition came out in late summer of 1958 and the Nobel Prize was awarded to Pasternak on October 23.

This was hailed by an immediate uproar in the Russian press. The decision was regarded as an act of open hostility, a new maneuver in the Cold War. The award was "steeped in lies and hypocrisy" and *Dr. Zhivago* was a "squalid" work in which Pasternak manifested his "open hatred of the Russian people. He does not have one kind word to say about our workers." *Pravda* discussed the whole thing under the delightfully confusing headline: "A Reactionary Hue and Cry about a Literary Weed."

On October 27 Pasternak was solemnly expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union. This automatically made it impossible for him to be published or to make any kind of a living by his pen. On October 30 Pasternak, seeing the political storm that had been raised about the award, communicated to Stockholm his regretful decision not to accept the prize. Nothing had been said officially one way or another by the Kremlin. Of all the attacks on Pasternak, the most concentrated and bitter were those which came from his colleagues in the Union of Soviet Writers. The day after his refusal of the prize, eight hundred members of the Union which had already expelled him now passed a resolution demanding that he be deprived of Soviet citizenship.

At the same time, the issue continued to be discussed with a certain amount of frankness in Moscow. Pasternak was visited by newspapermen and friends. Poems and parts of *Zhivago* continued to circulate from hand to hand in typewritten or mimeographed editions.

The reports in the Western press tended, by and large, to miss the nuances and gradations of the Pasternak Affair in Russia. Everything was presented as either black or white. The Russians were *all* against Pasternak. The Kremlin was completely opposed to him, and would have done away with him if the protest of the West had not been so strong. In the West, on the contrary, everything was white, everyone was *for* Pasternak.

It is true that the protest of Western thinkers and intellectuals was decisive in arresting the all-out campaign against Pasternak in Russia, and in helping to keep him free. Nevertheless, his friends inside Russia were by no means idle. Efforts to organize a positive movement in his behalf were not very successful. But several of the most influential members of the Writers' Union refused to participate in the meetings where Pasternak was condemned. Ilya Ehrenburg sent word that he was "absent from Moscow" when everyone knew he was in his Gorky Street apartment. Leonid Leonov remained conspicuously aloof. Another writer tried actively to bring about Pasternak's rehabilitation and used his influence with Khrushchev for this end. A well-informed Western observer in

Moscow reported that the Kremlin in general was disturbed by the fact that the Moscow intelligentsia remained at least passively pro-Pasternak, and that the campaign was met with deep anxiety and even mute protest on the part of the young writers who admired him. Mute protest is not much, of course. But in Russia, any protest at all is significant.

It is said that Pasternak received a fair number of letters from people in the USSR who deplored the attacks on him. Later, many of the Soviet writers who had participated in the voting at the Writers' Union privately expressed their regrets to him. All this is true. But at the same time it must not be forgotten that a real wave of indignation and hostility toward Pasternak swept the Soviet Union, incited by the speeches and articles against him, and one night a resentful crowd put on a demonstration outside his *dacha* and even threatened to burn it down.

The political noise that has surrounded *Dr. Zhivago* both in the East and in the West does nothing whatever to make the book or its author better or worse. As far as politics are concerned, Pasternak takes the position of a "nonparticipant," or *obyvatel,* and as *Life* comments, "Pasternak's detachment sounds a little like the faraway voice of a monk in a beleaguered Dark Age monastery, a mood with which Americans cannot easily sympathize." For my own part, being not only an American, but also a monk, I do not find sympathy so terribly hard. On the contrary, it would seem that Pasternak's ability to rise above political dichotomies may very well be his greatest strength. This transcendence is the power and the essence of *Dr. Zhivago*. One of the more important judgments made by this book is a condemnation of the chaotic meaninglessness of all twentieth-century political life, and the assertion that politics has practically ceased to be a really vital and significant force in man's society. This judgment is pronounced upon the political confusion of the nineteen-twenties in Soviet Russia, but it also falls by implication, and with proper modifications, on the West as well as on the East. What Pasternak says about Russia goes, in a different way, for the Western Europe of Hitler and Mussolini, and for the whole world of the last war—not to mention the America of the '50s.

The protest of *Dr. Zhivago* is spiritual, not political, not sociological, not pragmatic. It is religious, aesthetic, and mystical. We cannot fully understand the author's view of the modern world if we insist on interpreting him by standards which have nothing to do with his work and his thought. We cannot fit into simple political categories one for whom the whole political chaos of our world is a kind of enormous spiritual

cancer, running wild with a strange, admirable, and disastrous life of its own and feeding on the spiritual substance of man. The deep interest of *Dr. Zhivago* is precisely its diagnosis of man's spiritual situation as a struggle for freedom *in spite of* and *against* the virulence of this enormous political disease. For, to be more accurate, since man's spiritual substance is his freedom itself, it is precisely this freedom which is devoured by politics and transmuted into a huge growth of uncontrollable precocity. Hope of attaining true freedom by purely political means has become an insane delusion.

The great success of *Dr. Zhivago* is by no means attributable to the mere fact that it happens to contain sentences which level devastating blows against the Communist mentality. Anyone with any perception can see that these blows fall, with equal power, on every form of materialistic society. They fall upon most of the gross, pervasive and accepted structures of thought and life which go to make up our changing world. The book is successful not because these blows are dealt, but because, as they land, we gradually begin to realize that Pasternak seems to know what is wrong. He seems to know what has happened to our spiritual freedom. He seems to realize why it is that most of the world's talk about freedom, peace, happiness, hope for the future is just talk and nothing more. He knows all too well that such talk is only a palliative for despair. But at the same time he has a true and solid hope to offer.

The author who most reminds me of Pasternak in this respect is Ignazio Silone. His heroes too, perhaps on a smaller scale and in a more restricted area, travel the same road as *Dr. Zhivago,* but with a more explicitly political orientation. Silone's men, with all the pathetic yet admirable smallness of genuinely human heroes, are true to man, true to his real history, true to man's vocation to "be Christ."

Zhivago of course is not a saint or a perfect hero. He is weak-willed, and his life is a confused and unsatisfactory mess. He himself knows that he has not been able to make a success of it. But the point is, he sees that in the circumstances in which he lives it is not possible to make a real success out of life—that the only honest thing is to face meaninglessness and failure with humility, and make out of it the best one can. Under such conditions his tragic life is lived "successfully" under the sign of wisdom.

It seems that the main difference between Pasternak and Western authors who have sensed the same futility is that he is not defeated by it as they are. Nowhere in Pasternak does one get the impression that his heroes are up a blind alley, beating their heads against a wall. In the

Merton, Thomas. Spiritual Implications. 1960. – The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton. New Directions. 1985

West one sees very little else. For a great majority of Western writers, though in varying degrees, man finds himself as he does in Sartre, with "No Exit"—*Huis Clos*—that is to say, in hell. The Communists would explain this as a feature of capitalist decay. Yet their own society is up the same blind alley, pretending that the wall at the end is not there, and that the business of beating your head against it is proof of optimism and progress. Pasternak sees the blind alley and sees the wall, but knows that the way out is not through the wall, and not back out by the way we came in. The exit is into an entirely new dimension—finding ourselves in others, discovering the inward sources of freedom and love which God has put in our nature, discovering Christ in the midst of us, as "one we know not."

This exit is not a mere theoretical possibility. Nor is it even a mere escape. It is a real and creative solution to man's problems: a solution that can bring meaning out of confusion and good out of evil. It is something that has been sought after with hope and conviction by the greatest Russian minds of the past century: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Soloviev, and by Russians of our own time like Nicholas Berdyaev.

The solution is *love* as the highest expression of man's spirituality and freedom. Love and Life (reduced to one and the same thing) form the great theme of *Dr. Zhivago*. In proportion as one is alive he has a greater capacity and a greater obligation to love. Every degree of true and false love makes its appearance in the book—from the self-assured and bestial selfishness of Komarovsky, the businessman, to the different shades of compulsive and authoritarian falsity in the various revolutionaries. There are all aspects of parental and conjugal love (Zhivago really loves his wife Tonia, for example). Lara though seduced by Komarovsky in her girlhood remains the embodiment of a love that is simple, unadulterated spontaneity, a love that does not know how to be untrue to itself or to life. Her love is perfectly aware of the difference between sin and goodness, but her repentance (the Magdalen theme) has a creative power to transcend limitations and to emerge into a new world. Lara is thus the embodiment of the goodness and love of God immanent in His creation, immanent in man and in Russia, and there left at the mercy of every evil. Far from being a trite and prissy concept, this is both deep and original. One can see in Pasternak a strong influence from Soloviev's *Meaning of Love* and his theory of man's vocation to regenerate the world by the spiritualization of human love raised to the sophianic level of perfect conscious participation in the mystery of the divine wisdom of which the earthly sacrament is love.

At the same time we must remember that Zhivago's victory is tragic. Lara vanishes "without a trace," to die, probably, in a concentration camp. Nothing has been "transformed." It is the victory that shines forth in apparent defeat—the victory of death and resurrection. We notice too, that resurrection remains curiously implicit in the strange, impoverished death of the unsuccessful doctor who falls to the pavement with a heart attack while getting out of a Moscow streetcar. There is a strange parallel between the double death rite of Marina and Lara for Zhivago and the terribly impressive scene of lamentation at the end of *Safe Conduct* in which Mayakovsky's sister raves with Oriental passion over the body of the suicide. There is a gleam of hope in the Epilogue where Tania, the child of Zhivago and Lara, the "child of the terrible years," is seen for a moment in her own simplicity. The things she has had to go through have not ruined her. And we realize that the strange mystical figure of Evgraf, the "guardian angel," "will take care of her." She is the Russia of the future.

One of the singularly striking things about *Dr. Zhivago* is its quality of tragedy without frustration. Here everything is clean and free from ambivalence. Love is love and hate is hate. Zhivago says and does what he means, and when he is uncertain he is not dishonest about it. It is this spiritual cleanliness, this direct vision and fidelity to life here and now which Pasternak opposes to the grandiose and systematic ravings of politicians who turn all life into casuistry and bind man hand and foot in the meticulous service of unrealities.

It is time to quote. These are the thoughts of Zhivago, half starved and faint from hardships and exposure, as he reads a political proclamation pasted on a wall:

> Had (these words) been composed last year, the year before? Only once in his life had this uncompromising language and single-mindedness filled him with enthusiasm. Was it possible that he must pay for that rash enthusiasm all his life by never hearing year after year, anything but these unchanging, shrill, crazy exclamations and demands which became progressively more impractical, meaningless and unfulfillable as time went by? . . . What an enviable blindness, to be able to talk of bread when it has long since vanished from the face of the earth! Of propertied classes and speculators when they have long since been abolished by earlier decrees! Of peasants and villages that no longer exist! Don't they remember their own plans and measures, which long since turned life upside down? What kind of people are they, to go on raving with this never cooling feverish ardor, year in, year out, on non-existent, long-vanished subjects, and to know nothing, to see nothing around them.

Pasternak was morally compelled to refuse the Nobel Prize in order to remain in Russia. Writers in England, France, and the United States protested against Russia's flat rejection of her only great writer since the Revolution. *Pravda* devoted eighteen columns to an unprecedented publication of the "original letter" which had been sent to Pasternak by the magazine *Novy Mir* refusing to serialize the novel in Russian. The letter was signed, curiously enough, by a poet, A. T. Tvardovsky, who, since writing it, had himself fallen under an official ban. The document is notable for its surprising lack of abusiveness and its relatively sympathetic effort to reason with the author. Pasternak was evidently respected in this case by a devoted colleague. The chief objection is not made against the passages in which Marxism is explicitly condemned, for these are relatively few and could have been expunged. The whole fault of the book, from the Soviet point of view, is something "which neither the editors nor the author can alter by cuts or revision . . . the spirit of the novel, its general tenor, *the author's view of life*."

This view of life, as we have indicated above, is that the individual is more important than the collectivity. His spirit, his freedom, his ability to love, raise him above the state. The state exists for man, not man for the state. No man has the right to hand himself over to any superior force other than God Himself. Man has no right to alienate his own liberty to become a cog in a machine. Man is of no use to man if he ceases to be a person and lets himself be reduced to the status of a "thing." A collectivity that reduces the members to the level of alienated objects is dooming both itself and its members to a sterile and futile existence to which no amount of speeches and parades can ever give a meaning. The great tragedy of the revolution, for Pasternak, was the fact that the best men in Russia submitted to mass insanity and yielded up their own judgment to the authority of Juggernaut.

> It was then that untruth came down on our land of Russia. The main misfortune, the root of evil to come, was the loss of confidence in the value of one's own opinion. People imagined that it was out of date to follow their own moral sense, that they must all sing in chorus, and live by other people's notions, notions that were being crammed down everybody's throat. . . . The social evil became an epidemic. It was catching, and it affected everything, nothing was left untouched by it. Our home too became infected. . . . Instead of being natural and spontaneous as we had always been, we began to be idiotically pompous with each other. Something showy, artificial, forced, crept into our conversation—you felt you had to be clever in a certain way about certain world-important themes. . . .

Like Dostoevsky, Pasternak holds that man's future depends on his ability to work his way out from under a continuous succession of authoritarian rulers who promise him happiness at the cost of his freedom. Like Dostoevsky, also, Pasternak insists that the fruit of Christ's Incarnation, Death and Resurrection, is that true freedom has at least become possible: but that man, ignoring the real meaning of the New Testament, prefers to evade the responsibility of his vocation and continues to live "under the law." This is not a new complaint: it goes back to St. Paul.

Ironically enough, one of the most brilliant analyses of man's alienation came from the pen of Marx. Modern Russia, while paying lip service to Marx's theory on this point, has forgotten his full meaning. Yet in so doing, the Soviets have brought out the inner contradiction of Marx's thought: for the complete spiritual alienation of man which Marx ascribed in part to religion has been brought about by militant atheism, as well as by the economic system which claims to be built on an orthodox Marxian foundation. It is of course not fair to blame Stalin's police state directly on Marx, though Marx cannot be absolved from indirect responsibility.

At any event, Pasternak's "view of life" is what has brought upon him the outraged and unanimous condemnation of Soviet officialdom. While the letter from *Novy Mir* reproves Pasternak as immoral, the Soviet critics after the Nobel Prize award did not hesitate to find in *Dr. Zhivago* and in its author every possible kind of moral depravity. Pasternak, the lowest of the low, could not even be compared to a pig. He could no longer claim a right to breathe the pure air of Soviet Russia.

It would be a great mistake to think that for the Communists such accusations are taken as mere words without specific reference, to be used with cynical opportunism. The curious fact is that Communism today has forged its own rigid and authoritarian code of morals, which can be called "an ethic" only by doing violence to the meaning of words, but which nevertheless claims with puritanical self-assurance to show men how to "live."

The ideal Communist is a combination of a beaver and a wolf. He unites machinelike industry with utter insensitiveness to deep human values whenever they come into conflict with political duty. He either knows at all times the course of history and "the one correct thing" to do at the moment, or, if he does not know it, he obeys someone else who claims to know it. In either case, he "acts" with all the complacent self-assurance of a well-adjusted machine, and grinds to pieces anything that comes in his way, whether it be his own idea of truth, his most cherished

hopes for this world or the next, or the person of a wife, friend, or parent.

All through *Dr. Zhivago* we find an extraordinary and subtle range of such characters portrayed: some of them pure Communist types, others much more complicated and hard to label. The hero himself, Yurii Zhivago, *is in all respects the exact opposite to the New Soviet Man.* This, of course, is what constitutes, in Soviet eyes, the depth of moral degradation. To have human feelings, to follow the lead of spontaneous inner inspiration, to be moved by love and pity, to let oneself be swayed by appreciation of what is *human* in man—all this is nothing but bourgeois depravity and shameless individualism.

It almost seems that Pasternak has gone out of his way to make Zhivago act on impulse in a way that would seem utterly foolish to Communists. It always remains clear that this yielding to impulse is not presented (as it sometimes is in Western novels) as the ideal of freedom. No, freedom is something higher and more spiritual than that. But Pasternak makes the point that if one does at times follow a crazy urge and do something completely pointless, it is not an act to be ashamed of. Must one always be reasonable? Must one always have a ponderous ethical justification for every action he performs? Must one fear spontaneity and never do anything that is not decreed by some program, some form or other of duty? On the contrary, it is compulsiveness that warps life and makes it pointless. The apparent pointlessness of man's impulses may perhaps show the way to what he is really seeking.

This, for a Marxist, is deadly heresy: everyone knows that for a Marxist everything has to fit in with his fantasies of omniscience. Everything has to have a point, everything has to be guided toward some specific purpose. To this, Zhivago replies:

> You find in practice that what they mean by ideas is nothing but words—claptrap in praise of the revolution and the regime. . . . One of my sins is a belief in intuition. And yet see how ridiculous. They all shout that I am a marvelous diagnostician, and as a matter of fact it's true that I don't often make mistakes in diagnosing a disease. Well, what is this immediate grasp of the situation as a whole supposed to be if not this intuition they find so detestable?

It is therefore understandable that *Novy Mir* should have singled out with horror the passage where Yurii Zhivago finds himself accidentally in the middle of a battle between Red Partisans and White Russian volunteers. There can be no question that such a passage would make any good Communist squirm in his chair with acute moral dis-

comfort. It would repel and horrify him in much the same way as a chapter of Sartre or Moravia might horrify a nun. It is the kind of thing he would take not only as alien and unpleasant, but as a threat to the whole foundation of his moral security and peace of mind. I do not doubt that Pasternak wrote this section deliberately with his tongue in his cheek. The Reds have responded admirably. The *Novy Mir* letter as reprinted in *Pravda* contains the whole passage quoted *in extenso,* in order to let each loyal Communist taste the full deliciousness of scandalized horror.

What happens? Zhivago, as a doctor, is not supposed to fight. But he is caught in this battle which like all battles is a silly and tragic mess. Zhivago impulsively takes the gun of a fallen comrade, but deliberately aims at a dead tree trunk, and only hits one of the enemy by accident. After the skirmish, he finds that his fallen Red comrade and the White soldier he has wounded each wear a locket containing the text of Psalm 90, which was devoutly believed to be a protection against death. The Red soldier, with a corrupt text of the Psalm, is dead. The White, with a correct text, is alive. Taking pity on him, Zhivago clothes him in the uniform of the fallen Red Partisan and looks after him among the Communist fighters, until he escapes, threatening that he will continue to fight the Reds.

This scene, which is essentially comical, contains just about every mortal sin in the Communist code. I leave the reader to discover them for himself.

The situation being what it was, the Soviet leaders were faced with the problem of blackening Pasternak in the eyes of East and West at the same time. He had to be regarded not only as a dangerous criminal by Russia, but as a hypocrite and coward by the West. Realistic politicians knew well enough that denunciations would not be enough to ruin Pasternak in the eyes of the young writers who undoubtedly looked up to him as a model and a hero. Soviet attacks on Pasternak could only add to his prestige in the West. For this reason, far from categorically forbidding him to accept the prize, they left the door wide open and urged him to leave Russia as long as he did not try to return. It would have been admirable, from their viewpoint, to have "proof" that Pasternak was a traitor to his country. At the same time their benevolence would remain to "prove" that "Pasternak has been left perfectly free to accept the Nobel Prize." Pasternak refused to abandon Russia, not out of

political astuteness but merely because he loved his own country and did not feel that he would be able to write anywhere else.

Once again, he was acting with perfect consistency as one who is the exact opposite of a Communist. His staying in Russia was another victory for his personal integrity as an artist and as a human being. But perhaps there was some advantage to be gained here by the Reds. Perhaps Pasternak could be pressed a little further, and so diminish in the eyes of the West. Pasternak came out in *Pravda* with a letter of "apology," declared that he had made a "mistake" in accepting the Nobel Prize, and that his subsequent refusal of it had been "entirely voluntary." He stated that he had not been threatened and that his life had not been imperiled. This letter, which saddened and shocked readers in the West, but which could have been regarded as inevitable, was probably extracted from him in order to save face for the Soviet government and pay the price of his moral victory.

If one reads the letter carefully, he can detect the difference between passages written by Pasternak and those inserted by others to "make his meaning clear." The passages obviously written by Pasternak are clear and consistent with his position. He asks to be dissociated from the "political campaign around my novel" which he regrets and did not intend. "I never had the intention of causing harm to my state and my people." That is only a reaffirmation of the obvious fact that the book is not a political tract. In regard to the "political errors" of which he "might be accused," he declares that they are not to be found in the novel. This passage is interesting and entirely true. Here is what Pasternak writes: *"It would appear* that I am *allegedly maintaining* the following erroneous principles. *I am supposed to have alleged* that any revolution is an historically illegal phenomenon, that the October Revolution was such, and that it brought unhappiness to Russia and the downfall of the Russian intelligentsia." It is quite obvious that Pasternak nowhere holds that all revolution is "historically illegal"—nor does anybody else. Nor does he maintain that the October Revolution was "illegal." The texts we have quoted certainly show that Russia after the revolution is not portrayed in *Dr. Zhivago* as a bed of roses and that Pasternak plainly ascribes many bad effects to Communism. At the same time we have seen clearly that he accepted the necessity of the revolution, first of all in 1905, then in 1917. No one in his right senses could imagine that Pasternak was trying in *Dr. Zhivago* to lead Russia back to capitalism or to the old regime. But it is equally clear that he has maintained a perfect independence and objectivity with regard to the revolution, and after

living through Stalin's five-year plans and the purges, he has concluded (with the vast majority of intellectuals everywhere in the world) that the Bolshevik revolution was a failure and that Marxism had nothing to offer man but a gospel of delusions. His apology as it stands does nothing to alter the substance of this belief. All that he regrets, about *Zhivago,* is the manner in which it was published and the way it was exploited by anti-Communist journalism. These two things were obviously not the fault of the author.

Pasternak's letter ends with a pious sigh which is utterly alien to his thought and his style and was almost certainly inserted by somebody else: "I firmly believe that I shall find the strength to redeem my good name and restore the confidence of my comrades."

The mystery of this letter has not fully been cleared up, but after its publication and the publication of other similar statements Pasternak cautioned a friend against believing any statement that was supposed to have emanated from him.

Meanwhile, November and December 1958 were months of bitterness and conflict. We have already considered the open explosions of hostility which occurred at the time of the prize award, when the Soviet authorities were trying to get Pasternak out of Russia. These explosions soon ceased, and the case vanished from the pages of *Pravda.* It ceased to be front-page news in the West and soon disappeared altogether but for a few sporadic flare-ups.

Meanwhile, Pasternak was exhausted and ill. In order to forget his troubles, he kept himself busy on a translation of a Polish play, a job that had been deliberately steered his way by sympathetic friends in the Polish Writers' Union. Letters continued to arrive from the West. Friends and even reporters continued to visit the *dacha*—where the presence of newspapermen did nothing to improve the peace of the household. Mrs. Pasternak strenuously objected to them, and uttered vigorous protests, all of which were dutifully reported in the Western newspapers.

December came, and with it the distribution of the Nobel prizes. Western journalists gloated over the possibility that it might turn into a good show—with an empty chair in evidence for Pasternak. No such thing was done, fortunately. It would have been very entertaining for minds that rejoice in devious forms of moral aggression, but it would not have made life any more comfortable for Pasternak.

At the end of the year a story broke in the Western press, stating that a Spanish exile in London, José Vilallonga, had arranged to tour free Europe and America with Pasternak, giving lectures. It was alleged that

Pasternak's life had been insured for three million dollars. The Russians seem to have taken this story seriously and *Pravda* reported a telegram in which Pasternak was supposed to have rejected the offer. In reality, as Pasternak himself made clear, he had never been in contact with Vilallonga and everything about the story was "pure invention," including the supposed telegram.

Early in the new year, Pasternak was again featured in a disturbing story. A reporter of the London *Daily Mail* printed a poem in which Pasternak complained bitterly at being rejected by his own countrymen. Pasternak did not deny having written the poem but protested against its publication as a breach of confidence. Once again it was felt that his life might be in danger. When in February Pasternak suddenly disappeared from his *dacha,* many came to the conclusion that he had been imprisoned and that the game was now up. The explanation given by the Soviet Press was that he had gone away for a "vacation" and in order "to avoid the newspapermen who were coming from London to Moscow with Prime Minister Macmillan." As it turned out, this explanation may have been substantially true.

Actually, Pasternak had left Peredelkino of his own free will and had gone to spend a few weeks at Tiflis, Georgia, as the guest of Mrs. Tabidze, the widow of the Georgian poet shot by Stalin's police. He returned home in good health, and gradually, as the affair ceased to appear in the press and began to be forgotten in the West, prospects began to look good for the harassed writer. In May, for example, a shake-up in the Soviet Writers' Union led to the replacement of Pasternak's enemy, Surkov, as head of the Union, by Fedin, who is friendly to Pasternak.

This was not a mere coincidence. The removal of Surkov was certainly a consequence of the Pasternak Affair, and those who interpreted this change in the Writer's Union as evidence that Pasternak's friends had won over the favor of Khrushchev are perhaps not too far wrong. Whatever may be the real facts, which remain to be discovered and made public, we can agree with the writer of *The New York Times* who said: "It was apparent that there were profound second thoughts about the persecution of Mr. Pasternak. All of the leading literary and party figures who participated in the verbal lynching were downgraded or demoted." And this is highly significant. It shows at least that the qualities of freedom and integrity for which Pasternak stood in the eyes of West and East alike were able in some measure to get themselves recognized in Soviet Russia.

This is no small achievement. It is quite clear that Pasternak emerged from the whole affair as the moral and spiritual conqueror of Stalinism, and that he conquered not for himself alone but even for those of his compatriots who were able to share to some degree in his outlook. And if he did this, it was not only because of his natural and human qualities but, I might venture to say, because of the depth and clarity of his Christian faith. Not that Pasternak is an explicit witness for the Christian message, in the face of Communism: his faith was never directly involved in the debate at all. And yet his resistance was spiritual and his spirit was essentially Christian not only because of his belief in "Christ as the center of history" but because of his existential dedication to the supreme inner value of personalism, which is one of the characteristic Christian contributions to Western humanistic thought.

Let us now draw a few conclusions.

Pasternak's book was offered for publication in Russia after the death of Stalin, during the "thaw" when, at the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev openly admitted the "crimes and errors" of Stalin, implicitly showing that Russia needed to move back from extreme dictatorial authoritarianism to a freer and more flexible way of life. Pasternak obviously thought that his book could claim to represent the thought and aspirations of the intelligentsia, including many Communists, at that time. No doubt there would have to be changes, but the *substance* of his book was, it seemed, just what Russia was waiting for. As far as the young intellectuals are concerned, this may have been true.

Unfortunately, as regards the Party, he was premature! The fact that *Dr. Zhivago* could never be made acceptable by editing showed that Soviet Russia could never accept so fundamental an idea of freedom. The end of the thaw soon made this very plain.

A providential accident led to the publication of the novel outside the USSR by an Italian publisher who refused obedience to Moscow when the edition was condemned. When Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize, it showed that the whole world was glad that at last a great book had come out of Russia. The acclaim of critics and readers was certainly not primarily a political matter. Unquestionably, Western readers have not studied Pasternak's estimate of Communism without satisfaction. And of course the newspapers have turned the book into a political weapon, which was not the intention of the author. But the Nobel Prize was awarded on nonpolitical grounds to a book great in its own right.

The fact remains that if Soviet Russia had been strong enough to

absorb the powerful contents of this book in the first place, and had been able to publish it, even in a somewhat edited version, the prestige achieved by this act would have been tremendous. One Nobel Prize winner in literature is of more value to Russia than a thousand winners in physics, no matter how set the Soviet government is on science. It is one thing to produce atomic counters or to win the pentathlon, and another to be recognized as a leader in the field of literature. If Russia wins the Nobel award in science it is because she has good scientists. If her athletes excel, it is because they are good. But her scientists and athletes are good because dialectical materialism cannot directly interfere in their specialty. (The attempt to do so in biology has been given up.) What remains but the conclusion that if Russian writers were not forced to sabotage their talent and their integrity and grind out political clichés, they too might win Nobel prizes? Here is one who has done it: but without benefit of a blessing from the Kremlin. The implications are so plain that even the Kremlin can see them, and, like the Hungarian revolution, the spectacle has proved disconcerting.

So much for Russia. But what does Pasternak have to say to the Western intellectual? The first thing, of course, is said by the triumphant artistic achievement of his novel and the poetry which accompanies it. *Dr. Zhivago* itself is greater than any "message" that might be distilled out of it. It is a superb novel which recovers the full creative fecundity that seems to have vanished from our cramped and worried literature; a book with a sense of orientation and meaning in strong contrast with our Western frustration and despair.

Pasternak has become a best seller and a widely read author in the West, but he will always be a writer's writer. His greatest impact has been on the *writers* of the West. He has received letters from all kinds of people, but especially from other writers, in many different countries, not the least being Camus and Mauriac. Pasternak answered all these letters with profound warmth of understanding, and those who were privileged to be in contact with him felt that he had given them much more than they expected—an inspiration and sense of direction which they had ceased to hope for from any other writer!

We have learned from Pasternak that we must never yield to the great temptation offered by Communism to the writer. I do not mean the temptation to be a member of a privileged and respected class, but the far more insidious one of becoming a "writer for the future." Surely there is something apocalyptic about the sinister complacency with which Communism, which has hitherto proved effective only in killing writers or

ruining them, proposes itself as Master of the future of literature. "Write for us, you will be remembered forever in the Kingdom of the Messias who has now come! Refuse our offer, and you will be buried with the world that we are about to bury."

It is against such insinuations of the Beast that Pasternak replies with his doctrine of life and resurrection. This is a doctrine with a strongly Christian basis, using exclusively Christian symbolism. Needless to say, not all of Pasternak's expressions can be fully reconciled with those to be found in a manual of dogma. The Christ of Pasternak is the Christ Who has liberated man from death and Who lives in man, waiting for man's liberty to give Him a chance to transform the world by love. Love is the work not of states, not of organizations, not of institutions, but of persons. Hence:

> Gregariousness is always the refuge of mediocrities. . . . Only individuals seek the truth, and they shun those whose whole concern is not the truth. How many things in this world deserve our loyalty? Very few indeed. I think one should be loyal to immortality, which is another word for life, a stronger word for it. One must be true to immortality—true to Christ.

Pasternak looks at our world, dismembered by its obsessions and its factions, each one claiming to be on the side of the angels and calling everyone else a devil. Egged on by journalists, politicians, and propagandists, we cling with mad hope to fanatical creeds whose only function is to foment violence, hatred, and division. Will we never begin to understand that the "differences" between these factions are often so superficial as to be illusory and that all of them are equally stupid? Will we never grow up, and get down to the business of living productively on this earth, in unity and peace?

History is not a matter of inexorable scientific laws, it is a new creation, a work of God in and through man: but this theandric work is unthinkable not only without man's desire but also without his *initiative*. Christ has planted in the world the seeds of something altogether new, but they do not grow by themselves. Hence history has never yet really had a chance to become a Christian creation. For the world to be changed, man himself must begin to change it, he must take the initiative, he must step forth and make a new kind of history. The change begins within himself.

> You can't advance in this direction without a certain faith. You can't make such discoveries without a spiritual equipment. And the basic elements of this equipment are in the Gospels. What are they? To begin with a certain love of one's neighbor, which is the supreme form of vital energy. Once it

> fills the heart of man it has to overflow and expend itself. And then the two basic ideals of modern man—without them he is unthinkable—the idea of free personality and the idea of life as sacrifice. . . . There is no history in this sense among the ancients. They had blood and beastliness and cruelty and pockmarked Caligulas who had no idea how inferior the system of slavery is. They had the boastful dead eternity of bronze monuments and marble columns. It was not until after the coming of Christ that time and man could breathe freely. Man does not die in a ditch like a dog—but at home in history, while the work toward the conquest of death is in full swing; he dies sharing in this work.

Here is the deep meaning of Pasternak's critique of Communism. It is blindness and sin to seek immortality in the bronze and stone which are already stamped with lifelessness and twice dead when they are frozen into an art without inspiration. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Communism, like all characteristically modern political movements, far from opening the door to the future is only a regression into the past, the ancient past, the time of slavery before Christ. Following these movements, mankind falls backward into an abyss of ancient, magical laws; man comes under the authority of numbers and astrological systems and loses all hope of freedom. But with the coming of Christ:

> The reign of numbers was at an end. The duty, imposed by armed force to live unanimously as a people, a whole nation, was abolished. Leaders and nations were relegated to the past. They were replaced by the doctrine of individuality and freedom. *Individual human life became the life story of God and its contents filled the vast expanses of the universe.*

These words occur on page 413, far into the book, in an apparently colorless, "unexciting" chapter which is in reality very important to Pasternak's great work—one of the nerve centers where all his meaning is fully experienced.

If we stop to think about what it says, we will realize that if Pasternak is ever fully studied, he is just as likely to be regarded as a dangerous writer in the West as he is in the East. He is saying that political and social structures as we understand them are things of the past, and that the crisis through which we are now passing is nothing but the full and inescapable manifestation of their falsity. For twenty centuries we have called ourselves Christians, without even beginning to understand one tenth of the Gospel. We have been taking Caesar for God and God for Caesar. Now that "charity is growing cold" and we stand facing the smoky dawn of an apocalyptic era, Pasternak reminds us that there is

only one source of truth, but that it is not sufficient to know the source is there—we must go and drink from it, as he has done.

Do we have the courage to do so? For obviously, if we consider what Pasternak is saying, doing, and undergoing, to read the Gospel with eyes wide open may be a perilous thing!

Postscript

I had begun to correspond with Pasternak before the appearance of *Dr. Zhivago* in 1958, and exchanged two letters with him before the Nobel Prize affair. After that I received messages from him either through a correspondent of his in England, or through mutual friends with whom he corresponded in German. (It was through these friends that Pasternak made known his satisfaction with the article on "The People with Watch Chains.") I continued, however, to reach him directly with three or four letters and some books. I am not sure that all of my communications got through to him, and I believe at least one letter of his did not reach me. The last letter he wrote, in February 1960, was an acknowledgment of a privately printed Christmas book, *A Nativity Kerygma,* which I had sent him in late November. *Kerygma* is a Greek word meaning "proclamation" or "solemn announcement." Hence the Greek sentence at the beginning of the letter: "I acknowledge your *Kerygma* as soon as possible."

The letter, deeply moving in its hastily composed, improvised English, reflects the titanic inner struggle which the poet was waging to keep his head above water—no longer because of political pressure but because of the almost infinite complications of his life itself, as a result of his celebrity. I reproduce the letter here in witness of the generosity, courage, and boundless warmth of Christian charity which constitute the most eminent greatness of this great man, and which made him the friend of all.[2]

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