



The
Zhivago
Affair

*The Kremlin, the CIA,
and the Battle Over
a Forbidden Book*



*Peter Finn and
Petra Couvée*

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For Nora FitzGerald, and our children, Rachel, Liam, David, and Ria

and

For Koos Couvée and Paula van Rossen

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Prologue

“This is *Doctor Zhivago*. May it make its way around the world.”

On May 20, 1956, two men took the suburban electric train from Moscow’s Kiev station to the villa of Peredelkino, a thirty-minute ride southwest of the city. It was a blue-sky Sunday morning. Spring had pushed the last of the snow away just the previous month, and the air was sweet with the scent of blooming lilac. Vladlen Vladimirovsky, easily the bigger of the two, had bright blond hair and wore the billowing pants and double-breasted jacket favored by most Soviet officials. His slender companion was clearly a foreigner—Russians teased the man that he was a *stilyaga*, or “style maven,” because of his Western clothing. Sergio D’Angelo also had the kind of quick smile that was uncommon in a country where circumspection was ingrained. The Italian was in Peredelkino to charm a poet.

The previous month D’Angelo, an Italian Communist working at Radio Moscow, read a brief cultural news item noting the imminent publication of a first novel by the Russian poet Boris Pasternak. The two-sentence bulletin told him little except that Pasternak’s book promised to be another Russian epic. The novel was called *Doctor Zhivago*.

Before leaving Italy, D’Angelo had agreed to scout out new Soviet literature for a young publishing house in Milan that had been established by a party loyalist, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. Getting the rights to a first novel by one of Russia’s best-known poets would be a major coup both for himself and the new publishing concern. He wrote a letter to an editor in Milan in late April, and before receiving a reply, he asked Vladimirovsky, a colleague at Radio Moscow, to set up a meeting with Pasternak.

Peredelkino was a writers’ colony built on the former estate of a Russian nobleman. Set down among virgin pine, lime trees, cedars, and larches, it was created in 1934 to reward the Soviet Union’s most prominent authors with a retreat that provided escape from their apartments in the city. About fifty country homes, or dachas, were built on large lots on 250 acres. Writers shared the village with peasants who lived in wooden huts—the women wore kerchiefs and men rode on horse-drawn sleds.

Some of the biggest names in Soviet letters lived in Peredelkino—the novelists Konstantin Fedin and Vsevolod Ivanov lived on either side of Pasternak. Kornei Chukovsky, the Soviet Union’s most beloved children’s-book writer, lived a couple of streets away as did the literary critic Viktor Shklovsky. As idyllic as it looked, the village was haunted by its dead, those executed by the state during the Great Terror of the late 1930s—the writers Isaak Babel and Boris Pilnyak were both arrested at their dachas in Peredelkino. Their homes were handed off to other writers.

According to village lore, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had asked Maxim Gorky, the father of Soviet literature and one of the founders of the socialist-realist school of writing, how his counterparts in the West lived. When Gorky said they lived in villas, Peredelkino was ordered up by Stalin. Legend or not, writers were a privileged caste. They were organized into the nearly four-thousand-strong Union of Soviet Writers, and lavished with perks unimaginable for ordinary Soviet citizens, who often lived in tiny spaces and suffered through long lines for basic goods. “Entrapping writers within a cocoon of comfort surrounding them with a network of spies” was how Chukovsky described the system.

Novels, plays, and poems were seen as critical instruments of mass propaganda that would help lead the

masses to socialism. Stalin expected his authors to produce fictional or poetic celebrations of the Communist state, the story lines full of muscular progress in the factories and the fields. In 1932, during a meeting with writers at Gorky's home, Stalin launched the new literature with a toast: "The production of souls is more important than the production of tanks.... Here someone correctly said that a writer must not sit still, that a writer must know the life of a country. And that is correct. Man is remade by life itself. But you, too, will assist in remaking his soul. This is important, the production of souls. And that is why I raise my glass to you, writers, the engineers of the human soul."

After leaving the train station, D'Angelo and Vladimirsky passed the walled summer residence of the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. They crossed a stream by a graveyard and walked along roads that were still a little muddy before turning onto Pavlenko Street, the narrow lane at the edge of the village where Pasternak lived. D'Angelo was unsure what to expect. He knew from his research that Pasternak was esteemed as a supremely gifted poet and was praised by scholars in the West as someone who stood out brightly in the stolid world of Soviet letters. But D'Angelo had never actually read anything by him. Within the Soviet establishment, recognition of Pasternak's talent was tempered by doubts about his political commitment, and for long periods original work by the poet was not published. He earned a living as a translator of foreign literature, becoming one of the premier Russian interpreters of Shakespeare's plays and Goethe's *Faust*.

Pasternak's dacha, emerging from stands of fir and birch, was a chocolate-brown, two-story building with bay windows and a veranda; it reminded some visitors of an American timber-frame house. As D'Angelo arrived at the wooden gate, the sixty-six-year-old writer, in Wellington boots and homespun pants and jacket, was working in his front garden, where the family had a vegetable patch among the fruit trees, bushes, and flowers. Pasternak was a physically arresting man, remarkably youthful, with an elongated face that seemed sculpted from stone, full sensuous lips, and lively chestnut eyes. The poet's wife Marina Tsvetaeva said he looked like an Arab *and* his horse. A visitor to Peredelkino noted that he could pause at certain moments as if recognizing the impact "of his own extraordinary face ... half closing his slanted brown eyes, turning his head away, reminiscent of a horse balking."

Pasternak greeted his visitors with firm handshakes. His smile was exuberant, almost childlike. Pasternak enjoyed the company of foreigners, a distinct pleasure in the Soviet Union, which only began to open up to outsiders after the death of Stalin in 1953. Another Western visitor to Peredelkino that summer, the Oxford don Isaiah Berlin, said the experience of conversing with writers there was "like speaking to the victims of shipwreck on a desert island, cut off for decades from civilization—all the news they heard they received as new, exciting and delightful."

The three men sat outside on two wooden benches set at right angles in the garden, and Pasternak took some delight in Sergio's last name, stretching it out in his low droning voice with its slightly nasal timbre. He asked about the name's origin. Byzantine, said D'Angelo, but very common in Italy. The poet talked at length about his one trip to Italy when he was a twenty-two-year-old philosophy student at the University of Marburg in Germany in the summer of 1912. Traveling in a fourth-class train carriage, he had visited Venice and Florence but had run out of money before he could get to Rome. He had written memorabilia of Italy in an autobiographical sketch, including a sleepy half-day in Milan just after he arrived. He remembered approaching the city's cathedral, seeing it from various angles as he came closer, and "like a melting glacier it grew up again and again on the deep blue perpendicular of the August heat and seemed to nourish the innumerable Milan cafes with ice and water. When at last a narrow platform placed me on its foot and I craned my head, it slid into me with the whole choral murmur of its pillars and turrets, like

a plug of snow down the jointed column of a drainpipe.”

Forty-five years later, Pasternak would become bound to Milan. Just a short distance away from the cathedral, through the glass-vaulted Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and past La Scala, was Via Andegari. Number 6 was the office of Feltrinelli, the man who would defy the Soviet Union and first publish *Doctor Zhivago*.

Conversations with Pasternak could become soliloquies. Once engaged, he talked in long, seeming chaotic paragraphs, full of coltish enthusiasm, words and ideas hurtling ahead before he alighted on some original point. Isaiah Berlin said, “He always spoke with his peculiar brand of vitality, and flights of imaginative genius.” D’Angelo was enthralled, happy to be an audience, when Pasternak apologized for talking on and asked his visitor why he wanted to see him.

D’Angelo explained that his posting in Moscow was sponsored by the Italian Communist Party, which encouraged its leading activists to experience life in the Soviet Union. D’Angelo worked as an Italian language producer and reporter for Radio Moscow, the Soviet Union’s official international broadcaster, which was housed in two buildings behind Pushkin Square in central Moscow. Before coming to the Soviet Union, he had been the manager of the Libreria Rinascita, the Italian Communist Party bookstore in Rome. D’Angelo was a committed activist from an anti-Fascist family who joined the party in 1944, but some of his Italian comrades felt he was a little too bookish and lacked sufficient zeal. They hoped a stint in Moscow would stoke some fire. The party leadership arranged a two-year assignment in the Soviet capital. He had been in the Soviet Union since March.

D’Angelo, who spoke Russian well and only occasionally had to ask Vladimirsky to help him with a word, told Pasternak that he also acted as a part-time agent for the publisher Feltrinelli. Not only was Feltrinelli a committed party member, D’Angelo said, he was a very rich man, the young multimillionaire scion of an Italian business dynasty, who had been radicalized during the war. Feltrinelli had recently started a publishing venture, and he especially wanted contemporary literature from the Soviet Union. D’Angelo said he had recently heard about *Doctor Zhivago*, and it seemed an ideal book for Feltrinelli’s new house.

Pasternak interrupted the Italian’s pitch with a wave of his hand. “In the USSR,” he said, “the novel will not come out. It doesn’t conform to official cultural guidelines.”

D’Angelo protested that the book’s publication had already been announced and since the death of Stalin there had been a marked relaxation within Soviet society, a development that got its name—“thaw”—from the title of a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg. The horizons of literature seemed to broaden as old dogmas were challenged. Fiction that was somewhat critical of the system, reflected on the recent Soviet past, and contained complex, flawed characters had begun to be published.

The Italian said he had a proposal. Pasternak should give him a copy of *Doctor Zhivago* so that Feltrinelli could have it translated, although he would of course wait until publication in the Soviet Union before bringing it out in Italy. And Pasternak could trust Feltrinelli because he was a Communist Party loyalist. This all sounded reasonable to the eager D’Angelo, anxious as he was to secure the manuscript and justify the stipend he was receiving from Feltrinelli.

D’Angelo had no sense of the risk Pasternak would be taking by placing his manuscript in foreign hands. Pasternak was all too aware that the unsanctioned publication in the West of a work that had not first appeared in the Soviet Union could lead to charges of disloyalty and endanger the author and his family. In a letter to his sisters in England in December 1948, he warned them against any printing of some early chapters he had sent them: “Publication abroad would expose me to the most catastrophic, n

to mention fatal, dangers.”

Pilnyak, Pasternak's former next-door neighbor in Peredelkino (the side gate between their gardens was never closed), was executed with a single bullet to the back of the head in April 1938. Pilnyak was skeptical of the Soviet project, tackled themes such as incest in his fiction, and described Stalin's and Gorky's literary commands as the castration of art. Pilnyak's fate may well have been foreordained as early as 1929 when he was accused, falsely, of orchestrating publication abroad of his short novel *Mahogany* by anti-Soviet elements. Set in a postrevolutionary provincial town, the novel includes a sympathetically drawn character who is a supporter of Leon Trotsky—Stalin's bitter rival. Pilnyak was subjected to a public campaign of abuse in the press. “To me a finished literary work is like a weapon,” wrote Vladimir Mayakovsky, the brash and militant Bolshevik poet, in a review of Pilnyak's work that noted, without blushes, he had not actually read *Mahogany*. “Even if that weapon were above the class struggle—such a thing does not exist (though, perhaps, Pilnyak thinks of it like that)—handing it over to the White press strengthens the arsenals of our enemies. At the present time of darkening storm clouds this is the same treachery at the front.”

Pilnyak tried to win his way back into the party's good graces with some kowtowing pronouncements about Stalin's greatness, but he couldn't save himself. The charge of disloyalty was memorialized in a film. With the Great Terror at its height, he was tormented by the fear of imminent arrest. The country was in the grip of a mad, murderous purging of the ranks of the party, the bureaucracy, and the military as well as the intelligentsia and whole ethnic groups. Hundreds of thousands were killed or died in detention between 1936 and 1939; hundreds of writers were among the victims. Pasternak remembered Pilnyak constantly looking out the window. Acquaintances he ran into expressed amazement that he hadn't already been picked up. “Is it really you?” they asked. And on October 28, 1937, the secret police came. Pasternak and his wife were at their neighbor's house; it was the birthday of Pilnyak's three-year-old son, also named Boris. That evening, a car pulled up and several men in uniform got out. It was all very polite. Pilnyak was needed on urgent business, said one officer.

He was charged with belonging to “anti-Soviet, Trotskyist, subversive and terrorist organizations preparing to assassinate Stalin, and spying for Japan; he had traveled to Japan and China in 1927 and written about his journey. He had also spent six months in the United States in 1931 with Stalin's permission, traveling cross-country in a Ford and working briefly in Hollywood as a screenwriter for MGM. His travelogue novel *Okay* offered a harsh view of American life.

Pilnyak “confessed” to everything, but in a final word to a military tribunal he said he would like “to have paper” in front of him on which he “could write something of use to the Soviet people.” After a fifteen-minute trial, from 5:45 to 6:00 p.m. on April 20, 1938, Pilnyak was found guilty and sentenced to the “ultimate penalty,” which was carried out the next day—in the sinister language of the bureaucracy—by the “head of 1st special section's 12th department.” Pilnyak's wife spent nineteen years in the Gulag, and his child was raised in the Soviet republic of Georgia by a grandmother. All of Pilnyak's works were withdrawn from libraries and bookstores, and destroyed. In 1938–39, according to a report by the state censor, 24,138,799 copies of “politically damaging” works or titles of “absolutely no value to the Soviet reader” were pulped.

In the wake of the arrest of Pilnyak and others, the Pasternaks, like many in the village, lived with fear. “It was awful,” said Pasternak's wife, Zinaida, pregnant at the time with their first son. “Every minute we expected that Borya would be arrested.”

Even after the death of Stalin, no Soviet writer could entertain the idea of publication abroad without considering Pilnyak's fate. And since 1929 no one had broken the unwritten but iron rule that unauthorized foreign publication was forbidden.

As he continued his patter, D'Angelo suddenly realized that Pasternak was lost in thought. Chukovsk's neighbor, thought he had a "somnambulistic quality"—"he listens but does not hear" who was away in the world of his own thoughts and calculations. Pasternak had an uncompromising certainty about his writing, its genius, and his need to have it read by as wide an audience as possible. The writer was convinced that *Doctor Zhivago* was the culmination of his life's work, a deeply authentic expression of his vision, and superior to all of the celebrated poetry he had produced over many decades. "My finest happiness and madness," he called it.

Both epic and autobiographical, the novel revolves around the doctor-poet Yuri Zhivago, his art, love, and losses in the decades surrounding the 1917 Russian Revolution. After the death of his parents, Zhivago is adopted into a family of the bourgeois Moscow intelligentsia. In this genteel and enlightened setting, he discovers his talents for poetry and healing. He finishes medical school and marries Tonya, the daughter of his foster parents. During World War I, while serving in a field hospital in southern Russia, he meets the nurse Lara Antipova and falls in love with her.

Upon his return to his family in 1917, Zhivago finds a changed city. Controlled by the Reds, Moscow is wracked by the chaos of revolution and its citizens are starving. The old world of art, leisure, and intellectual contemplation has been erased. Zhivago's initial enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks soon fades. Fleeing typhus, Zhivago and his family travel to Varykino, their estate in the Urals. Nearby, in the town of Yuryatin, Zhivago and Lara meet again. Lara's husband is away with the Red Army. Zhivago's desire for her is rekindled, but he is troubled by his infidelity.

Captured by a band of peasant soldiers who press-gang him into serving as a field doctor, Zhivago witnesses the atrocities of the Russian Civil War, committed by both the Red Army and its enemy, a coalition of anti-Bolshevik forces known as the Whites. Zhivago eventually "deserts" the revolutionary fight and returns home to find that his family, believing him dead, has fled the country. He moves in with Lara. As the war draws near, they take refuge in the country house in Varykino. For a brief moment, the world is shut out, and Zhivago's muse returns to inspire a burst of poetry writing. The howling of the wolves outside is a portent of the relationship's doom. With the end of the war, and the consolidation of Bolshevik power, fate forces the couple apart forever. Lara leaves for the Russian Far East. Zhivago returns to Moscow and dies there in 1929. He leaves behind a collection of poetry, which forms the novel's last chapter and serves as Zhivago's artistic legacy and life credo.

Zhivago is Pasternak's sometime alter ego. Both character and writer are from a lost past, the cultured milieu of the Moscow intelligentsia. In Soviet letters, this was a world to be disdained, if summoned at all. Pasternak knew that the Soviet publishing world would recoil from *Doctor Zhivago's* alien tone, its overt religiosity, its sprawling indifference to the demands of socialist realism and the obligation to genuflect before the October Revolution. The novel's heresies were manifold and undisguised, and for the Soviet faithful, particular sentences and thoughts carried the shock of an unexpected slap. A "zoological apostasy" was the reaction in an early official critique of the novel. The revolution was not shown as "the cake with cream on top," Pasternak acknowledged, as the writing neared completion. The manuscript "should not be given to anyone who asks for it," he said, "because I do not believe it will ever appear in print."

Pasternak had not considered Western publication, but by the time D'Angelo arrived at his gate, he had endured five months of complete silence from Goslitizdat, the state literary publisher, to which he had submitted the novel. Two leading journals, *Znamya* (The Banner) and *Novy Mir* (New World), which had hoped might excerpt parts of *Doctor Zhivago*, had also not responded. For D'Angelo, the timing of his pitch was the height of good fortune; Pasternak, when presented with this unexpected offer, was ready to act. In a totalitarian society he had long displayed an unusual fearlessness—visiting and giving money to the relatives of people who had been sent to the Gulag when the fear of taint scared so many others away.

intervening with the authorities to ask for mercy for those accused of political crimes; and refusing to sign drummed-up petitions demanding execution for named enemies of the state. He recoiled from the ground to think of many of his fellow writers. “Don’t yell at me,” he said to his peers at one public meeting, when he was heckled for asserting that writers should not be given orders. “But if you must yell, at least don’t do it in unison.” Pasternak felt no need to tailor his art to the political demands of the state; to sacrifice his novel, he believed, would be a sin against his own genius.

“Let’s not worry about whether or not the Soviet edition will eventually come out,” he said to D’Angelo. “I am willing to give you the novel so long as Feltrinelli promises to send a copy of it, shall we say in the next few months, to other publishers from important countries, first and foremost France and England. What do you think? Can you ask Milan?” D’Angelo replied that it was not only possible but inevitable because Feltrinelli would surely want to sell the foreign rights to the book.

Pasternak paused again for a moment before excusing himself and going into his house, where he worked in a Spartan study on the second floor. In winter it looked out over “a vast white expanse dominated by a little cemetery on a hill, like a bit of background out of a Chagall painting.” Pasternak emerged from the dacha a short time later with a large package wrapped in a covering of newspaper. The manuscript was 433 closely typed pages divided into five parts. Each part, bound in soft paper and cardboard, was held together by twine that was threaded through rough holes in the pages and then knotted. The first section was dated 1948, and the work was still littered with Pasternak’s handwritten corrections.

“This is *Doctor Zhivago*,” Pasternak said. “May it make its way around the world.”

With all that was to come, Pasternak never wavered from that wish.

D’Angelo explained that he would be able to get the manuscript to Feltrinelli within a matter of days because he was planning a trip to the West. It was just before noon, and the men chatted for a few more minutes.

As they stood at the garden gate saying their good-byes, the novel under D’Angelo’s arm, Pasternak had an odd expression—wry, ironic—playing on his face. He said to the Italian: “You are hereby invited to my execution.”

The publication of *Doctor Zhivago* in the West in 1957 and the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Boris Pasternak the following year triggered one of the great cultural storms of the Cold War. Because of the enduring appeal of the novel, and the 1965 David Lean film based on it, *Doctor Zhivago* remains a landmark piece of fiction. Yet few readers know the trials of its birth and how the novel galvanized a world largely divided between the competing ideologies of two superpowers.

Doctor Zhivago was banned in the Soviet Union, and the Kremlin attempted to use the Italian Communist Party to suppress the first publication of the novel in translation in Italy. Officials in Moscow and leading Italian Communists threatened both Pasternak and his Milan publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. The two men, who never met, resisted the pressure and forged one of the greatest partnerships in the history of publishing. Their secret correspondence, carried in and out of the Soviet Union by trusted couriers, is its own manifesto on artistic freedom.

The Soviet Union’s widely reported hostility to *Doctor Zhivago* ensured that a novel that might otherwise have had a small elite readership became an international best seller. *Doctor Zhivago*’s astonishing sales increased even more when Pasternak was honored by the Swedish Academy with the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature. The writer had been nominated several times before in acknowledgment of his poetry, but the appearance of the novel made Pasternak an almost inevitable choice. The Kremlin

dismissed Pasternak's Nobel Prize as an anti-Soviet provocation and orchestrated a relentless international campaign to vilify the writer as a traitor. Pasternak was driven to the point of suicide. The scale and viciousness of the assault on the elderly writer shocked people around the world, including many writers sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Figures as diverse as Ernest Hemingway and the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, rose to Pasternak's defense.

Pasternak lived in a society where novels, poems, and plays were hugely significant forms of communication and entertainment. The themes, aesthetics, and political role of literature were the subject of fierce ideological disputes, and sometimes the losers in these debates paid with their lives. After 1917, nearly 1,500 writers in the Soviet Union were executed or died in labor camps for various alleged infractions. Writers were to be either marshaled in the creation of a new "Soviet man" or isolated, and in some cases crushed; literature could either serve the revolution or the enemies of the state.

The Soviet leadership wrote extensively about revolutionary art; gave hours-long speeches about the purpose of fiction and poetry; and summoned writers to the Kremlin to lecture them about their responsibilities. The men in the Kremlin cared about writing all the more because they had experienced its capacity to transform. The revolutionary Vladimir Lenin was radicalized by a novel, Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* "Art belongs to the people," Lenin said. "It should be understood and loved by the masses. It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will. It must stir them to activity and develop the artistic instincts within them. Should we serve exquisite sweet cake to a small minority while the worker and peasant masses are in need of black bread?"

As Stalin consolidated power in the early 1930s, he brought the country's literary life under strict control. Literature was no longer the party's ally, but its servant. The artistic vitality of the 1920s withered. Stalin, a poet in his youth, was a voracious reader of fiction, sometimes devouring hundreds of pages in a day. He red-lined passages that displeased him. He weighed in on what plays should be staged. He once telephoned Pasternak to discuss whether a particular poet, Osip Mandelstam, was a master of his art—a conversation that was really about Mandelstam's fate. He decided which writers should receive the country's premier literary award, inevitably named the Stalin Prize.

The Soviet public longed for great writing with a desire that was rarely sated. The country's shelves groaned under the dry, formulaic dreck produced to order. Isaiah Berlin found it all "irretrievably second-rate." Those writers who held on to their individual voices—Pasternak and the poet Anna Akhmatova among a few others—were rewarded with near adulation. Their readings could fill concert halls and their words, even when banned, found a way to their public's lips. In the Obozerka forced-labor camp near the White Sea, some inmates amused and bolstered each other by trying to see who could recite the most of Pasternak. The Russian émigré critic Victor Frank, explaining Pasternak's appeal, said that in his poetry "the skies were deeper, the stars more radiant, the rains louder and the sun more savage.... No other poet in Russian literature—and, perhaps, in the world at large—is capable of charging with the same magic through humdrum objects of our humdrum lives as he. Nothing is too small, too insignificant for his piercing eye: the eye of a child, the eye of the first man on a new planet: rain puddles, window-sills, mirror stands, aprons, doors of railway carriages, the little hairlets standing off a wet overcoat—all this flotsam and jetsam of daily life is transformed by him into a joy for ever."

The poet had a deeply ambivalent relationship with the Communist Party, its leaders, and the Soviet Union's literary establishment. Before the Great Terror of the late 1930s, Pasternak had written poetry in praise of Lenin and Stalin, and he was for a time transfixed by Stalin's guile and authority. But as the bloodletting of the purges swept the country, he became profoundly disillusioned with the Soviet state. That he survived the Terror when so many others were swallowed by its relentless, blind maw has no single explanation. The Terror could be bizarrely random—mowing down the loyal and leaving some of the

suspect alive. Pasternak was protected by luck, by his international status, and, perhaps most critically, by Stalin's interested observation of the poet's unique and sometimes eccentric talent.

Pasternak did not seek to confront the authorities but lived in the purposeful isolation of his creative and his country life. He began to write *Doctor Zhivago* in 1945 and it took him ten years to complete. The writing was slowed by periods of illness; by the need to set it aside to make money from commissioned translations of foreign works; and by Pasternak's growing ambition and wonder at what was flowing from his pen.

It was, effectively, a first novel, and Pasternak was sixty-five when he finished it. He channeled much of his own experience and opinions into its pages. *Doctor Zhivago* was not a polemic, or an attack on the Soviet Union, or a defense of any other political system. Its power lay in its individual spirit, Pasternak's wish to find some communion with the earth, some truth in life, some love. Like Dostoevsky, he wanted to settle with the past and express this period of Russia's history through "fidelity to poetic truth."

As the story evolved, Pasternak realized that *Doctor Zhivago* stood as a rebuke to the short history of the Soviet state. The plot, the characters, the atmosphere embodied much that was alien to Soviet literature. There was in its pages a disdain for the "deadening and merciless" ideology that animated so many of his contemporaries. *Doctor Zhivago* was Pasternak's final testament, a salute to an age and a sensibility he cherished but that had been destroyed. He was obsessively determined to get it published—unlike some of his generation who wrote in secret for the "drawer."

Doctor Zhivago appeared in succession in Italian, French, German, and English, among numerous languages—but not, at first, in Russian.

In September 1958, at the World's Fair in Brussels, a Russian-language edition of *Doctor Zhivago*, handsomely bound in a blue linen hardcover, was handed out from the Vatican Pavilion to Soviet visitors. Rumors about the genesis of this mysterious edition began almost immediately; the CIA was first mentioned by name as its secret publisher in November 1958. Until now, the CIA has never acknowledged its role.

Over the years, a series of apocryphal stories have appeared about how the CIA obtained an original manuscript of *Doctor Zhivago* and its motivation in printing the novel in Russian. It was said that British intelligence had forced down a plane in Malta that was carrying Feltrinelli from Moscow and secretly photographed the novel, which they removed from his suitcase in the plane's hold. It never happened. Some of Pasternak's French friends believed, incorrectly, that an original-language printing of *Doctor Zhivago* was necessary to qualify for the Nobel Prize—a theory that has periodically resurfaced. The Nobel Prize was not a CIA goal, and an internal accounting of the agency's distribution of the book shows that no copies were sent to Stockholm; the CIA simply wanted to get copies of *Doctor Zhivago* into the Soviet Union and into the hands of Soviet citizens.

It has also been argued that the printing was the work of Russian émigrés in Europe and the agency's involvement was marginal—no more than that of the financier of émigré front organizations. The CIA was in fact deeply involved. The operation to print and distribute *Doctor Zhivago* was run by the CIA's Soviet Russia Division, monitored by CIA director Allen Dulles, and sanctioned by President Eisenhower's Operations Coordinating Board, which reported to the National Security Council at the White House. The agency arranged the printing of a hardcover edition in 1958 in the Netherlands and printed a miniature paperback edition of the novel at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., in 1959.

A weapon in the ideological battles between East and West—this, too, is part of *Doctor Zhivago*'s extraordinary life.

Chapter 1

“The roof over the whole of Russia has been torn off.”

Bullets cracked against the facade of the Pasternak family’s apartment building on Volkhonka Street in central Moscow, pierced the windows, and whistled into the plaster ceilings. The gunfire, which began with a few isolated skirmishes, escalated into all-out street fighting in the surrounding neighborhood, and drove the family into the back rooms of the spacious second-floor flat. That, too, seemed perilous when shrapnel from an artillery barrage struck the back of the building. Those few civilians who ventured out on Volkhonka crab-ran from hiding spot to hiding spot. One of the Pasternaks’ neighbors was shot and killed when he crossed in front of one of his windows.

On October 25, 1917, in a largely bloodless coup, the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, the Russian capital, which had been called Saint Petersburg until World War I broke out and a Germanic name became intolerable. Other major centers did not fall so easily as militants loyal to the revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin battled the Provisional Government that had been in power since March. There was more than a week of fighting in Moscow, the country’s commercial center and second city, and the Pasternaks found themselves in the middle of it. The family’s apartment building was on a street that crested a hill. The flat’s nine street-side windows offered a panoramic view of the Moscow River and the monumental golden dome of Christ the Savior Cathedral. The Kremlin was just a few hundred meters to the northeast along the bend of the river. Pasternak, who rented a room in the Arbat neighborhood, had happened over to his parents’ place on the day the fighting began and found himself stuck there, eventually huddling with his parents and younger, twenty-four-year-old brother, Alexander, in the downstairs apartment of a neighbor. The telephone and lights were out, and water only occasionally, and then briefly, trickled out of the taps. Boris’s two sisters—Josephine and Lydia—were caught in similarly miserable conditions at the nearby home of their cousin. They had gone out for a stroll on an unseasonably mild evening when suddenly, armored cars began to careen through streets that quickly emptied. The sisters had just made to the shelter of their cousin’s home when a man across the street was felled by a shot. For days, the constant crackle of machine-gun fire and the thud of exploding shells were punctuated by “the scream of wheeling swifts and swallows.” And then as quickly as it started “the air drained clear, and a terrifying silence fell.” Moscow had fallen to the Soviets.

Russia’s year of revolution had begun the previous February when women protesting bread shortages in Petrograd were joined by tens of thousands of striking workers and the national war weariness swelled into a sea of demonstrators against the exhausted autocracy. Two million Russians would die in the carnage on the Eastern Front and another 1.5 million civilians died from disease and military action. The economy of the vast, backward Russian empire was collapsing. When troops loyal to the czar fired on the crowds, killing hundreds, the capital was in open revolt. On March 3, having been abandoned by the army, Nicholas II abdicated, and the three-hundred-year-old Romanov dynasty was at an end.

Pasternak, who had been assigned to a chemical factory in the Urals to support the war effort, hurried back to Moscow. He traveled part of the journey on a *kibitka*, a covered wagon on runners, and warded off

the cold with sheepskin coats and hay. Pasternak and his siblings welcomed the fall of the monarchy, the emergence of a new Provisional Government, and, above all, the prospect of a constitutional political order. Subjects became citizens, and they revelled in the transformation. “Just imagine when an ocean of blood and filth begins to give out light,” Pasternak told one friend. His sister Josephine described him as “overwhelmed” and “intoxicated” by the charisma of Alexander Kerensky, a leading political figure, and his effect on a crowd outside the Bolshoi Theatre that spring. The Provisional Government abolished censorship and introduced freedom of assembly.

Pasternak would later channel the sense of euphoria into his novel. The hero of *Doctor Zhivago* was spellbound by the public discourse, which was brilliantly alive, almost magical. “I watched a meeting last night. An astounding spectacle,” said Yuri Zhivago, in a passage where the character describes the first months after the fall of the czar. “Mother Russia has begun to move, she won’t stay put, she walks and never tires of walking, she talks and can’t talk enough. And it’s not as if only people are talking. Stars and trees come together and converse, night flowers philosophize, and stone buildings hold meetings. Something gospel-like, isn’t it? As in the time of the apostles. Remember, in Paul? ‘Speak in tongues and prophesy. Pray for the gift of interpretation.’ ”

It seemed to Zhivago that “the roof over the whole of Russia has been torn off.” The political ferment also enfeebled the Provisional Government, which was unable to establish its writ. It was overwhelmed above all by the widely hated decision to keep fighting in the world war. The Bolsheviks, earning popular support with the promise of “Bread, Peace and Land,” and driven by Lenin’s calculation that power was for the taking, launched their insurrection and a second revolution in October. “What magnificent surgery!” Pasternak wrote in *Doctor Zhivago*. “To take and at one stroke artistically cut out the old, stinking sores!”

The Bolsheviks, in their constitution, promised Utopia—“the abolition of all exploitation of man by man, the complete elimination of the division of society into classes, the ruthless suppression of the exploiters, the establishment of a socialist organization of society, and the victory of socialism in all countries.”

Yuri Zhivago quickly is disillusioned by the convulsions of the new order: “First, the ideas of general improvement, as they’ve been understood since October, don’t set me on fire. Second, it’s all still so far from realization, while the mere talk about it has been paid for with such seas of blood that I don’t think the ends justify the means. Third, and this is the main thing, when I hear about the remaking of life I lose control of myself and fall into despair.”

The word *remaking* was the same one Stalin used when toasting his writers and demanding engineers to give the soul. Zhivago tells his interlocutor, a guerrilla commander: “I grant you’re all bright lights and liberators of Russia, that without you she would perish, drowned in poverty and ignorance, and nevertheless I can’t be bothered with you, and I spit on you, I don’t like you, and you can all go to the devil.”

These are the judgments of a much older Pasternak, writing more than three decades after the revolution and looking back in sorrow and disgust. At the time, when Pasternak was twenty-seven, he was a man in love, writing poetry, and swept along in the “greatness of the moment.”

The Pasternaks were a prominent family within Moscow’s artistic intelligentsia, who looked to the West, and were disposed to support the political reform of an autocratic, sclerotic system. Boris’s father, Leonid, was a well-known impressionist painter and a professor at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He was born to a Jewish innkeeper in the Black Sea city of Odessa, a multicultural and dynamic center within the Pale of Settlement where most of Russia’s Jews were forced to reside. Odessa had a rich cultural life and Alexander Pushkin, who lived there in the early part of the nineteenth century, wrote “the air is filled with all Europe.” Leonid first moved to Moscow in 1881, to study medicine.

at Moscow University. By the fall of 1882, queasy about working with cadavers, he abandoned medicine and enrolled at the Bavarian Royal Academy of Art in Munich. His daughter Lydia described him as a man of a dreamy, gentle disposition ... slow and uncertain in anything but his work.”

After obligatory military service, Leonid returned to Moscow in 1888, and his first sale—a painting entitled *Letter from Home*—was to Pavel Tretyakov, a collector whose purchases denoted a kind of arrival for favored artists. Leonid also established a reputation as a skilled illustrator, and he contributed to an edition of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* in 1892. The following year, Leonid and Tolstoy met and became friends. Over the years, Leonid sketched the Russian writer numerous times, including in death at the Astapovo train station in 1910. Leonid brought Boris on the overnight train to pay respects to Tolstoy, and Boris recalled that the grand old man seemed tiny and wizened, no longer a mountain, just “one of those he had described and scattered over his pages by the dozen.”

Tolstoy visited the Pasternak apartment in Moscow, as did the composers Sergei Rachmaninov and Alexander Scriabin, among other cultural figures of the day, many of whom were painted by Leonid. The children viewed the visiting dignitaries as a fact of home life. “I have observed art and important people from my earliest days, and I have become accustomed to treating the sublime and exclusive as something natural, as a norm of life,” wrote Pasternak, recalling the luminaries who graced his parents’ parlor and his father’s studio.

Pasternak’s childhood was also filled with music. His mother, née Rozalia Kaufman, was an extraordinarily precocious child who, as a five-year-old coming to the piano for the first time, perfectly reproduced pieces played by her cousin simply from having watched him. Roza, as she was called, was the daughter of a wealthy soda-water manufacturer in Odessa. She gave her first recital at age eight, by eleven was drawing glowing reviews in the local press, and two years later toured southern Russia. She performed in Saint Petersburg, studied in Vienna, and was appointed a professor of music at the Odessa conservatory before she was twenty. “Mother was music,” her daughter Lydia wrote. “There may be a greater virtuoso or more brilliant performer but no-one with greater penetration, something indefinable, which makes you burst out in tears at the first chord, at each movement in sheer joy and ecstasy.” Roza’s potential as a major pianist of her age was curtailed, however, by anxiety, heart problems, and marriage. She met Leonid Pasternak in 1886 in Odessa, and they were married in February 1889 in Moscow. Boris was born the following year. His brother, Alexander, was born in 1893, Josephine in 1900, and Lydia in 1902.

By twelve, Boris was imagining a career as a pianist and composer. The “craving for improvisation and composition flared up in me and grew into a passion.” He quit when he realized that his skills at the piano lacked the brilliance and natural flair of some of the composers he idolized, such as Scriabin. Pasternak could not tolerate the possibility that he would not achieve greatness. As a boy, he was used to being the best and the first, and he had an inner arrogance about his own skills. He had equal measures of physical and intellectual confidence. After watching local peasant girls ride horses one summer in the countryside, Boris convinced himself that he, too, could ride bareback. It became an obsession to teach himself. When he finally persuaded a girl to let him ride her mount, the twelve-year-old boy was thrown from a panicking filly while jumping a stream, and broke his right thighbone. When it healed, his right leg was slightly shorter, and the resulting lameness, although disguised for much of his life, kept him out of military service in the First World War. Pasternak’s brother said that his natural talents “confirmed in him a strong faith in his own powers, in his abilities and in his destiny.” Second-best was something to be cast aside in a fit of pique, and forgotten. “I despised everything uncreative, any kind of hack work, being conceited enough to imagine I was a judge in these matters,” Pasternak wrote many years later. “In *real* life I thought, everything must be a miracle, everything must be predestined from above, nothing must be deliberately designed or planned, nothing must be done to follow one’s own fancies.” The pianist

abandoned, he turned toward poetry.

While he was a student at Moscow University, where he studied law and then philosophy and graduated with a first-class honors degree, Pasternak attended a salon of young authors, musicians, and poets—the “tipsy society” that mixed artistic experimentation and discovery with rum-laced tea. Moscow was full of overlapping and feuding salons built around competing philosophies of art, and Pasternak was an ardent little-known participant. “They did not suspect that there before them was a great poet, and meanwhile treated him as an intriguing curiosity without ascribing any serious importance to him,” said his friend Konstantin Loks. One observer at a reading said he “spoke in a toneless voice and forgot nearly all the lines.... There was an impression of painful concentration, one wanted to give him a push, like a carriage that won’t go—‘Get a move on!’—and as not a single word came across (just mutterings like some being waking up), one kept thinking impatiently: ‘Lord, why does he torment himself and us like this.’” His cousin Olga Freidenberg thought Pasternak was “not of this world,” that he was absent-minded and self-absorbed: “Borya did all the talking as usual,” Olga exclaimed to her diary after a long walk.

Pasternak was prone to unrequited infatuations, a spur for his poetry but dispiriting for the young man. While at the University of Marburg, where he studied philosophy in the summer of 1912, he was rebuffed by a woman, Ida Vysotskaya, the daughter of a rich Moscow tea merchant, to whom he professed his love. “Just try to live normally,” Ida told him. “You’ve been led astray by your way of life. Anyone who hasn’t lunched and is short of sleep discovers lots of wild and incredible ideas in himself.” Ida’s rejection led to a burst of poetry writing on the day he was supposed to be turning in a paper for his philosophy class. He ultimately decided against staying at the German university to pursue a doctorate in philosophy. “Go home, how successful my trip to Marburg is. But I am giving up everything—art it is, and nothing else.” Pasternak tended to talk at his wished-for lovers, interspersing rhapsodies of affection with philosophical treatises. Another woman, who balked at something more intimate than friendship, complained the “meetings were rather monologues on his part.” These amorous failings left Pasternak emotionally shattered, and they prompted some intense periods of writing.

His first stand-alone publication appeared in December 1913 after a productive summer where he “wrote poetry not as a rare exception but often and continuously, as one paints or composes music.” The resulting collection, called *Twin in the Storm Clouds*, drew little attention or enthusiasm and an older Pasternak later dismissed these efforts as painfully pretentious. A second volume, *Over the Barriers*, appeared in early 1917. Some of the poems were cut—grievously—by the czarist censor, the book was littered with misprints, and it, too, received little attention from the critics. Still, for *Over the Barriers*, Pasternak got paid for the first time—150 rubles, a memorable moment for any writer. The Russian writer Andrei Sinyavsky described Pasternak’s first two volumes as “a tuning-up,” and said it was “part of the search for a voice of his own, for his own view of life, for his own place amid the diversity of literary currents.”

In the summer of 1917 Pasternak was in love with Yelena Vinograd, a young war widow, student, and enthusiastic supporter of the revolution. She took the poet to demonstrations and political meetings, enjoyed his company, but was not sexually attracted to him. “The relationship remained platonically unphysical and unconsummated emotionally, and it was thus an intensely tormenting one for Pasternak,” wrote one scholar. The fuel of passion and frustration, all playing out against the backdrop of a society that was being utterly transformed, led to a cycle of poems that would vault Pasternak into the front ranks of Russian literature. The collection was called *My Sister Life* and came with the subtitle *Summer 1917*. At first, only handwritten copies of the poems circulated and the work gained a popularity “no poet since Pushkin achieved on the basis of manuscript copies.”

Because of the upheaval of revolution, and the subsequent privation of the civil war, when much literary publishing ground to a halt because of a lack of paper, the book did not appear until 1922, long after Vinograd had departed and Pasternak had finally found love with Yevgenia Lurye, an artist.

They first met at a birthday party where Yevgenia, striking in a green dress, drew the attention of a number of young men. Pasternak recited his poetry, but the young woman was distracted and didn't pay attention. "Right you are, why listen to such nonsense?" said Pasternak.

She wanted to see him again and was responsive to his expressions of ardor. "Ah, it were better I never lose this feeling," he wrote her, describing how much he missed her when she visited her parents before their marriage. "It is like a conversation with you, murmuring profoundly, dripping mutely, secretly—and true... What am I to do, what am I to call this magnetism and saturation with the melody of you other than the distraction you compel, and which I would dispel—like one lost in the woods."

They married in 1922. Pasternak had the gold medal he won as his high school's best student melted in order to make wedding rings, which he engraved roughly himself: "Zhenya and Borya." Their son Yevgeny—named after his mother—was born in 1923. They lived in a small section of the Pasternak family's old apartment now divided among six families. "Hemmed in on all sides by noise, can only concentrate for short periods at a time by dint of extreme sublimated desperation, akin to self-oblivion," he complained to the All-Russian Union of Writers. Often he could only work at night when silence fell over the house, staying awake with cigarettes and hot tea.

Both Pasternak and Yevgenia had their own artistic ambitions, and the marriage was marked by the competing struggle to assert themselves creatively and an inability to make concessions. There was also the unavoidable and looming fact that Pasternak was "a man with inarguably more talent," their son later wrote.

Pasternak's relations with women continued to be fraught. The marriage was buffeted by the heat of some of his correspondence with the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, which greatly irritated his wife. In the summer of 1930, he found himself increasingly attracted to Zinaida Neigauz, the wife of his best friend, the pianist Genrikh Neigauz, with whom the Pasternaks vacationed in Ukraine. Zinaida was born in Saint Petersburg in 1897, the daughter of a Russian factory owner and a mother who was half Italian. When she was fifteen, she became involved with a cousin, a man in his forties and married with two children, an affair that informed some of the early experience of the young Lara in *Doctor Zhivago*. In 1917, Zinaida moved to Yelisavetgrad where she met and married her piano teacher, Neigauz.

Before he was even sure of Zinaida's feeling, Pasternak told his wife he was in love. He then immediately proceeded to announce his passion to Genrikh. Pasternak and Genrikh wept, but Zinaida, for the moment, remained with her husband. By early the next year, the two were sleeping together, and Zinaida confessed the affair in a letter to her husband, who was on a concert tour in Siberia. He left the recital in tears and returned to Moscow.

Pasternak, with more than a measure of narcissism, argued that he could maintain his marriage and continue his affair, and sustain his friendship, all the while remaining above reproach. "I've shown myself unworthy of [Genrikh], whom I still love and always will," said Pasternak in a letter to his parents. "I've caused prolonged, terrible, and as yet undiminished suffering to [Yevgenia]—and yet I'm purer and more innocent than before I entered this life."

The complicated ménage continued for some time. Yevgenia went to Germany with her young son, leaving Boris and Zinaida free to consort together. In a poem, he encouraged Yevgenia to make a fresh start without him:

Do not fret, do not cry, do not tax

Your last strength, and your heart do not torture.

You're alive, you're inside me, intact,

As a buttress, a friend, an adventure.

I've no fear of standing exposed

As a fraud in my faith in the future.

It's not life, not a union of souls

We are breaking off, but a hoax mutual.

Many years later, he remembered the marriage as unhappy and lacking passion. He said that “beauty the mark of true feelings, the sign of its strength and sincerity.” And he thought it unfair that his sobore bore the trace of his failure to love in his “ugly face” with its reddish complexion and freckles.

Yevgenia’s eventual return to Moscow in early 1932 left Boris and Zinaida without a place to live in a city where flats were a very precious commodity. Zinaida, feeling “painfully awkward,” returned to Genrikh and asked him to take her back as “a nanny for the children” and “to help him do the housekeeping.” Pasternak returned to Yevgenia—for three days. “I begged her to understand—that I worship [Zinaida]—that it would be despicable to fight against this feeling.” When he met friends, he gave long, tearful accounts of his complicated family affairs.

Effectively homeless and in love, Pasternak began to despair. “It was around midnight—and freezing. A terrible, accelerating conviction of hopelessness tightened like a spring inside me. I suddenly saw the bankruptcy of my whole life.” He ran through the streets to the Neigauzes’ apartment. “Der spätkommende Gast? [The late-arriving guest?],” said Genrikh laconically as he opened the door and promptly left. Inside, Pasternak pulled a bottle of iodine from a shelf and drank it in one gulp. “What are you chewing? Why does it smell so strong of iodine?” asked Zinaida, who began to scream. A doctor living in the building was summoned, and Pasternak was induced to vomit repeatedly and then put to bed, still very weak. “In this state of bliss, my pulse almost gone, I felt a wave of pure, virginal, totally untrammelled freedom. I actively, almost languidly, desired death—as you might want a cake. If there had been a revolver by my side, I would have reached out my hand like reaching for a sweet.”

Genrikh, who at this point seemed quite happy to rid himself of Zinaida, said, “Well, are you satisfied? Has he proved his love for you?”

For Pasternak, Zinaida, to whom he was now married, was a homemaker who allowed him the physical and emotional space to work—something Yevgenia was less disposed to do.

Yevgenia “is much cleverer and more mature than [Zinaida] is, and perhaps better educated too,” Pasternak told his parents. Yevgenia “is purer and weaker, and more childlike, but better armed with the noisy weapons of her quick temper, demanding stubbornness and insubstantial theorizing.” Zinaida had “the hardworking, industrious core of her strong (but quiet and wordless) temperament.”

Yevgenia, said her son, “continued loving my father for the rest of her life.”

Pasternak’s complicated relations with more than one woman were far from over. Nor was his impulse to surrender to providence. And fate may have repaid his trust with the poet’s unlikely survival of Stalin’s purges in the years to follow.

Chapter 2

“Pasternak, without realizing it, entered the personal life of Stalin.”

The revolution was followed by a devastating and prolonged civil war between the Red Army and the anti-Bolshevik forces, the Whites. The winters were unusually severe. Food was scarce, and the Pasternak family was routinely undernourished. Boris sold books for bread, and traveled to the countryside to scrounge for apples, dry biscuits, honey, and fat from relatives and friends. He and his brother sawed wood from joints in the attic to keep fires burning at the Volkhonka apartment, where the living space was reduced by the authorities to two rooms; at night the brothers sometimes went out to steal fencing and other items that could be burned. Almost everyone's health declined, and in 1920 Leonid sought and obtained permission to take Roza to Germany for treatment after she suffered a heart attack. Their two daughters also moved to Germany, and the family was permanently divided. Pasternak's parents and sisters eventually settled in England before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Boris saw his parents only once more, during a visit to Berlin after he married his first wife, Yevgeniya. That extended ten-month stay in Berlin, which had become the capital of émigré Russia, convinced Pasternak that his artistic future lay in his homeland, not amid the nostalgia and squabbling that marked the exile community. “Pasternak is uneasy in Berlin,” wrote the literary theorist and critic Viktor Shklovsky, who also later returned to Moscow. “It seems to me that he feels among us an absence of propulsion.... We are refugees. No, not refugees but fugitives—and now squatters.... Russian Berlin is going nowhere. It has no destiny.” Pasternak was deeply wedded to Moscow and Russia. “Amidst Moscow streets, by-ways and courtyards he felt like a fish in water; here he was in his element and his tongue was pure Muscovite.... I recall how his colloquial speech shocked me and how it was organically linked to his whole Muscovite manner,” observed Chukovsky.

Isaiah Berlin said Pasternak had “a passionate, almost obsessive desire to be thought a Russian writer with roots deep in Russian soil” and that this was “particularly evident in his negative feelings towards his Jewish origins ... he wished the Jews to assimilate, to disappear as a people.” In *Doctor Zhivago*, the character Misha Gordon articulates this point of view, demanding of the Jews: “Come to your senses. Enough. There's no need for more. Don't call yourselves by the old name. Don't cling together, disperse. Be with everyone. You are the first and best Christians in the world.” When he was a child, Pasternak's nanny brought him to Orthodox churches in Moscow—services redolent with incense and watched over by walls of Byzantine iconography. But his sisters said he was untouched by Russian Orthodox theology before 1936, and Isaiah Berlin saw no sign of it in 1945, concluding that Pasternak's interest in Christianity was a “late accretion.” As an older man, Pasternak was attached to his own version of Christianity, a faith influenced by the Orthodox Church but not formally part of it. “I was born a Jew,” he told a journalist late in life. “My family was interested in music and art and paid little attention to religious practice. Because I felt an urgent need to find a channel of communication with the Creator, I was converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity. But try as I might I could not achieve a complete spiritual experience. Thus I am still a seeker.”

By early 1921, the White forces who opposed the Bolsheviks were defeated, and literary life slowly rekindled in the ruined country. The first print run of *My Sister Life*, which also was published in Berlin, ran to about one thousand. It appeared in somewhat impecunious-looking khaki dustcovers—"the last gamble of some croaking publisher." *My Sister Life* drew euphoric, head-turning reviews that announced the entry of a giant.

"To read Pasternak's verse is to clear your throat, to fortify your breathing, to fill your lungs; surely such poetry could provide a cure for tuberculosis. No poetry is more healthful at the present moment! It is like koumiss [fermented mare's milk] after evaporated milk," said the poet Osip Mandelstam.

"I was caught in it as in a downpour... A downpour of light," swooned Tsvetaeva in a 1922 review. "Pasternak is all wide-open—eyes, nostrils, ears, lips, arms."

The collection barely seemed to touch on the actual events of 1917 beyond what Tsvetaeva called "the faintest hints." The only time the word *revolution* was employed was to describe a haystack. In "About the Poems," which appears at the beginning of the collection, the airy indifference to the political moment engendered some carping that Pasternak seemed a little too precious for the times:

*The window-halves I'll throw apart,
In muffler from the cold to hide,
And call to children in the yard,
"What century is it outside?"*

A "hothouse aristocrat of our society's private residences," sneered the Marxist critic Valeria Pravdukhin. Such criticism would eventually grow louder, but in 1922 whatever ideological shortcomings might be surmised were muted by the widely acknowledged poetic genius of his lines.

Pasternak had arrived, and it did not take the Soviet leadership long to notice. In June 1922, Pasternak was summoned to the Revolutionary Military Council for a meeting with Leon Trotsky, the head of the Red Army, a leading theoretician of the new Marxist state, and the best-known, behind Lenin, of the new leadership. Trotsky was the member of the Politburo most interested in culture, and he believed artists and agitprop had a critical role in the elevation of the working class, with the ultimate goal of creating what he called a "classless culture, the first that will be truly universal." In 1922, Trotsky began to familiarize himself with prominent and emerging writers, and the following year he would publish *Literature and Revolution*. "It is silly, absurd, stupid to the highest degree," he wrote in the introduction, "to pretend that art will remain indifferent to the convulsions of our epoch.... If nature, love or friendship had no connection with the social spirit of an epoch, lyric poetry would long ago have ceased to exist. This profound break in history, that is, a rearrangement of classes in society, shakes up individuality and establishes the perception of the fundamental problems of lyric poetry from a new angle, and so saves art from eternal repetition."

"Trotsky was no liberal in affairs of culture," wrote one of his biographers. "He felt that no one in Russia who challenged the Soviet order, even if only in novels or paintings, deserved official toleration. But he wanted a policy of flexible management within this stern framework. He aimed to win the sympathy of those intellectuals who were not the party's foes and might yet become its friends."

Trotsky wanted to find out if Pasternak was willing to commit his lyrical talent and subsume his individuality to a greater cause: the revolution. Pasternak was recovering from a night of drinking when the summons by telephone came. He and Yevgenia were about to embark on their trip to Germany to introduce her to his parents, and a farewell party at the Volkhonka apartment had left a number of people the worse for wear. Pasternak was sleeping late when the phone rang at noon. He was summoned to the

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